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SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' ATTITUDES CONCERNING  
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TESTS

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STARLYNN RAENAE NANCE

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TESTS

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CURRICULUM

BY

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Dr. John J. Chiodo, Chair

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Dr. Priscilla Griffith

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Dr. Frank McQuarrie

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Dr. Stacy Reeder

---

Dr. Courtney Vaughn

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Kerry Adon Cosby, the *only* friend that could talk to me about my dissertation and actually like it. Well, except your strong opinions about transcendental phenomenology. Thank you for taking my calls about successes, failures, breakdowns and quitting my program a million times. I appreciate your patience and guidance through this process and I cherish your friendship of almost 20 years.

I now can say without hesitation, to quote George Castanza, “Serenity Now!”

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## ABSTRACT

This transcendental phenomenological qualitative study examines attitudes toward Controversial Public Issue instruction by teachers who used mandated standards and state tests. After the interviews of 11 social studies teachers (high school, middle school and junior high) five distinct themes emerged in the study. Overall, participants execute Controversial Public Issues instruction regardless of the void in state standards. Each participant expressed her/his own attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction; however, there were also definite commonalities. Ten participants planned Controversial Public Issues in their classroom regardless of obstacles stated in previous research.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Events in the world today focus on economic, political, and social issues. These include bombings, international wars, unpopular healthcare laws and democratic overthrows of depot leaders. Issues such as these encourage citizens and representatives to discuss solutions to the problems either privately or through governmental assemblies. Many choose sides or changes opinions according to different perspectives delivered through media, friends, family or congressional law. All occurs in a democracy. A democratic society, according to Thomas Jefferson, requires citizens to be informed. He expounded on this idea in 1820 by stating,

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education” (Thomas Jefferson to William C. Jarvis, 1820. ME 15:278).

Social studies education’s major role of instruction is to produce active citizens. Social studies involves people and events that cause change in society. As society changes, social studies teachers adapt to differing methodologies to explain world, national or local events to students. By definition, “the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world”

([http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS\\_SS.pdf](http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS_SS.pdf)). To accommodate

this definition, social studies teachers can use issue-centered discussion to develop informed decision-making and citizenship skills. However, with increasing federal demands on standards and state mandated testing, social studies teachers struggle with teaching mandated content and discussion in the classroom (Hess & Posselt, 2004). This study focuses on social studies teacher's evolution and attitudes adapting standardized curriculum to a more civic republican classroom of sharing, discussion and co-existing with students.

Students crave a voice in the classroom to discuss the world around them to engage in problem solving issues of a social, economic and political nature. Some social studies teachers include active discussion in the classroom in the form of Controversial Public Issues. These issue-centered lessons encourage students to participate in discussion, reflection, and active listening. Students engage in heterogeneous conversations, weighing different perspectives then concluding the discussion with recommended solutions (Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009). The classroom environment is a safe space for students to practice citizenship skills and evolve as active participants in society. However, discussion in the classroom is rapidly declining (Hess, 2001; Hess, 2002; Hess, 2004; Rossi, 1996; Rossi, 2006) due to public education's movement toward knowledge-based curriculum and mandatory assessments (Burroughs, 2005; Caweti, 2006; Grant, 2007; Misco, 2005; Pederson, 2007; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, accountability, standards and testing has become the primary focus of education. With the pressure to comply with standards and student passage of mandated tests, how

does a teacher balance the purpose of social studies with mandated curriculum standards and tests?

### Background

Beginning with the inception of public education, school curricula in the eighteenth century incorporated and replicated the ideologies of the time. In colonial United States, education supported the authority of the government and secured religious standards of the age (Guttek, 1972; Painter, 1999; Spring, 2005). The purpose of educating students in reading and writing reinforced compliance with “...the laws of God and the state” (Spring, 2005, p. 45).

According to Spring (2005), the nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers and policy-makers continued the ideology that education was the “panacea” for the United States. With the concentration of Protestantism, republicanism and capitalism the U.S. government in the 1830s instituted curricula in common schools that promoted cohesion, assimilation of immigrants, and adherence to laws (Guttek, 1972; Spring, 2005). Even throughout the end of the nineteenth and onset of the twentieth century, schools taught patriotism and Americanization (Spring, 2005) in a didactic teacher-centered methodology. After the conclusion of WWII, the government took a growing interest in education, especially emphasizing math and science to combat the USSR and support national defense (Guttek, 1972; Spring, 2005). The government’s interest in education also vastly increased with the 1954 ruling of *Brown v The Board of Education, Topeka Kansas* (Guttek, 1972; Spring, 2005). In society, groups spoke out against inequalities and made changes through the court systems and Congress. Dialogue spilled over into classrooms and students actively participated in discussion.

“Although social, political, and cultural alterations has [sic] an impact on education, student discontent was also caused by the rapid growth of the students [sic] population, changes in social roles and expectations, and the changing temperament of a new generation of students” (Gutek, 1972, p. 398). At this time, the Harvard Social Studies Project of 1967 published *Taking a Stand: A Guide to Clear Discussion of Public Issues* and introduced issue-centered or Controversial Public Issues to students through specific lesson plans. The Harvard Social Studies Project seeped into the classroom, offering students the opportunity to have a voice and learn democratic ideology.

Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty and Great Society initiatives, especially Title I a portion of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), would permanently unite public schools with federal funding and mandates. The aim of the ESEA was to expand the opportunities of disadvantaged students in the public schools by allotting money to poverty-ridden school districts. Along with Johnson, Nixon’s administration added specific goals to prepare students for the labor market (Spring, 2005, pp. 449-450) continuing federal funding to schools and stressing economic education. The labor market ideology and school accountability policies continued throughout the course of Presidents Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush’s administration.

The accountability era started in the mid-1970s and is present today. Through the new waves of conservatism, the New Right used many outlets to push its propaganda to the public. The scapegoats were the National Education Association (NEA), secular humanism, the Education Department, the public school system and

finally, the textbook writers. The New Right's agenda included the teaching of creationism, censoring of textbooks and extricating humanism from the schools. The back-to-the basics movement united the New Right to reform public schools to content orientated, teacher-centered lessons to produce American citizens. The lax test scores and reading/writing instruction ignited the media to publish reports stating that public school stockholders demanded a back to the basic curriculum.

During the back to the basics movement, a publication in 1980, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, concluded that U.S. schools threaten the future of the nation by allowing mediocrity in the public schools, therefore blaming the decline in international economic competition (Evans, 2004). During this time, social studies declared no definition or central curriculum and was adrift. Due to the lack to consistency, traditional history made its revival. One major focus during the traditional history revival centered on teacher certifications. Along with certification, developing a curriculum model for social studies became imperative. The formation of the National Commission on Social Studies started in 1984 and supported the goals of the traditional history camp and provided history and geography as the framework for social studies.

The concerns and solutions presented in *A Nation at Risk* continued under America 2000 and Goals 2000. These initiatives impressed on the public schools to teach history, geography and civics without the mention of social studies and emphasized a standards based education system. To establish solidarity, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) established a definition and specific standards drawing content from the social studies. State-based standards soared into the state



education departments in the 1990s along with state-mandated tests and by 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) solidified mandated tests and accountability for teachers and students.

### Statement of the Problem

The goal of education is to instruct students to fulfill democratic responsibilities as citizens of local, state and national communities. Civic education is “the means by which individuals are prepared to gain the knowledge, skills and values that enable them to understand, examine, decide and participate in public affairs and in (the means for) forwarding the well-being of other individuals and of their society” (Dyneson, 1988, p. 114). Civic education includes content knowledge but also emphasizes critical thinking skills to make informed decisions. Social studies teachers tasked by local, state and national standards train their students in citizenship education. However, the challenge for social studies teachers is to adhere to the standards, prepare students for mandated state testing and include citizenship skills in their classroom. No Child Left Behind (2001), National Council for the Social Studies and the Southwestern state standards all specify the purpose of social studies and civic education. For No Child Left Behind (2001), civic education is to “foster civic competence and responsibility.” National Council for the Social Studies explains that civic competence requires

the ability to use knowledge about one’s community, nation, and world, apply inquiry processes, and employ skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving. Young people who are knowledgeable, skillful, and committed to democracy are necessary to

sustaining and improving our democratic way of life, and participating as members of a global community (NCSS, 2008).

To the Southwestern state standards (2010),

a social studies education encourages and enables each student to acquire a core of basic knowledge, an arsenal of useful skills, and a way of thinking drawn from many academic disciplines. Thus equipped, students are prepared to become informed [sic], contributing, and participating citizens in this democratic republic, the United States of America.

Additionally, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or the nation's report card, "is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas" (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/>) . Conducted periodically, the NAEP assesses mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history. "Since NAEP assessments are administered uniformly using the same sets of test booklets across the nation, NAEP results serve as a common metric for all states and selected urban districts. The assessment stays essentially the same from year to year, with only carefully documented changes. This permits NAEP to provide a clear picture of student academic progress over time" (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nclb.asp>).

The NAEP civics assessment, administered to 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, covers civic knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills and civic dispositions. Civic knowledge shows basic content of civic understanding while intellectual and participatory skills show aptitudes of the mind and action applying civic knowledge to

“good effect.” Civic dispositions “refers to the traits of private and public character essential to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy” (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/civics/whatmeasure.asp>). The results of the 2010 NAEP civics assessment show students making progress in civics at grades 4 but not at grades 8 and 12. Compared to 2006, the 2010 assessment shows 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were higher, no significantly difference in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and lower at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level.

Consulting the standards above and the NAEP civic assessment goals, students need instruction that extends beyond basic content knowledge to comply with the mandated standards and testing. However, previous research indicates a decline in a variety of classroom instruction due to the demand of mandated standards and state testing (Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009; Godland, 1984; Grant 2005). Teachers are teaching “to the test” (Grant, 2005) rather than including Controversial Public Issue in their curricula. Nystrand, Gamoran, and Carbonara (1998) researched 48 high school social studies classrooms and found 62.5% of the class periods did not have any type of discussion and when discussion occurred, it averaged only half a minute per class. Significantly, Hess, 2002; Rossi, 2006 and Hess & Posselt, 2002 found more than 50% (and in one study, 90%) of teachers did not encompass discussions in their classroom. Teachers may agree that Controversial Public Issue discussions are beneficial to the classroom environment and advance democracy, but exhibit frustration when asked why Controversial Public Issue discussion is not a part of their classroom curriculum. Teachers indicate several barriers to teaching discussions: what topic to teach, does the topic coincide with state objectives and state testing, lack of

confidence, classroom management, inadequate training, unequal time for both viewpoints, and the observation that Controversial Public Issue instruction can only be successful with higher level students (Hess, 2002; Malikow, 2006; Preskill, 1997; Rossi, 2006; Rossi & Pace, 1998). Additionally, Byford, et. al, (2009); Harwood & Hahn (1991); Hess (2002) McNeil, (1986); Newmann, (1988); Nystrand, et. al (1998) and Trosset, (1998) researched social studies classrooms and also found students infrequently contribute to classroom discussion or teacher excluded it in their curricula. With the decline in discussion, state testing and state standards are definitely an obstacle (Byford, et. al 2009 & Grant, 2007).

Adding to the purpose of the study is the implementation of Common Core. In the post-No Child Left Behind era, the state lead initiative Common Core is scheduled to be implemented in the 2014-2015 school year with new common assessments. This initiative is for college and career ready students after completion of high school. Within Common Core “standards are 1.) are aligned with college and work expectations; 2.) are clear, understandable and consistent; 3.) include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills; 4.) build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards; 5.) are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and 6.) are evidence-based” (<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards>). Social studies falls under English Language standards and contain key points include reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, media and technology.

The researcher realizes transition to Common Core is currently underway in the southwestern state and approval of the waiver (flexibility for schools against the

strict regulation of No Child Left Behind) by the federal government has been granted. However, state standards and testing remain the same under state law during this transition time. For this study, the researcher uses current federal and state law.

With the research indicating discussion is limited in the classroom, how does the teacher comply with the No Child Left Behind (2001), National Council for the Social Studies and the Southwestern state standards of civic education? In addition, what are teacher's attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction when complying to mandated standards and state testing?

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study is to collect data of teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issues instruction while using social studies standards and preparing the students for mandated state tests in social studies classrooms. The data collected will determine if the social studies teacher's attitudes correspond with the purpose of social studies and civic education according to No Child Left Behind (2001), National Council for the Social Studies and the Southwestern state standards.

This study is important to school boards, teachers, principals, parents, teacher educators and policy makers because it is an example of how students can learn to be active citizens. The decline of 12<sup>th</sup> graders results of the civic assessment of NAEP, the overall decline of civic participation, apathy for the government and an increasing array of homogenous discussion (Hahn, 2008; Marginson, 2006; Patrick, 2000)

especially as seen through media (Samuels, 2008) illustrates the need for citizenship education and democratic skills for students in social studies classrooms.

Potential values from the study include increased skills in active citizenry, competence in discussion with peers and opportunities to participate in heterogeneous discussion. Increasing competence in discussion and engaging in heterogeneous discourse prepares students to connect with others of opposite views and perspectives. Through heterogeneous discussion, students actively engage in creating compromises and solution to real world problems.

### Research Questions

In an attempt to understand teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction, I will interview a group of social studies teachers using a qualitative study methodology and in-depth interviews to gain their perspectives to the questions:

- 1.) What are social studies teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated standards and state testing?
- 2.) Do teachers see Controversial Public Issues as being compatible with No Child Left Behind, National Council for the Social Studies and state standards?

### Delimitations and Limitations of Study

The study includes delimitations (factors controlled by the researcher) and limitations (factors not controlled by the researcher). The delimitations are 1.) participants were chosen from four districts in a Southwestern state, 2.) participants

were from junior high and high schools. Limitations are 1.) teachers may state they use Controversial Public Issues to engage students in their classes because the methodology does not require observation. 2.) teachers may view discussion/discourse as stating opinions and 3.) teachers who volunteer may be exceptional teachers that may bias the study.

### Significance of the Study

Because relatively little information exists about teacher's attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated standards and state testing, this research study can fill in gaps concerning teachers apprehension, frustration and/or adding Controversial Public Issue instruction to their curricula while using mandated standards and testing. It may validate or dispel certain assumptions about social studies teacher's motivation to teach Controversial Public Issue instruction and compliance with standards.

Researchers have found that students learning Controversial Public Issue instruction prepares them to actively engage in a larger society (Hess, 2002; Newmann, 1989) maintaining a healthy democracy (Barber, 1989; Barber, 1994; Mansbridge 1991). Democratic participation is more than counting hands (Mansbridge, 1991), it is the ability to discuss topics of a controversial nature making decisions for their community. Media also plays a part in student's discussion of Controversial Public Issues allowing students to "surf" the web for homogenous information concerning a certain issue-centered topic (Samuels, 2008). According to the standards, democratic and civic education includes skills needed to function in the larger society. Decision-making, analysis and responsibility are just a few skills

required. Researchers such as Hess (2004), Hahn (2004) and others note that Controversial Public Issue instruction enhances content knowledge, discussion abilities, and critical thinking skills making Controversial Public Issue instruction a valid method to comply with state testing and mandated standards.

### Definition of Terms

1. Social Studies— “Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences. Social studies draws upon such subjects as economics, geography, history, law/political science, psychology, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. A social studies education encourages and enables each student to acquire a core of basic knowledge and develop a way of thinking drawn from many academic disciplines”  
([http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS\\_SS.pdf](http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS_SS.pdf))
2. Controversial Public Issues—unresolved questions of public policy, generating considerable discord between two opposing viewpoints (Cotton, 2006; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2001; Hess, 2002; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Lockwood, 1996; Malikow, 2006; McCully, 2006; Oulton, Dillon, & Grace, 2004; Rossi & Pace, 1998).
3. National Council for the Social Studies standards—Standards approved by the National Council for the Social Studies for social studies teachers to follow in their classrooms. “The Curriculum Standards for Social Studies were



developed by a Task Force of the National Council for the Social Studies and approved by the National Council for the Social Studies Board of Directors in April 1994” (<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/curriculum>).

4. Mandated state standards—Standards approved by the Southwestern State Board of Education to be used by classroom teachers. “[The guidelines] serve as a set of specific school standards covering all areas of a student’s academic growth: English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, and world languages. [The Southwestern states standards] were developed by and for educators. These detailed sets of standards guide teachers and school leaders as they plan curriculum, instruction, and assessment for your student” ([http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS\\_SS.pdf](http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS_SS.pdf)).
5. Mandated state tests—Assessments taken by students at the end of the instruction year in cores subject areas (including social studies) to fulfill federal and state law.

“ **Federal Accountability** - *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) requires all states to establish state academic standards and assessments that meet federal requirements for monitoring the Adequate Yearly Progress of schools. Failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress results in being named a School In Need Of Improvement.

**State Accountability** - There are three types of assessments within the [The Southwestern state] Student Testing Program for Grades 3-8 and "End-of-Instruction" (EOI) secondary level tests. All are aligned to the state-mandated Core curriculum, the [*state standards*], which has been adopted by the State

Board of Education.

**District Accountability** – [The Southwestern state’s] **Academic Performance**

**Index** (API) was created in law to measure the performance and progress of a school or district based on several factors, primarily state test scores, that contribute to overall educational success. *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) is based on federally approved state defined performance benchmarks. Schools that fail to meet the AYP benchmarks face a number of possible sanctions outlined by the federal law.’’

**District Report Cards** - The API status of each school district and each district's student achievement on General Assessments are available here for your information and use. The information contained in these reports meet reporting requirements in the "No Child Left Behind Act." Public Law 107-110’’ (<http://sde.state.ok.us/AcctAssess/default.html>).

6. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001)—A federal law enacted in 2001 that requires states to establish standards and assess students at the end of the academic year. Federal funds are attached to the schools progress. (<http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>).
7. Democracy—“government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system’’ (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/democracy>).
8. Citizen—a native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection

9. Transcendental Phenomenology Qualitative Methodology—A methodology based on Hegel and Hurrerl’s influence. “Knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience. The process leads to an unfolding of phenomenal consciousness through science and philosophy ‘toward the absolute knowledge of the Absolute’ (Moustakas, p. 26).
10. Local standards—standards given to the teachers by the local school district including state standards. This usually includes an academic calendar that includes objectives for each day and dates of district benchmark tests. The calendar is used to ensure the teachers stay on a schedule to complete all state standards included in state mandated tests.
11. Epoche—“Setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence” (Moustakas, p. 180) “...the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (Moustakas, p. 33).
12. Citizenship—the state of being vested with the rights, privileges, and duties of a citizen.
13. Discussion—“a particular form of group interaction where members join together in addressing a question of common concern, exchanging and examining different views to form their answer, enhancing their knowledge or understanding, their appreciation or judgment, their decision, resolution or acting over the matter of the issue” (Hess, 2004, p. 167).

## Summary

The inception of education was to perpetuate democratic skills and knowledge to the young of the United States (Evans 2007; Spring 2005). This would ensure the continuation of democracy initiated by the founding fathers. However, with increased governmental involvement in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the shift to standards, accountability and testing overshadows original intent.

The balancing act for teachers is teaching democratic skills and preparing students for knowledge level testing ([http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS\\_SS.pdf](http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/ParentWeb/HS_SS.pdf)). The studies design is to look at teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using social studies standards and preparing the students for mandated state tests in social studies classrooms.

Divided into five chapters, this dissertation contains an introduction, a literature review, conceptual framework, methodology, analysis, results and limitations. The literature review will discuss democracy, citizenship, social studies, No Child Left Behind and Controversial Public Issues instruction. Following the literature review, chapter three will detail the conceptual framework of civic republicanism and continue with an explanation of the methodology of the study and the research procedure and participants. Chapter four will include the results of the textual, structural and textual-structural descriptions and Chapter five will include a discussion, synthesis, limitations and implications.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

Controversial Public Issue instruction continues to be a topic of research and discussion throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many journal articles, ERIC resources and social studies teacher-centered magazines publish research and teaching methodologies concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction. Professional educators strongly encourage this type of pedagogy identifying it as a significant democratic skill needed for active citizenry. State and national standards promote a development of students' abilities to make informed and reasoned decisions (NCSS, 2010; PASS, 2010). Education, specifically social studies education, is the vehicle to prepare students for democratic participation and civic competence in an ever-changing society (Authur, Davies & Hahn, 2008; Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977; Dewey, 1916; Elkin & Soltan, 1999; Gutmann, 1987; Hahn, 1998; Heater, 2004; Hess, 2004; Jenlink, 2009; McDonnell, Timpane & Benjamin, 2000; Ochoa-Becker 2007; Soltan & Elkins 1996). Preparing students to make informed decisions, critically analyze and openly oppose public policy prepare emerging citizens to take an active role in democracy (Dewey, 1916; Hahn, 1998; Hess, 2004; Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

This chapter will first define democracy for the purposes of this dissertation and briefly discuss its historical uses. Second, this chapter will discuss civic and social studies education related to democracy and emerging citizens. Third, it will attempt to give a historical overview of citizenship and social studies education in the United States while defining and explaining the components of civic education.

Fourth, this chapter will give a definition of discussion and address the difference of classroom talk. Finally, a discussion of No Child Left Behind and Controversial Public Issue instruction concludes the literature review.

### Democracy

Democracy in its simplest form is *demokratia* or rule by the governed. This simplistic definition is very deceiving. From Aristotle to twenty-first century philosophers democracy remains a popular topic of exploration and debate. With publications from antiquity to the present, these philosophers have attempted to develop a complete and comprehensive explanation of democracy but not one agreed upon definition has emerged (Keene, 2009). Democracy is a very valued governmental practice all over the world but it can differentiate according to country. From literature, three key behaviors emerge when observing democracy 1.) democracy is not an absolute 2.) democracy is a practiced form of government and 3.) democracy is dependent on the participation of its citizens (Keene, 2009). Keeping the three key behaviors in mind, the following definition of democracy is used in this dissertation, “a government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/democracy>).

### Historical Usages of Democracy

Bernard Crick (2008) discusses four historical usages that illustrate the three key behaviors and chosen explanation of democracy. In the first usage, Aristotle adapted the version of Plato’s ideas of democracy. Instead of being a rule by the poor

and uneducated, Aristotle saw it as a few ruling with the consent of the many. “He did not call his ‘best possible’ state democracy, rather... a political or civic community of citizens deciding on common action by public debate” (Crick in Arthur, Davies & Hahn, 2008, p. 354). Democracy to Aristotle meant understanding “ruling and being ruled in turn.” Machiavelli, in the second usage, takes the Roman Republic’s idea of mixed government as a good government. He emphasized constitutional law, concentrating on the procedures that change the laws. “Good laws to protect all were not good enough unless subjects became active citizens making their own laws collectively” (Crick in Arthur, Davis, & Hahn, 2008, p. 354). The third usage follows the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the events of the French Revolution. He felt that anyone regardless of education or property ownership should participate in the business of the state. The American constitution (and other European constitutions in the nineteenth century and following WW II), the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and J.S. Mill complete the fourth usage of democracy. This usage highlights active citizens mutually respecting the equal rights of one another within a “legal order.” Again, in each of the usages of democracy, it is a practiced form of government requiring active participation of citizens.

### Citizenship

Citizenship is often defined as simply a person legally recognized by the nation-state as a citizen (Heater, 2004; Ochoa-Becker, 2007). Chiodo and Martin (2005), Heater (1990), Heater (2004), Isin and Turner (2002) and Kivisto and Faist (2007) clarify citizenship as an interaction between citizen and nation-state as well as interaction between citizen and citizen. Members of a state also encompass territory,

shared interests and national pride. Heater (2004) continues the explanation stating that citizenship “defines the relationship of the individual not to another individual...or other group...but essentially to the idea of the state...The civic identity is enshrined in the rights conveyed by the state and the duties performed by the individual citizens, who are all autonomous persons, equal in status” (p. 2). The most important attributes in citizenship are the interactions between citizens and reciprocal duties to the nation-state (Chiodo & Martin 2005; Heater, 1990; Kivisto & Faist, 2007).

Democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Absent a reasoned commitment on the part of its citizens to the fundamental values and principles of democracy, a free and open society cannot succeed. It is imperative, therefore, that educators, policymakers, and members of civil society make the case and ask for the support of civic education from all segments of society and from the widest range of institutions and governments. (Branson, 1998, p. 2)

Citizenship in a democracy is not blind faith or acting as a subject of the state (king/queen) but a conscious effort to practice responsibilities and engage in efforts of public policy. Continued customs of citizenship rely on the youth of the nation-state to learn their responsibilities as a citizen. Aristotle, Rousseau, Jefferson and Dewey are only a few philosophers insisting education is the cornerstone of citizenship to instill and continue the customs of citizenry. Thus, citizenship education is “...the means by which individuals are prepared to gain the knowledge, skills and values that



enable them to understand, examine, decide and participate in public affairs and in (the means for) forwarding the well-being of other individuals and of their society”

(Dynneson, 1988, p. 114).

### Citizenship Education

Citizenship education is the preparation of citizens in a democracy. Public schools are the vehicle to prepare students to become emerging citizens. In the formal setting of school, “civic education in a democratic society most assuredly needs to be concerned with promoting understanding of the ideals of democracy and a reasoned commitment to the values and principles of democracy” (Branson, p. 2). Committed, informed and effective citizens should desire a society and government that, acknowledges individual dignity and worth, observes the rule of law, fulfills civic responsibility, concerns itself with the common good, and respects human rights. To accomplish such a commitment, civic education should be on the forefront of educators’ minds to promote the ideals of democracy (Branson 1998, Heater, 1990, Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

According to Margaret S. Branson from the Center for Civic Education (1998), the components of civic education include civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions. Civic knowledge is content citizens need to know to participate in a democracy. Civic skills combine civic knowledge with relevant intellectual and participatory skills. Intellectual skills allow citizens to link content with critical thinking to understand the “issue, its history, its contemporary relevance, as well as command of a set of intellectual tools or considerations useful in dealing with such an issue” (Branson, 1998, p. 3). Civic education fosters intellectual skills including

critical thinking, discernment, analyzing and explaining. Through the intellectual skills, emerging citizens interact, monitor and influence other citizens and policy issues. Along with intellectual skills, participatory skills develop through all grade levels. Participatory skills include collecting information, working with others to exchange opinions, active listening, questioning and compromising while formulating a plan of action. The classroom prepares the students for opportunities to experience participatory skills under guidance from a teacher. Participatory skills focus on emerging citizens exerting influence by different means than just voting. Citizens also influence public policy by petitioning, testifying before public bodies, advocating and joining coalitions. Lastly, civic disposition matures in the citizen over time. It consists of public and private character that is “essential to the maintenance and improvement of constitutional democracy” (Branson, p. 4). These traits encourage the citizen to be an independent member of society requiring political participation for furthering democracy. Assuming the personal, political and economic responsibility of a citizen encourages a respect for individual worth and human dignity, engaging in civil discourse and influence while promoting a healthy democracy.

Heater (1990) states, “...accepting the basic needs of literacy and numeracy, the education of citizen should be the heart of modern education” (p. 350). Throughout the history of the United States educational system, the founding fathers along with scholars concluded social studies education is the content area to produce active citizens. In 1977, Barr, Barth and Shermis believed that social studies had a definition, a goal and objectives. “*Definition*: The social studies is an integration of experience and knowledge concerning human relations for the purpose of citizenship

education. *The Goal: Citizenship Education, Objectives: Required To Achieve Effective Citizenship: Knowledge, skills necessary to process information, values and beliefs, social participation*” (p. 69). Social studies education did not spring up overnight, nor has it become a stagnate part of education. The history is rocky but the purpose has remained the same, to educate students to become active citizens.

### Social Studies Education

Western liberal civic education of the nineteenth century focused on making the mass population politically literate. Continuing through the nineteenth and early twentieth century, property specifications for suffrage diminished and citizens could use their new civic virtue. Particularly in the United States, liberal democracy in education grew with the educational philosopher Horace Mann. Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, he believed effective education would produce responsible citizens (Heater, 1990; Heater, 2004). Common schools would teach the mass population fundamental principles of American republicanism but without controversial issues or altered political ideologies. He placed the responsibility of assuring education on the state. Mann stated:

I believe in...the duty of every government to see that the means of education are provided for all...Under a republican government, it seems clear that the minimum of...this education can never be less than such as is sufficient to qualify each citizen for the civil and social duties he will be called upon to discharge. (Heater, 2004, p. 105)

By the 1830s and 1840s, legislative acts required civic education instruction in schools. The medium to transmit civic education to the youth consisted of American

history, government, civics, and economics. According to Mann, students should not be serfs in the classroom and then assume independence after leaving public education. Students should participate in democratic training in public education and continue it throughout their adult years. The method of teaching citizenship included classroom harmony inspired by patriotic music and singing. Under this methodology, classroom harmony would only succeed if students did not participate in political issues taking place outside the classroom, especially controversial topics that may encourage partisan teaching. Concerned about common schools and controversial teaching in the classroom, Mann established a coursework of constitutional study. This curriculum established guidelines for civic education such as learning the preamble to the constitution. This evolution of citizenship curriculum maintained its viability through the Civil War and Reconstruction classrooms. However, the turn of the century observed a renewal of reform. This era approximately a decade before World War I, named the Progressive Era, affected education and civic education throughout the country.

It was in 1916 that turned citizenship education into a national importance. Several publications including John Dewey's publication, *Democracy and Education* (1916), stressed the connection between progressive education and democracy. Rush Welter, quoted in Heater (2004), sums up Dewey's philosophy, "the techniques of progressive education...were intended to produce free men whose intelligences would engage in social reconstruction for democratic ends" (p. 116). Schools curricula should reflect the progressive ideology by producing civic efficiency of good citizens and educate the students with a well-rounded curriculum that includes economics,

civics and politics. Dewey's progressive education did not advocate 'destabilizing change' but an education for students to think and possibly create social change (Heater, 2004, p. 116). He advocated for civic efficiency or good citizenship not the old model of education. Through this type of education, the working class, instructed in a well-rounded education, could practice their democratic rights by preventing subordination and improving knowledge of everyday issues. In addition, moral education should influence character. As Dewey expressed in 1961, "education is life" (p. 210) and is learned through living. Individuals should live as members of their community balancing contributions to the community with receipt of community services. Dewey maintained that a democratic society should enlist the schools to produce citizens to advocate and produce social change without inciting disorder. Along with Dewey, the National Education Association (NEA) and National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) also advocated for good citizenship specifically focusing on social studies.

The NEA produced reports to strengthen social studies as a multidisciplinary field and defining it as the method of passing on civic education. It encouraged social studies in high schools to emphasize citizenship, relevance and the problems approach methodology. The dominate goal of subjects such as geography, history, civics and economics would echo good citizenship. Each subject taught emphasized the individual student's reaction to the current issues of the time and their own understanding of those current issues. Straying from the academic approach of Mann's constitutional study, teachers presented students with current societal problems and encouraged a solution by using their knowledge of the academic content of the course.

The NEA then drafted the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* in 1918 and supported “the assignment of projects and problems to groups of pupils for cooperative solution and the socialized recitation whereby a class as a whole develops a sense of collective responsibility” (p. 210). Heater (2004) explains the *Cardinal Principles* as intra-mural and extra-mural democratic participation. The intra-mural democratic participation focused on the democratic structure of the school and stressed the cooperation between student and teacher, student and student, and teacher and teacher. The extra-mural feature included social action in the community, for example students advocating for more parks in their community.

Leading the cause for National Council for the Social Studies, Harold Rugg also dominated progressive education in the 1920s campaigning for a problem centered social studies curriculum. The *Historical Outlook* published his arguments of problem solving, alternative proposals, clear thinking, and current events. Although ahead of his time, his opponents criticized the curriculum as too difficult. Eventually, Rugg developed a series of pamphlets and teachers guides soon evolving into textbooks and problem-centered curricula that peaked in the 1930s.

Problem-centered curricula seemed to be the key to transforming the ailing society of excessive individualism during the Great Depression. Progressive education concentrated on student activity, participation and growth. Problems of Democracy and current event courses increased in public schools along with the excitement of issue-centered education. The American Historical Association (AHA) also added to the discussion with its findings and recommendations concerning social studies curricula. Charles Beard and George Counts, the most prominent members of

the AHA, penned the *Conclusions and Recommendations* of the commission. The publication viewed as controversial, required several rewritings but the finished product included a statement of philosophy and purpose, frame of reference and the statement, “the age of individualism and laissez faire in economy and government is closing and that a new age of collectivism is emerging” (Evans, 2004, p. 55). The overall view in learning leaned toward life interests of the student and purposing any topic for classroom discussion was appropriate. Content in the social studies included history, geography, economics, politics, sociology, anthropology and psychology. Choosing a diversity of committee members, the commission could not agree and some members did not sign the final draft. The press and educators reacted to the commission in a negative manner. Addressing dissent in the press included the *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* and *New York Sun*. The press did not favor the commission’s recommendations, titling news articles as “Breeding Communism” and “Propaganda in Education.” Educators also criticized the recommendations of the commission’s generalities and lack of concern for classroom conditions. One educator stated, “we are just where we were when we started” (Evans, 2004, p. 58) showing teachers needed substance and guidance the commission did not suggest in their publication. Media and educators voiced their views on the commission’s recommendations and then attacked Rugg’s issue-centered curriculum. His critics included media, school boards, retired military, business writers and the Hearst syndicate, fanning the flames of dissent. The critics’ main objective was to rid the schools of the communist/socialist propaganda taught by the Rugg issue-centered curriculum. Rugg tried to refute his critics but their success in

the public schools would cause the discontinuing of the textbook series. Issue-center curricula diminished as the forefront of social studies curriculum. By the end of the 1930's, the focus changed from inquiry of political, social and economic institutions to what is correct and respectable about political, social, and economic institutions. Therefore, the social studies focus changed from content and questioning to preserving American democracy.

World War II made an impact on social studies, transforming education to a “war effort” mentality. First, progressive education as an organized driving force in social studies withered to nothing. Harmful questions initiated in the classroom concerning the political system of the United States and questions of improving society quickly transformed to respect and duty for democracy. The National Defense Commission took charge to prepare defense workers. This program provided courses to youth and the unemployed and by November 1940, the numbers exploded to one million. National Council for the Social Studies published a report, *The Social Studies Mobilize for Victory* proposing citizens needed to be prepared to “face the dangers of combat—willingly” (Evans, 2004, p. 71). Assisting the war effort the National Council for the Social Studies publication’s main objective made citizens efficient and therefore, enhanced devotion to democracy. The significance of the publication called for indoctrination in the classroom and a new respect for the capitalist system. The questioning of the capitalist system would not support the idea of compliance and military recruitment.

The war changed the values in social studies to a more traditional tone, increased patriotism and demanded social studies clarify and purge un-American



curricula from the classroom. According to the media, American history fell through the cracks in secondary and post-secondary education and social studies was the perpetrator. Although the Wesley committee research found American history was overwhelmingly taught in the elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools, the opinion Americans did not “know” their American history was sustained. “Knowing” American history included dates, names and specific events. However, the Wesley committee reiterated, American history courses in schools and colleges continued to be a program of study starting with elementary students continuing through college years.

The period saw social studies buffeted by two nearly all-consuming controversies. First,

the controversy over the Rugg textbooks, and second, the controversy over the teaching of American history. Both were directly linked to wartime concerns over patriotism, and both challenged social studies to clarify, and to purify its aims...these controversies were only the beginning in a long period of national concerns over the direction of social studies curriculum in schools. (Evans, 2004, p. 95)

As World War II ended, the fear of communism swept through American society and threatened freedom of speech and academic freedoms. “If World War II signaled the death of progressive social studies, the cold war completed the act” (Evans, 2004, p. 96). This era created the resurgence of a traditional history curriculum. Attacks on progressive education ran strong and hard. Conformity and the threat to democracy was the core of the curriculum in public schools. Citizenship

education became the medium to teach anti-communism and un-American ideas, limiting free speech and expression in the social studies classroom. The federal government sponsored curriculum projects to focus on traditional disciplines and traditional methods of teaching replacing issue-centered and “questioning” techniques. The launch of Sputnik caused the U.S. government to pour more funding to education. The National Defense Education Act of 1957 launched a federally funded curriculum increasing the importance of math, science and foreign language but not social studies. However, Vice Admiral Hyman G. Rickover published *Education and Freedom* (1959) attacking Dewey for the failure in American education by highlighting the advances in Soviet and European education. *Brainwashing the High Schools* by E. Merrill Root (1959) hypothesized if students did not learn the disciplines of United States politics, economics, history and ideals; the United States would lose the cold war. These attacks guided curricula to social science disciplines instead of its progressive roots.

The push for “better” academics funded by the U.S. government and fear of losing the cold war created an academic-based approach called the new social studies. A return to the basics or traditional teaching style emerged with the funding and approval of the U.S. government. Curriculum development programs instituted for math and science set the stage for curriculum development in social studies. The new social studies aimed to make students “junior” historians and social scientists (Evans, 2004, p. 123). Project Social Studies, a Department of Education initiative, encouraged improvement in “research, instruction, teacher education and the dissemination of information in the field... and would fund research projects,

curriculum study centers, and conferences and seminars” (Evans, 2004, p. 125). The new social studies highlighted “...structure, inductive teaching, the disciplines, sequential learning, new types of material, new subjects, and emphases on evaluation” (Evans, 2004, p. 127). By 1967, an explosion of national projects appearing to advocate curricula to the new social studies emerged. The new social studies initiatives, however, each went in different directions from the original objective. The projects intensity from 1968-1972 died and many critiques of the new social studies mounted. Due to the social changes of the time, social studies moved to an inquiry based curriculum. The new social studies morphed into the newer social studies promoting an issue-centered approach. However, academic freedom cases, the public lynching of the Man: A Course of Study (MACOS), lack of teacher knowledge, poor curriculum and societal turmoil caused the new and newer social studies to fail. The federal government increased their influence through the 1960s to present with initiatives to increase accountability of the students with testing. Particularly in the 1990s states created content standards for subjects requiring teachers to include those skills in their lesson plans. Testing over the content area would measure the student’s knowledge of the subject. By 2002, No Child Left Behind would dominate education and while no federal mandate of testing social studies is intact; most states include it in their measurement of content areas. Social studies in the twenty-first century is guided by state and national standards and state testing.

#### No Child Left Behind

Citizenship education was widely accepted as the goal of social studies but conservative politics and American culture established a decline in progressive

education and an increase in accountability in education, including social studies (Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009). The accountability era started in the mid-1970s, and is present today with the current federal mandate No Child Left Behind (NCLB). No Child Left Behind (2001), signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* and “is built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results; an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility”

(<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf>).

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* was designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America’s schools. President George W. Bush describes this law as the “cornerstone of my administration.” Clearly, our children are our future, and, as President Bush has expressed, “too many of our neediest children are being left behind” (<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf>).

Testing the students in specific grades and subjects is the chosen method of accountability. In a parent guide published by the Bush administration it explains,

Although testing may be stressful for some students, testing is a normal and expected way of assessing what students have learned. The purpose of state assessments required under *No Child Left Behind* is to provide an independent insight into each child’s progress, as well as each school’s. This information is essential for parents, schools, districts and states in their efforts to ensure that no child—regardless of race, ethnic group, gender or family income—is

trapped in a consistently low-performing school.

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf>

No Child Left Behind (2001) requires states to provide a report card for each district that includes information pertaining to students performance of the state assessments. Each report card includes state assessment results by performance level (basic, proficient and advanced) including (1) two-year trend data for each subject and grade tested; and (2) a comparison between annual objectives and actual performance for each student group. Percentage of each group of students not tested. Graduation rates for secondary school students and any other student achievement indicators that the state chooses. Performance of school districts on adequate yearly progress measures, including the number and names of schools identified as needing improvement. Professional qualifications of teachers in the state, including the percentage of teachers in the classroom with only emergency or provisional credentials and the percentage of classes in the state that are *not* taught by highly qualified teachers, including a comparison between high- and low-income schools. Schools not meeting specific requirements are identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring.

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf>

Adequate yearly progress is the minimum levels of improvements of student performance that school districts and their schools must achieve within periods specified by No Child Left Behind (2001). “Subsequent thresholds must be raised at least once every three years, until, at the end of 12 years, all students in the state are

achieving at the proficient level on state assessments in reading/language arts and math” (<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf>).

Civic Education in No Child Left Behind, National Council for the Social Studies and  
State Standards

No Child Left Behind (2001) does not require social studies testing but according to Grant (2007), “23 states conduct standards-based social studies tests” including the Southwestern state in this study. No Child Left Behind (2001) however does require civic education as stated in subpart 3, section 2342. It clearly states,

the purpose if this subpart is (1) to improve the quality of civics and government education by educating students about the history and principles of the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights; (2) to foster civic competence and responsibility; and (3) to improve the quality of civic education and economic education through cooperative civic education and economic education exchange programs with emerging democracies.

(NCLB, 2001 <http://www2.ed.gov>)

Like No Child Left Behind (2001), National Council of the Social Studies creates guidelines for teachers to direct students in civic competence and responsibility. The basic core purpose of National Council of the Social Studies is “to lead the community of social studies professionals in promoting a knowledgeable and engaged citizenry” (NCSS, <http://www.socialstudies.org/about/strateicplan>). It promotes social studies as a well respected core subject and place social studies teachers as “role models for civic participation” (NCSS,

<http://www.socialstudies.org/about/strategicplan>). National Council of the Social Studies also believes

a primary goal of public education is to prepare students to be engaged and effective citizens. National Council of the Social Studies has defined an effective citizen as one who has the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to assume the “office of citizen” in our democratic republic. To accomplish this goal, every student must participate in citizenship education activities each year. These activities should expand civic knowledge, develop participation skills, and support the belief that, in a democracy, the actions of each person make a difference.

Throughout the curriculum and at every grade level, students should have opportunities to apply their civic knowledge, skills, and values as they work to solve real problems in their school, the community, our nation, and the world. These opportunities should be part of a well-planned and organized citizenship education program. (NCSS, <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/effectivecitizens>) National Council of the Social Studies also list characteristics of an effective citizen and characteristics of an effective citizenship education program.

The state standards are guidelines for teachers to prepare students for mandated state tests at the end of every academic school year. Duplicating the National Council of the Social Studies definition and purpose of social studies, the Southwestern state’s social studies standards begin with

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Social studies draws upon such disciplines as

anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world...However it is presented, social studies as a field of study incorporates many disciplines in an integrated fashion, and is designed to promote civic competence. Civic competence is the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of students to be able to assume “the office of citizen,” as Thomas Jefferson called it. A social studies education encourages and enables each student to acquire a core of basic knowledge, an arsenal of useful skills, and a way of thinking drawn from many academic disciplines. Thus equipped, students are prepared to become informed, contributing, and participating citizens in this democratic republic, the United States of America.

<http://sde.state.ok.us/curriculum/PASS/Subject/socstud.pdf>

All three mandates require educators to teach civic competence and produce engaging citizens. The mandates affirm that students learn social studies content and application of content in order to practice democratic skills. Skills used in democracy include the ability to make informed decisions through discussion, voting, evaluating differing perspectives and engaging in democracy at every grade level.



### Definition of Discussion

Teaching students to participate in active citizenry requires students to discuss differing perspectives of an issue. Many definitions describe the term discussion. “Wilén defined discussion as an educative, reflective, and structured group conversation with students. The key word is “conservation” which, in the context of the classroom, is an informed exchange of higher level thoughts and feelings” (Wilén, 1991, p. 24). For this study the definition of discussion is “a particular form of group interaction where members join together in addressing a question of common concern, exchanging and examining different views to form their answer, enhancing their knowledge or understanding, their appreciation or judgment, their decision, resolution or acting over the matter of the issue” (Hess, 2004, p. 167).

The purpose of social studies education is to instruct students in citizenship skills so they actively participate in the democratic process (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977; Evans, 2004; Jenness, 1990; McMurray 2007; Ochoa-Becker 2004; Warren, 1991). Hess (2004), Hahn (2002) and McMurray (2007) repeatedly express classroom discussion as one of the most important skills to teach students concerning democracy. Democracy depends on the ability of its citizens to discuss and make decisions concerning the national, state and local communities. Discussion is a mode to deliver different perspectives, facts and formulate a compromise about an issue or selected topic. It allows the citizenry to deliberate and choose a solution for the common good. Discussion encouraged in the social studies classroom develops listening skills, higher order of thinking and the ability to make informed decisions (Hahn, 2002; Hess, 2004; Larson, 1999; McMurry, 2007; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Wilén, 2004). Students mature

to active citizens through preparation in the social studies classroom and should be an important element in the curriculum of public schools.

Many social studies teachers however interchange the term discussion to describe classroom talk. Classroom talk is interaction between students and teachers usually concerning recall concerning basic social studies content or an opinion over current events (Wilén, 2004). Wilén (2004) calls this type of classroom talk recitation. In his study, Larson (1999) found teachers misuse of the term discussion to mean recitation, questioning students about lectures or other teacher-dominated activities. McMurray (2007) adds that discussions are not bull sessions or a way to pass time but should “ensure that learning is occurring, beliefs are substantiated by evidence, and minority opinions are protected” (p. 49). Classroom talk is simply talk and does not fit the criteria set in the definition of discussion.

### Controversial Public Issues

A specific structure that encourages students to deliberate together is Controversial Public Issues or unresolved questions of public policy, generating considerable discord between two opposing viewpoints (Cotton, 2006; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2001; Hess, 2002; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Lockwood, 1996; Malikow, 2006; McCully, 2006; Oulton, Dillon, & Grace, 2004; Rossi & Pace, 1998).

Controversial Public Issue instruction is not a new methodology in social studies. In the post-Sputnik era, the United States government flooded education with grants to better curriculum in schools. Social studies benefited from governmental aid for improvement of curriculum. A significant program called The Harvard Project contributed to the New Social Studies movement of the 1960's and 1970's. Authored

by Donald Oliver, Fred Newmann, and James Shaver the project, originally funded by private support, won federal funding and “stressed the structure of the disciplines and inquiry-based methods” (Bohan & Feinberg, 2008, p. 55). The Harvard Project followed John Dewey, Thomas Jefferson and Gunnar Myrdal’s influence to create an issue-centered curriculum and a specific focus for debate. From the publications, students achieved higher levels of cognition, an understanding of differing opinions, evaluating information, creating informed judgments and clarifying personal values (Bohan & Feinberg, 2008). Students also compared pamphlet content to modern issues using discussion as a basis to evaluate their solutions. This curriculum facilitated discussion of social studies topics giving historical background with differing perspectives of the content. The materials used in the Harvard Project allowed students to analyze content critically, back up opinions with evidence and justify views on public policy.

The Harvard Project’s major purpose was “to help students analyze and discuss persisting human dilemmas related to public issues” (Shaver, Oliver, & Newmann, 1967, p. 2). The Harvard Project did not just publish booklets with controversy but explained controversy and discussion in detail for the teacher and the students.

Two major parts in the Harvard Project were *Cases and Controversy* and *Taking a Stand*. *Cases and Controversy*’s objective was to explain the rationale of the approach and give guidelines for implementing the approach in the social studies classroom. The objective to *Taking A Stand* was to help students improve their discussion skills. *Cases and Controversy* contained an introduction to the guide,

discussion of The Harvard Project and the social studies curriculum, analyzing public issues, cases and unit books, case study approach with materials and strategies, classroom discussion, activities, answer keys and case reference table. *Taking A Stand* contained six sections titled purposes of discussion, case for discussion (a introduction to cases), discussion for direction, issues and support strategies, moving discussion forward and specific topical cases for discussion. These two guides instruct the teacher and student on analyzing and conducting proper discussion of public issues.

After the teacher and student have successfully completed the “training” on discussion and analyzing public issues, the Public Issue Series booklets were implement for use in the classroom. These topical booklets ranged in titles from the American Revolution to Negro Views of American. Each booklet gave a case description of the topic, listed the facts of the case, issues and justification, and discussion hurdles. Through the case studies a better “understanding in the discussion process” (p. 63) was developed. Students were encouraged to “seek deeper insights into opposing views of an issue and greater opportunities to express their own views clearly and effectively” (p. 63).

Another author implementing Controversial Public Issue instruction is Ocheo-Becker. Ocheo-Becker (2007) in the second edition of *Democratic Education for Social Studies: An Issue-Centered Decision Making Curriculum* states the goal of the text is to “improve school curricula designed to strengthen the capacity of the people to govern themselves (p. xi). She emphasizes the need for young people to prepare to make judgments on challenges of the future. She states that controversial public issue instruction is important to create effective citizenry and concludes testing and

accountability do not create such citizens. (p. xi). Ochoa-Becker (2007) states, an open discussion helps citizens "...acquire the knowledge and intellectual abilities needed to participate productively in meaningful dialogue and to enable...citizens to take an intellectually sound and active part in the improvement of issues that society faces" (p. 16). To continue democratic dialogue citizens also need to appreciate core principles of a representative democracy.

According to Ochoa-Becker (2007), Gunnar Myrdal (1945) summarized the six core principles characterizing representative democracy in his book *An American Dilemma*. It includes dignity of the individuals, rights of individuals and groups to participate, the right and responsibility of citizens intentionally to gather information about public affairs, strive for political and social improvement, the right of independence from the group and lastly, equality and opportunity for all people. Expounding on each individual principle creates a better understanding and the relationship of representative democracy in the United States.

Dignity of the individual involves the rights of citizens to oppose public policies created by the government and encourages members of minority groups to inform co-members of their opposition. Citizens may also use their opposition to influence minority groups affected by the policy and encourage political changes. Rights of the individual and groups to participate emphasize an equal vote for all citizens, fair representation in public offices and education. Participation is the conscious effort of citizens to remain knowledgeable of current issues involving government and governmental leaders. Nevertheless, gaining knowledge of current

events also comes with the responsibility of processing it and applying it to real life situations.

Ochoa-Becker (2007) reminds the reader that the principles are ideals of democracy and throughout history have fallen under hypocrisy. However, she emphasizes that knowledge of the democratic principles are essential to the continuation of practice of representative democracy. Knowledge and practice of these democratic principles empower citizens to proactively act, question and possibly change society.

#### Empirical Studies Concerning Controversial Public Issue Instruction

In an empirical study concerning Controversial Public Issues, Hahn (1998) interviewed social studies students in the United States. She found that social studies students discussed controversial issues coupled with current events in the classroom. However, controversial issues pertained to the school environment, such as no hats in the building or rotating schedules then turned to social issues such as gay rights, abortion or drugs. Students in specific courses, for example, a political studies course, discussed controversial issues but noted, in the other social studies courses, historical content remained the primary form of information. Students interviewed made it a point to add if their opinion contradicted the majority, they would remain silent in the discussion. For example, one student admitted being sympathetic to the Ku Klux Klan but quickly added she would not admit her personal feeling in the class because she was scared of the reaction. From the study Hahn (1998) concluded that students spend most of their time receiving content information however get to participate in a variety of activities such as simulations, current event discussions (specifically giving an

opinion) and small group activities. She stressed that most students define controversial as a domestic issue rather than an international issue and students find it easy to disagree with their teacher but hesitate to express unpopular opinions with peers present.

In another empirical study discussed by Hahn (2008), the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) surveyed all 50 states analyzing textbooks, conducting focus groups with student and teachers. Locations of the schools spread across the country to develop a case study of civic education. The purpose of the study was to show what three domains young people would learn in, 1.) democracy, political institutions, and 2.) rights and responsibilities of citizens, national identity, and 3.) social cohesion and diversity. Study tests and surveys administered to the representative sample consisted of ninth graders, teachers teaching in a civic related subject areas and administrators. The results found that students in civic courses learned about non-controversial and uncontested topics. The students were encouraged to speak in class about the non-controversial topics but rarely extended the topic to include an issue of a controversial nature like a disagreement from the public. From the study, discussion as defined by the students included answering questions from the teacher's content lessons. A correct or incorrect verbal command indicated a right or wrong answer and the teacher moved on with their content.

In the empirical studies, Hahn found that students do not discuss controversial issues in the classroom environment and student discussion consisted of answering the teacher's questions or remaining quiet in fear of reaction from the majority. Both

studies show a lack of democratic skills taught in the classroom and lack of proper methodology of controversial issues.

### Summary

Divided into differing categories, the literature review focused on democracy, Controversial Public Issue instruction and social studies. The review led to an examination of the intent of social studies and education as a whole and the shift to standards and testing. However, education and social studies emphasize the responsibility of teachers to instill democratic skills to their students for the purpose of continuing democracy. The literature review explains that democracy by definition is power “vested in the people” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/democracy>) and continues through education, specifically social studies education. Controversial Public Issue instruction allows teachers to teach democratic skills in the classroom using controversial issues throughout society. However, standards and laws such as No Child Left Behind (2001), teachers are preparing students for knowledge level testing and leaving out democratic skills. In two studies conducted by Hahn, students did not discuss Controversial Public Issues but rather answered teachers questions or kept quiet to avoid the majority opinion. The literature review indicates teachers are not teaching Controversial Public Issues in the classroom environment even though the standards, the law and the goal of education and social studies mandate it.

Chapter three will discuss the conceptual framework, the objective of the research and method used to study teachers’ attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issues instruction while using mandated standards and state testing.



## CHAPTER III

### Conceptual Framework of Model and Methodology

#### Conceptual Framework

##### Civic Republicanism

The conceptual framework used as the lens for studying teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated standards and state testing is Civic Republicanism. This section presents a definition and central themes of the framework.

Civic Republicanism “recognizes that realizing freedom requires strong political structures supported by active, public-spirited citizens...[and] is concerned with enabling interdependent citizens to deliberate on and realize the common goods [for the]...community” (Honohan, 2002, p. 1). Civic Republicanism relies on the writings and observations of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Rousseau, James Madison and Hannah Arent. Four central themes embedded from Civic Republicanism include civic virtue, freedom, participation and recognition. These four themes explore the interdependence and active citizenry within a nation, state and local community.

Civic virtues are responsibilities and duties of citizens living in a political community. The goal of civic virtue is for citizens to practice their duties for the common good (Heater, 2004; Honohan, 2002). Honohan (2002) introduces awareness, self-restraint and deliberative engagement as practical implications of civic virtue.

Awareness requires citizens to acknowledge consciously the “interdependencies and common economic, social and environmental concerns of the

polity” (p. 160). Citizens connect with other citizens concerning social conditions, political and economic issues and continually contribute to policy decisions. Self-restraint identifies citizenship as community involvement not an individual pursuit of personal wealth and power. Citizens practicing self-restraint put the common good before the individual especially supporting “measures to maintain political equality” (p. 161). In deliberative engagement, suspension of judgment is required until examination of all perspectives. “Deliberation is central to participation; thus a crucial part of civic virtue is the willingness to deliberate; to reflect on opinions and communicate with others...learning to deal with conflict is itself an important part of civic virtue” (Honohan, 2002, p. 161). Collectively, the practical implications of civic virtue foster solidarity with community members and require continual commitment to political action.

The second theme of Civic Republicanism is freedom. Freedom, according to Honohan (2002), is political autonomy. It means citizens act according to purposes they endorse and continually participating in social practices that create a common good.

Thirdly, active participation includes deliberation between citizens. The more extensive the deliberation the more likely the decisions and compromises made reflect the citizens involved. Deliberation includes unpopular and popular policies taking the widest perspectives and viewpoints to decide on a solution. “Republican politics allows the expression and potential recognition of difference. The substance of republican politics is based on interdependence, is created in deliberation, emerges in

multiple publics to which all can contribute, and is not definitive but open to change” (Honohan, 2002, p. 249).

Lastly, recognition is rooted in interdependence. Globalization brings republicanism to a smaller world, recognizing that citizens from other states connect through economic, cultural and environmental issues. This global citizen thinks about connectivity and recognizes the commonalities rather than the differences. Therefore, the decisions made reflect a more connected world rather than individual interests.

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experience of social studies teachers’ attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated standards and state tests. This research will then compare those lived experiences to determine if the teachers share similar experiences and judgments concerning Controversial Public Issues. Using in-depth interviews, this research will compare the lived experience of the social studies teachers who satisfy the criteria outlined by the research question in hopes to identify examples of how the teachers have used Controversial Public Issue instruction with mandated standards and state testing. The fundamental questions addressed by the study are as follows:

1. What are social studies teachers’ attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated standards and state testing?
2. Do teachers see Controversial Public Issue as being compatible with No Child Left Behind, National Council for the Social Studies and state standards?

This chapter will include information on transcendental qualitative method of study, a more detailed description of the research participants and school districts along with the data collection process. Chapter 3 will conclude with a discussion of the data analysis process.

### Research Design

Phenomenology “attempts to approach a lived experience with a sense of ‘newness’ of elicited rich and descriptive data...” (Creswell, 2007, p. 269) The main tool of data collection in phenomenology is a long in-depth interview. This process allows the researcher to develop questions to “evoke a comprehensive account of the person’s experience...” (Moustakas, 2004, p. 114). Transcendental Phenomenology “emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for the derivation of knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). The central principle is intentionality and is comprised of two experiences called noema and noesis. Intentionality is a connection with the world and relates consciousness toward an object (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Schwart, 2007). Schwart, (2007) also elaborates on intentionality and states, “we are related to the world we experience and live in through structures of meaning and significance” (p. 157). The noema and noesis are the meanings in phenomenological research. Noema is the textural aspect of intentionality and is the “what” of the appearing phenomenon. Noesis is the structural aspect of intentionality and is the “conscious acts of thinking and judging, imagining and recollecting, in order to arrive as a core structural meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79). Noema and noesis are in a

repeated relationship “coming together to create a fullness in understanding the essences of a phenomenon or experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79).

The primary processes that assist in the derivation of knowledge in transcendental phenomenology require epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and intuitive integration (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Refraining from judgment and avoid perceiving the phenomenon in a traditional fashion is the first step in derivation of knowledge and is called epoche. Researchers use epoche to perceive the phenomenon is a new way or as Moustakas (2007) explains, “a way that requires that we learn to see what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe...The everyday understandings...are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of pure or transcendental ego” (p. 33).

Second, gaining meanings to the phenomenon or reduction begins by bracketing or focusing on the topic/question while all other outside knowledge is set aside. Bracketing, utilized by the researcher, authenticates the phenomenon by practicing epoche and focusing on the topic/question of the research. Bracketing requires focus on the research to be placed in brackets so all other information or preconceived judgments are suspended so that the “entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and questions” (Moustakas, 1996, p. 97). Bracketing is used throughout the Phenomenological Reduction Process “Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences...[the] investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and

essences of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 84-85). Phenomenological reduction assumes initially every statement is equal by using horizontalization. After horizontalization is complete, the researcher removes irrelevant and repetitive statements to leave only horizons or the textural meanings of the phenomenon. Clustering the horizons into themes and organizing the themes into textural descriptions is the last step in phenomenological reduction.

Imaginative variation is the third step and requires the researcher to arrive at structural descriptions or “the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced...or the “how” that speaks to conditions that illuminate the “what” of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The researcher will develop structural themes from the textural descriptions through the already completed phenomenological reduction.

The final step is intuitive integration. In this step, the researcher merges the “textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The textural-structural synthesis represents the essence of the phenomenon studied.

### Research Population

For the purpose of this study, junior high and high school social studies teachers selected from urban, suburban and rural school districts agreed to an interview regarding their attitudes toward teaching Controversial Public Issues. The teachers were asked to participate based on three criteria: 1.) currently teaching social studies, 2.) knowledge of national and required state standards and 3.) experience with the Southwestern mandated state testing. Fifty participants were initially contacted

through their school email, which is published on the school websites. In the initial email, the details of the research project and the copy of the informed consent were attached for review. The participants have the option to phone or email with their decision to participate and decide on time and date. A reminder email, sent by the researcher, will arrive the day before the scheduled interview. Eleven participants responded via email that they would participate in the interview. In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, teacher participants agreed to contribute to the research creating a purposeful sample. “During purposeful sampling, subjects are selected because they reflect the average person, situation, or instance of phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 62). The investigator should discover, understand, and gain insight into a situation and select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). Thus, the researcher purposefully chose junior high and high school social studies teachers for this study.

Seven junior high/middle school and four high school social studies teachers agreed to the interview. Of the seven junior high teachers, six were male and one was female. The male teachers ages ranged from mid-20's to 70. Teaching experience collectively ranges from a first year teacher to 50 years of teaching experience.

The youngest social studies teacher is in his mid-20s, is Caucasian and a first year teacher. He taught 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography, coached and helped with differing activities of the school. He graduated from a research university in the Southwestern state with a bachelor's degree in social studies education. The second male teacher was in his early 40's and Native-American. He has taught a total of 16 years, 13 years in private schools and 3 years in public schools. He teaches 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography and

8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History, coaches and helps with different activities during the school year. He graduated from a parochial college in the Southwestern state with a bachelor's degree in education and is currently working on his master's degree in education. The next three male teachers were in their late 50's and were Caucasian. Each teacher had been teaching for over 25 years. One teacher taught 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) U.S. History, while the other two maintained all 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History and Pre-AP U.S. History courses. All three teachers held bachelor's degrees in education and one has a master's in interdisciplinary studies from a research university in the Southwestern state. None of these teachers coached but hold different sponsorships in the schools such as National Honor Society and yearbook. All three were the social studies coordinators of the social studies department at their school. The last male junior high/middle schoolteacher was a career teacher of 50 years and is Caucasian. He was a 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography teacher and did not coach or sponsor any activities. He held a bachelor's degree in education from a regional school out of state. The only female junior high teacher to participate was in her early 30's and was Caucasian. She had taught for 10 years. She taught 8<sup>th</sup> grade Pre-AP U.S. History and sponsors student council. She held a bachelor's degree in social studies education from a research university in the Southwestern state.

Four high school teachers responded agreeing to the interview. Of the four high school teachers, one was male and three were female. The male teacher was in his late 40's and the female teachers ages ranged from mid-30's to early 60's. Teaching experience collectively ranged from 10 to over 25 years. As with most high



school teachers, they all taught more than one subject; however, their testing subject is U.S. History and Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. History.

The only male high school teacher to participate was in his late 40's and was Caucasian. He had taught for 20 years. He taught two subjects one being U.S. History, coaches, sponsors the senior class and volunteers for several other activities throughout the year. He held a bachelor degree from a regional school in the Southwestern state. The first female was in her late 30's and is Caucasian. She had taught for 12 years. She taught more than one subject, one being AP United States History and sponsored a club along with other activities through the year. She was the coordinator of her department. She held a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in social studies education from one of the research universities in the Southwestern state. The second teacher was in her early 30's and was Caucasian. She taught more than one subject, one being U.S. History and sponsors clubs along with other activities through the year. She holds a bachelor's degree and master's degree from a research university in the Southwestern state. The last high school teacher was in her early 60's and was Caucasian. She had taught for over 25 years. She was the coordinator of the social studies department at her school. She taught more than one subject, one being U.S. History. She held a bachelor's degree in education from a regional university in the Southwestern state.

After the participants agreed to the interview, the researcher used the individual school district's web sites to collect demographic data and background for each district. Of the four districts used in the study, one school district was urban, one school district was suburban and two were rural. Each district had one superintendent,

a head principal for each school, a school board of education and maintained accreditation by the Southwestern State Department of Education and North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

The urban school district included K-12 education including charter schools and alternative education. It currently has 13 middle schools and 11 high schools. The total population of the urban school district was 40,990 students with 6,454 middle school students and 7,424 high school students. The ethnicity make-up was African-American 30.2 %, Asian 2.5%, Hispanic 40.2%, Native American 5.3% and white 21.8%. From the total population of students, 88% receives free or reduced price meals. The district comprises approximately 136 square miles stretching geographically into seven different cities.

The suburban school district is K-12 education including alternative education. It currently had five junior high schools and three high schools. The total population of the district has more than 21,000 total students with 3,243 junior high students and 5,876 high school students. The ethnicity make-up was African-American 7%, Asian and Pacific Islander 10%, Hispanic 9%, Alaskan or American Indian 14% and Caucasian 66%. From the total population of students, 38% received free or reduced price meals. The district comprises approximately 159 square miles and stretches into two cities.

One rural school district was K-12 education including alternative education. It currently had one junior high and one high school. The total population of the district was 5,725 students with 375 middle school students and 452 high school students. The ethnicity make-up was African-American 0%, Asian 1%, Hispanic 3%,

Native American 15% and Caucasian 88%. From the total population of students, 18% received free or reduced price meals. The approximate square miles of the school district was not available on the website.

The second rural school district was K-12 education including alternative education. It currently had one middle school and one high school. The total population of the district is 2, 860 with 644 junior high students and 787 high school students. The ethnicity make-up was African-American 2%, Asian 1%, Hispanic 3%, Native American 9% and Caucasian 86%. From the total population of students, 51% received free or reduced price meals. The approximate square miles of the school district was not available on the website.

### Method

The methods used to collect data were identical for each teacher and included: an audio-taped interview, probing questions for clarification, and note taking. “The phenomenological interview involved an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 114). I practiced epoche and bracketing during the process of the interviews. Bracketing, utilized by the researcher, authenticates the phenomenon by practicing epoche and focusing on the topic/question of the research. Bracketing requires focus on the research questions to be placed in brackets so all other information or preconceived judgments (epoche) are suspended so that the “entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and questions” (Moustakas, 1996, p. 97). After conclusion of the interviews, the researcher transcribes each interview and numbers each sentence of the interview. Each sentence is equal to all other sentences in the interview. The

researcher then removes repetitive sentence or sentences not related to the research questions. At this time, the researcher clusters the horizons into themes and organizing the themes into textural descriptions for each participant interview. The researcher then writes a composite of the textural descriptions or horizons for all participants. Following the textural descriptions, the researcher writes the textural composite paragraphs. After the textural composite, the researcher uses the horizons to analyze and develop the structural descriptions for each participant or “the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced...or the “how” that speaks to conditions that illuminate the “what” of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The researcher develops structural themes from the textural descriptions through the already completed phenomenological reduction. After the researcher writes the structural composite, the researcher merges the “textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The textural-structural synthesis represents the essence of the phenomenon studied.

The purpose of the interviews was to discover teachers’ attitudes toward teaching Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated standards and tests and to see if the social studies teachers comply with No Child Left Behind (2001), National Council for the Social Studies and Southwestern state standards. The researcher explained that teachers’ names and places of employment would be confidential and pseudonyms would appear in the dissertation during the analysis portion of the study.

### Procedure

Junior high and high school social studies teachers in the Southwestern United States participated in the study. Teaching state and district standards were required in all social studies classrooms being tested. Social studies classes tested are 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography, 8<sup>th</sup> grade United States history and high school United States History (grade of student is determined by district). The primary purpose of the state standards is to promote civic competence in knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of students to be able to assume, “the office of citizen” (P.A.S.S, 2010). Each participant is experienced instructing the mandated Southwestern state standards and administering state mandated tests. Once the participants established that they correspond with the three requirements, the participants responded to interview four questions/statements (see Appendix). I also used probing questions to clarify answers during each interview for comprehension.

### Summary

In summary, this study describes the experiences of eleven social studies teachers and explores their attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using standards and mandated state testing using transcendental phenomenological design. Using this method, the researcher will gain in-depth understanding of the teachers’ attitudes toward Controversial Public Issue instruction. Data analysis, using the processes of bracketing and phenomenological reduction provided insight into the lived experience of the social studies teachers. In chapter four the results of this analysis are presented.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the results of interviews with the 11 study participants. As discussed in previous chapters, the purpose of this study was to collect data of teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using social studies state standards and preparing the students for mandated state tests. To collect data, the researcher chose a qualitative design called transcendental phenomenology. A phenomenological design "attempts to approach a lived experience with a sense of newness of elicited rich and descriptive data..." (Creswell, 2007, p. 269). A transcendental phenomenological design "emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for the derivation of knowledge..." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). The transcendental phenomenological research design was used to understand the experiences of 11 social studies teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using state standards and state tests and if Controversial Public Issues are compatible with No Child Left Behind, National Council of the Social Studies and state standards. Data were collected from 11 social studies teachers using in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed to produce the essence of the phenomenon.

The third step in transcendental phenomenological research design is imaginative variation. This step includes textural descriptions, structural descriptions, composite textural, composite structural descriptions and textural-structural synthesis of the participants. Textural descriptions are exact words taken by the participant

during the interview process and is conveyed by the researcher. The researcher only reports the participants experience without including analysis. Structural descriptions are evaluations of the textural descriptions and

“...involves conscious acts of thinking and judging, imagining and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structural meanings... Texture and structure are in continual relationship. In the process of explicating intentional experience one moves from that which is experienced and described in concrete and full terms, the ‘what’ of the experience, towards its reflexive reference in the ‘how’ of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 78-79).

Lastly, textural-structural synthesis descriptions are discussed in Chapter 5.

### Textural Descriptions

#### Will’s Textural Descriptions

Will is a junior high United States History teacher and supplements Controversial Public Issues (Controversial Public Issues) with state standards. He states, “a controversial issue is something that causes one to think about their position on a stance. It makes you think of your core values and whether you stand with them or change your way of thinking.” He stresses, the state and district standards do not specifically deal with Controversial Public Issues but it does not get in the way of “incorporating” Controversial Public Issues in the daily curriculum. He does not think that state, district standards and testing get in the way of teaching Controversial Public Issues.

Will’s first example of a controversial issue is the district cell phone policy.

He continues stating “parents don’t really have a problem with it (phoning or texting during school hours), but it does interrupt the educational process.” Moving on to state curriculum, he continues his discussion recognizing that standards are in place to help students moving from one school district to another, however, he admits one drawback is the possibility of differing chapters.

Will explains state standards are a mandated feature in the public schools and “[They] give our kids an opportunity to be successful on the state testing.” Although he prepares students to take mandated tests, he enjoys incorporating Controversial Public Issues in his lesson plans. He states, “really you have to make time, you have to make sure that you can take your lesson and tie it” to the state and district curriculum. Will plans what Controversial Public Issue topics to use in his lesson plans because he “keeps up” with current events, “watching the news and reading the paper.” His Controversial Public Issues are a “premeditated” objective to his lesson plan but he states, “I wish I had time to do current events but because of how quick we have to move or how much time allowed in our curriculum guide, we do not get the opportunity to take a day out just to do a current event day.”

One Controversial Public Issue tied to state and district standards are current trends in the economy and economic panics in U.S. History. He states, “it tied into our curriculum so I look for things like that to tie in. But to say that I actually plan each day to bring in current events, well, it sometimes just happens.” He explains during class time, students may ask questions about current events. They do discuss those topics in his class but with appropriate guidelines for the students and the teacher. The students are given basic guidelines associated with respecting others



opinions. He stresses to the students it is important to listen to each other and appreciate different perspectives. Will states, listening to different perspectives can “remold” a person, meaning students “can become more educated...listening to others.” He continues stating, “I try to make them understand that we are not going to solve the issue but we can all become more educated.” He tells the students although eighth graders cannot vote, that does not mean eighth graders do not have a voice of influence. “You have the opportunity to talk to people about it and say hey mom, dad, or whoever, I learned this today, what do you think?” Will emphasizes this type of topic allows students to have communication with parents and discuss current events and Controversial Public Issues with an adult.

Connecting state’s rights to gay marriage is another Controversial Public Issue connected to the district and state standards. First, Will teaches the content required by state and district standards. After the students have a background, the class discusses a current event concerning states rights. “The kids...talk about how states want to define” gay marriage “but one side wants it this way and the other side wants it another. The students go back and forth about it and we actually have pretty good discussions.” Will laughs admitting that sometimes students have such good points, he thinks, “that was pretty valid.” Throughout Controversial Public Issue discussions, he places guidelines on himself too. “I make sure I do not give my opinion, I let them arrive and talk through it alone.”

Although the students discuss the current events, Will has noticed that most students in the minority opinion will not speak up. It is mostly the majority opinion discussing the topic. Nevertheless, he wants the students to arrive at a decision on

their own, he wants the students to research the topic, talk to their parents and make informed decisions. When students read documents like newspapers and other primary resources, they “arrive at a judgment.” Introducing students to different perspectives and making informed decisions are important to Will so “some five and six years from now they can make an informed opinion whenever they start to vote.” He also stresses, “I think that is a part of the state testing too.” He explains students examine documents on the state test and arrive at judgments according to the information given.

Will is confident he can “back up” any Controversial Public Issue with state and district standards. He states, “I know [some topics] are controversial but I think that you have to be able to approach that (Controversial Public Issue) especially in social studies. You have to be willing to approach those issues because of the fact that they are real. Maybe a parent does not want to understand that.” Parents may say teachers should not bring Controversial Public Issues into the classroom but “in fact, it is an issue...it is out there...” Will is confident of support from the administrators concerning Controversial Public Issues because the students do not know his personal opinion. He concludes, “I think the way I approach it, it does not seem as controversial because when I present it” it always connects state and district standards.

Will states several times in the interview the district and state curriculum does not “deal with or touch” Controversial Public Issue instruction. He however, includes Controversial Public Issue in his daily lesson plans because “I try to take our history and make it where the students have to think about issues, I try and get my students to think in a deeper way.” He adds Controversial Public Issues “allow your students to

see how it relates to their lives [and] they get interested...” in history along with current events. Will’s experience reveals 10 core themes:

1.) Controversial Public Issues are compatible with state and district guidelines 2.) Controversial Public Issues should connect with district and state curriculum, 3.) Controversial Public Issues are not listed in district or state curriculum. 4.) state mandated testing does not get in the way of Controversial Public Issues. 5.) listening to different perspectives are important for growth to be an informed citizen, 6.) Controversial Public Issues are important for students to have a voice, 7.) Controversial Public Issues are relevant to the student own lives compelling them to be interested in history and current events, 8.) communication with parents is important, 9.) Controversial Public Issues are important to teach student democratic skills such as discussion, listening skills, listening to different perspectives and becoming an informed citizen, 10.) teacher’s personal opinion is not relevant when teaching Controversial Public Issues.

#### Grace’s Textural Descriptions

Grace teaches United States history at the high school level and follows state standards combining Controversial Public Issue instruction in her lesson plans. “A controversial issue is not widely accepted morally or ethnically among the community which you teach...” and includes “...manifest destiny, the holocaust, genocide in other countries, Roe v. Wade, prohibition, gay rights, immigration [and]...civil rights...” as examples. She adds, “I think it is necessary to teach [Controversial Public Issues] and we look at the issues from both perspectives...and let the students discuss...” as a group. “You can’t really believe something unless you hear every side of it.” She

never reveals her views or perspectives and has direct rules and regulations for the Controversial Public Issue instruction. She encourages the students to have an open discussion. “Students are able to give their opinion whether it is mainstreamed culture beliefs...and [also] share if they are opposed. They know at the beginning of class they are to suspend judgment until everyone hears all...views...” Grace instructs the students to “...listen [and]...debate, not argue.” However, at the introduction of Controversial Public Issues, students only retaliate making the classroom environment hostile. After practicing the guidelines and specific rules, Grace noticed students not necessarily “...softened, but [are] more open to other people’s perspectives.”

“I love teaching Controversial Public Issues...because I think it puts the students in the zone of proximal development (ZDP) where they’re uncomfortable and it is outside the box...it will do two things: 1.) it will reconfirm their beliefs or 2.) it will make them reconsider their beliefs. I think it is very important as an educator to give them every perspective of the issue...” She wants the students to have availability to different perspectives as she describes a lesson plan concerning Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. “There is maybe one sentence in the whole American History textbook that covers Malcolm X...so, I went outside the book and we (the classes) talked about Malcolm X and compared him to King. Almost every writing that King...” produced Malcolm X responded. “And they (students) realized that Malcolm X was not necessarily that much different than King...”

Although Grace combines the Controversial Public Issues with district/state standards, she states teachers “...are encouraged not to discuss these things

(Controversial Public Issues), but as teachers who have been in the system for a long time...we understand our rights [and]...we know that they cannot prevent us to teach these issues if they are aligned with the curriculum.”

Grace continues discussing the six-week district tests. The test questions “are very broad” and they do not ask specific questions even when the topics are specifically in the state standards “like Roe v. Wade. There might be a question along the line of why were there so many movements during the civil rights era...they are not detailed. They don’t necessarily ask what Martin Luther King stood for or what Malcolm X stood for or what their philosophy was in regards to African American rights.”

Grace concludes her interview stating the administration frowns upon Controversial Public Issue instruction, but she only supplements her lessons with Controversial Public Issues, not substituting standards. Grace’s experience reveals 6 core themes: 1.) suspend judgment, 2.) rules and regulations to make a Controversial Public Issue successful, 3.) connect Controversial Public Issue to district/state curriculum, 4.) Controversial Public Issues are a necessary addition to curriculum, 5.) listening to different perspectives increases critical thinking skills so students can make their own decisions. 6.) Controversial Public Issue is compatible with state standards.

#### Jack’s Textural Description

Jack is a middle school United States history teacher for eighth grade students. He states, “a controversial public issue would be anything that is decisive [sic] in nature and will put people at odds with each other.” He adds that the topics are

controversial and are generally in a public forum. After defining a controversial public issue, he quickly adds, “I don’t really feel like we deal with a lot of controversial topics in the subject matter that I cover with the kids.” He continues, “because they’re changing around the emphasis of what people in power think should be important.” In his perspective, “US History is pretty generic.” His curriculum is “usually direct and to the point. We do not get a lot of leeway in going off on tangents...we are very narrow and limited with what we are allowed to get into.” Although his curriculum is direct and to the point, he feels state and district guidelines “try to make it inclusive” studying all nationalities but “you have to round it out a little bit from both sides of the story and from different perspectives.”

Jack is happy to announce that his “team” created the curriculum guide used by the district last school year and boasted that his site increased their test scores by 20% increase. He stressed, “So it was obvious what happens, if you get to run your own curriculum and it is built for the needs of your kids then you raise your test scores.” He describes testing as the “beginning and end of everything.” He feels strongly that testing is the reason he does not “teach the kids to love learning...” and “it’s all about prepping for a test and knowing this fact, this bit of information and regurgitate it.” Testing takes away from interesting topics “that would get them (students) on a lifelong learning path...it is just test after test after test.”

Concerning the curriculum, Jack feels like the state standards are more flexible than the curriculum set forth by the district. The way the state “objectives are written are nebulous, they give you a little bit of leeway...I think it is a pretty good set of objectives.” Jack confesses he uses his state standards “religiously” because the

“skills actually match up... they actually correlate with the test...” He likes how the state “fine tunes” the objectives and feels they improve every time another revision is released. However, the new district curriculum guide distributed to the teachers came with changes from the original guide approved by the district. Jack states, the new guides were “out of sync and it was obvious a non-social studies person had messed with it.”

However, Jack insists discussion is a big part of social studies. “Social studies is a conceptual process of learning how things fit together, learning with cause and effect.” He pulls kids into social studies topics by asking questions and encouraging students asking further questions. He “pulls” the kids in by discussion. He encourages students to express their knowledge on a subject then he adds to the base “or builds a scaffolding of what they know and plugs in the holes.”

Although he encourages discussion in his classroom, Jack feels the state and district standards “stays away from [Controversial Public Issues]” he continues pointing out the text is very “vanilla-ish [sic] in order to stay away from things like that.” However, he brings up two topics that he would consider controversial. Both discussed in his classroom and both connect with state and district curriculum. The first is slavery and the second is immigration. He teaches the content as established in the state and district standards and then opens the topics up to discussion. He states it is important to bring different perspectives in the classroom. Guidelines, established in the classroom, include no name-calling and mutual respect of the classroom community. He describes his classroom as family and the students need to learn how to discuss and not yell at each other. His main goal is for student to adopt the skills

learning in the social studies class and take them out to the real world. He tells the students that his classroom is a good time to develop and practice skills. He feels Controversial Public Issues help with this process. They develop communication and listening skills. "I let them know the world is a jointly working place and very seldom are you by yourself. You are not going to be able to do what you want to do without consequences. You have to take into consideration that the real world says we all overlap and we all are in everybody else's face." It is important to Jack to keep the class at an eighth grade level and "reign" in the impulsiveness that may be displayed during a Controversial Public Issue.

The Controversial Public Issues discussed in Jack's class correlate to the Constitution. "We have laws that are going to guide generally what we are trying to accomplish: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. [In addition], everyone is entitled to those things. I try to link it (Controversial Public Issue) back to their daily lives, show them that they own some of those powers and those abilities, and have those skills and rights..." He likes to put the responsibility back on the students, "I say these are your responsibilities that you get these rights but you have to fight to hold onto these things." For example, "You need to vote, you need to participate, you need to do all the things that make you a good citizen, and we talk about that." Through discussion, students also learn content for testing. "I think they remember the drama and the passion and the discussions that those kinds of things engender."

The Controversial Public Issues described by Jack are planned and supplemented in his lesson plans but admits, some students will bring up a controversial issue during class. He states that he leaves 10-15 minutes of class time



to discuss those topics, however, we still have to do what our district and state standards demand first then we can talk about the Controversial Public Issue. He maintains a neutral stance when Controversial Public Issues are discussed in his class. “They cannot tell politically where I am coming from or what I believe.” Jack’s experience reveals 11 core themes: 1.) teacher guided curriculum connected with state and district standards is best for student test scores, 2.) testing preparation is the social studies curriculum, 3.) Controversial Public Issues are tied to the curriculum, 4.) state standards are more flexible than district standards, 5.) state standards are compatible with Controversial Public Issue instruction 6.) different perspectives helps students with communication and listening skills, 7.) discussion helps with test preparation, 8.) Controversial Public Issue develops citizenship, 9.) Controversial Public Issue draws students in to the content and discipline of history, 10.) teacher remains neutral during discussion and 11.) social studies teachers need to teach Controversial Public Issues.

#### Karen’s Textural Descriptions

Karen is a high school advanced placement United States History teacher and elective social studies teacher. She utilizes Controversial Public Issue discussions in her lesson plans for both courses. Karen describes Controversial Public Issues as “issues that tend to polarize people and issues that tend to become political even if they are not in their nature political...” She states that the current curriculum “stays away from it and is pretty sterilized, I do my best to bring it in because I think it is a really important part of social studies. If you don’t tackle Controversial Public Issues, I don’t think you are really doing it right.” She states, “our standards at the state level are really constricted and compartmentalized. They don’t seem to go into much

depth...I would line our state standards with the national standards that would make them more interesting.” She emphasizes that, “I try to bring it (Controversial Public Issue) in but always with both sides of the coin a lot of background information so the kids can make an informed choice.” She teaches state standards but goes beyond the objectives using more controversial issues. However, she states her course requires controversial issues verses her on-level counterpart does not. She also points out that her elective class really envelopes Controversial Public Issues because it is teacher driven curriculum.

“I don’t think you can do social studies without it being controversial because it’s about society and there’s always different ideas about the causes or consequences of something the role of the individual the role of the politician and so I think social studies is kind of boring when you don’t talk about controversial issues.” In her course, students are realizing they may possess different opinions than their parents or community “and that is okay.” Students may not have much experience with Controversial Public Issue until they get into the social studies classroom. “You [the teacher] have to commit to it and guide them through it. I don’t think they have had much experience with it in our society which I think is sad, so we do it a lot.” By the end of the course, she attests, “I think they feel like they are better citizens on some level.”

Karen reiterates that the district/state curriculum is “very sterile and I think the national standards do a way better job of bringing those issues (Controversial Public Issues) in and talking about debate and discourse in social studies. Our district guides and to some extent our state standards tend to be laundry lists of facts and dates and

are less critical than they should be....” The district “always says different things than they want, they say that the curriculum guide is just a recommendation and that we are not bound to it...but now we have six weeks tests in your core areas so you are pretty much bound to that guide...the six weeks tests are not critical [thinking skills] and the state exam, that you are getting them ready for, is really not critical [thinking skills].” She goes on to say that other United States history teachers in her department “have 93% passage rates (United States history classes), they do not have any special higher level achieving students and they have great success on the tests...” However, Karen boldly affirms, “state tests get in the way of Controversial Public Issue.” As department head, she knows teachers in her department feel pressure for students to perform satisfactory or above on the test, they are afraid to have a Controversial Public Issue in their classroom because the curriculum guides are “robotic” and the tests are fact driven. She states again, “In my opinion, citizenship is being able to navigate controversial issues and being informed about them...and not pretend to be informed. Not just taking someone else’s word for it. In my mind, that’s the most important piece of social studies, choosing to make a choice. We’re so test driven, I think we forget that about social studies.” Social studies is for citizenship education.

Even though the teachers give the six-week exams, she maintains that students value Controversial Public Issue instruction because the “students naturally want to talk about the controversial and that appeals to them...” The Controversial Public Issue instruction needs to be handled in a “healthy way.” She defines healthy as “we (students and teacher) come to an agreement where there isn’t necessarily a right answer...” She does acknowledge that Controversial Public Issue instruction takes “a

lot of training.” In her classroom, the students begin Controversial Public Issue with a very apolitical article comparing two presidents and the students must learn the “Socratic circle” technique. “We start with this one because it is not really a hot topic, but they have to read it and bring their own questions at different levels of thinking to the debate.” The students have name placards and each student must speak twice, either answering a question or asking a question. The student must turn over their placard and remain silent until all members speak twice. She then begins to bring in thematic issues that are Controversial Public Issue in nature. She explains,

...we might be in the 1800’s in the early part of the (school) year and I will bring in an article on Mexican immigration and even though we are not in the same time, we are thematically there. And so I think that you can bring those Controversial Public Issues in to the classroom thematically. And I think it frees people to see it as a long term issue instead of just one we are dealing with tight now...it is a more healthy situation for the kids because they are not locked into the current political [mind frame] and can make a more informed choice...when every kid can sit in that circle and say I agree with you or I disagree with you and that is okay, then that is a pretty good day.

Students enjoy Controversial Public Issue instruction according to Karen. Training and practicing of Controversial Public Issues permits a comfortable environment to agree and disagree with one another without conflict. Critical thinking skills and openness to other’s opinions are sharpened. “In order to make it critical you have to take those subjects in and develop those in some way. So, I like to think that [students] are critical when they leave” my classroom. Controversial Public Issues

also create the opportunities for students to practice citizenship skills. “I think it is important for them [students] to practice it as much as possible so they get a sense of what it’s like to have civil discourse and not something that dissents into chaos.”

Karen continues, when students can practice in a safe environment, they may not mimic media, “in terms of political dialogue and you know it’s like pointing fingers or accusing. It is not really like hearing each other, it’s more like Keith Obermann and Bill O’Reilly, you know, yelling at each other.” Karen asks the question,

why do we do social studies? We do it because it is citizenship education.

They [students] are not going to get that in math, they are not going to get that in English and are not going to get it in science and so where are they supposed to get that? They are supposed to get that from us [social studies teachers]. I kind of lay that at the feet of social studies. I think that is one area in terms of our society in public school that is where we are supposed to be doing that.

Karen’s experience reveals 8 core themes: 1.) Controversial Public Issues must be taught in social studies classrooms to practice citizenship education, 2.) training the students for Controversial Public Issue discussion, 3.) connects the district/state curriculum to Controversial Public Issue instruction, 4.) teaches thematically, 5.) listening to different perspectives can increase critical thinking skills for students to make their own decisions, 6.) Controversial Public Issue is not compatible with state standards and mandated testing, 7) Social studies classrooms are the medium for Controversial Public Issue and 8.) freedom in elective course

### Phebe's Textural Description

Phebe is a junior high United States History teacher and incorporates Controversial Public Issues within her classroom. Phebe “loves” to teach Controversial Public Issues, but always combines them with state standards. For example, she incorporates immigration and the Iraq war with presidential powers, the economy and the constitution. She concludes Controversial Public Issues “help the kids see the connections between...history and current events.” It is an important realization because “it gets them (the students) more involved...in what is going on around them.” Phebe enjoys facilitating and listening to students during a topic of heated discourse and if needed “gives them a time out...and gets the fires down...” After the cool down, “...we (the class) start dissecting each person’s argument to help people see where each person is coming from and that...it is not a wrong opinion or that they have the wrong idea, but they (the student) have their own opinion that is based on different facts.” Certain guidelines are required in her classroom before introducing a Controversial Public Issue in a forum situation. “It has got to be civil...we want an honest, goodness wide open debate” about the topic and “we can do that, if we follow the rules.” Phebe adds students may not “change” their point of view of a topic, “...but they will start investigating the other side...they’re going to go out and get more information for themselves” and “inform themselves” about other perspectives. She concludes that the students understand they cannot continue in a discussion and be “one-sided.” Including Controversial Public Issues with her set curriculum, students recognize a “need to get more information and start making...informed choices” while developing into a functioning citizen. Phebe’s

experience reveals 4 core themes: 1.) connecting the Controversial Public Issue with district/state curriculum, 2.) “love” teaching Controversial Public Issues, 3.) necessary rules and regulations, 4.) students learn to gather information to make their own decisions, 5.) Controversial Public Issues are compatible with state standards and 6.) different perspectives.

### Ross’s Textural Description

Ross is a junior high United States History teacher that defines Controversial Public Issues as “definite polarized sides of an issue that is...controversial.” But, Controversial Public Issues must go along with historical issues that are related to United States History state standards. For example, “civil war, manifest destiny, [and] impact of manifest destiny on Native Americans...” He teaches “within the curriculum with school appropriate issues...” He states within the historical facts, “it is good...” to teach Controversial Public Issues “...because they (Controversial Public Issue) can get students to think and take a stand...when you have them critically analysis those stands and perhaps even modify them based on what they hear from other students, I think it is a success.” He does however admit that he has not had much discourse in his classroom “...in recent memory...I try to smooth feathers.” Ross sets guidelines in the classroom if a Controversial Public Issue discussion may occur, “you have to set parameters that they (the students) can function within and mutual respect is the key.” He also adds that students must know that their opinions are just opinions and not necessarily facts. Ross includes two topics that he considers controversial, relocation of Native Americans and slavery. “Now I don’t really have a lot of discussion concerning them, I mean, because we (teachers) present it as a

historical fact...and that is what happened...then the students can express themselves.” He concludes the interview by stating, “pre-Advanced Placement students would be easier to teach Controversial Public Issues to.” Ross’s experience reveals 4 core themes: 1.) using only historical topics for Controversial Public Issue discussion, 2.) cautious teaching—only allowing the students to express themselves after lectures, 3.) Controversial Public Issues are compatible with state standards and 4.) Controversial Public Issues connect with content.

#### Monica’s Textural Description

Monica is a career teacher for over 30 years and teaches United States history and an elective social studies course. She only lists controversial issues that are hot topics for her community like abortion, religion, politics and racism. Over “the last 10-15 years” she has acquired her curriculum because “it is tied to the state testing.” She is not “excited” about the state standards because the students are tested over the content.

Monica made it known throughout the interview she was very serious about her teaching and her student’s test scores. Because of the state standards and mandated tests, she does not let students “discuss things they have no knowledge about. In other words, they have to actually know something about the subject before we have any type of discussion.” Therefore, she states, “to be honest, we do not have a lot of discussion in my class.” She comments on three separate occasions she does not have time for discussion because of time restrictions. She feels she cannot get through the state standards and add a Controversial Public Issue to her curriculum. However, she does allow the students to state an opinion or ask a question. She says,



“the good thing about the kids here if they don’t agree they are respectful...” She adds, “we don’t have enough time for that type of thing [Controversial Public Issue] and really it’s not pertinent and it’s not my job to make them [students] decide one way or the other” about a controversial topic.

Monica reflects on her curriculum before the state standards and state testing, she had time to discuss controversial topics in her classroom, “I would always have 15-20 minutes or we could have just a good class discussion on a pertinent topic” but now “I really don’t have time for that anymore.”

However, in her elective course she allows students to discuss Controversial Public Issues because the curriculum is teacher lead. Unlike the United States history course, she does not worry about parental complaints about “those” topics. Her justification for the differences is students enrolled in the elective are upper classmen and most of the parents already know her from teaching in the community for so long. She mentioned however, students in the minority opinion,

would be afraid to say so, not because of me [but] because of the classmates and how people would look at them. Most of them are old enough to make their own decisions but most of them are not going to say how they truly feel about [a controversial topic] because of the stigma [from their peers and the community].

She continues her discussion about the elective stating, “I do try to get them to think more and we have all types of discussion.” But for Monica, she complains, “in history, for one thing we do not have time and it is a different class...I am loaded up trying to get those kids ready for the state test.”

Monica admits her students ask to have Controversial Public Issue discussions in United States history class. She responds to her students, “you tell me what you know about the subject and I’ll be happy to discuss it with you.” But her students do not have foundational knowledge of the topics. As she stated before, “they have to actually know something about the subject before we have any type of discussion.” She continues, “by the time we have the background to discuss, we probably don’t have time, like I said, my big complaint about the state testing is you don’t have time...for the things I think are really important.”

Her test scores are approximately 85% passage every year. It is unusual for a student to score an unsatisfactory on the state exam because of her teaching strategy. She uses repetition of content knowledge and does not modify her teaching style or use other strategies. “By the time they take a test in my class I have presented a lecture...they use the text that they work out of and I have a ‘work together’ strategy used for unit work.” Monica feels repetition is the best teaching strategy to prepare the students for the state exam. She smiles and tells the researcher her former students visiting after their US history survey tells her, “I already knew that stuff.”

Monica does not think most of the state standards are “pertinent” to the students’ daily lives nor do the state standards “have anything to do with whether you’re a good citizen or not.” She wishes she had 10-15 minutes a day in United States history class to discuss “important topics” relating to students lives. But, she says, “the main thing is I don’t have time...” She has experienced students inquiring about a current events and she feels she could briefly touch on it, but not very often.

Current events are very important and Monica feels social studies teachers should present these pertinent topics. She asks,

where are they [students] going to get this, math and English? We should be talking about those in history...I have a real big problem in fact, that none of us have time for any [discussion concerning current events] and especially in social studies...It makes me feel like I'm not doing a good job in that way, but my excuse is I don't have time.

Monica continues her concerns about state standards stating they are "archaic" and lack depth. "You know the first thing I would do if I could teach Controversial Public Issues is get into the library and do some research." Students would research both sides, so different perspectives would be represented. She would conduct the discussions without her personal opinions and would remain open-minded. "I think they" are important to teach "because kids learn as much from that type of thing as they do from me standing up her talking about the state standards that they are never going to use again." After describing a classroom with Controversial Public Issue discussion she states, "if I took time out for stuff like that, my test scores would go down." Monica's experience reveals 6 themes. 1.) time issues, 2.) state standards and state testing gets in the way of Controversial Public Issues, 3.) state standards are not connected to citizenship, 4.) students afraid to express opposition to majority opinion, 5.) freedom in the elective course to discuss Controversial Public Issues, 6.) students do not have enough foundational knowledge for Controversial Public Issue discussion.

### Joey's Textural Descriptions

Joey is a high school United States history and a social studies elective teacher. Controversial Public Issue topics are an addition to the state curriculum in United States history and his elective course. Controversial topics include political parties, abortion, gun control and civil rights. He immediately states he will take time, up to two days, to have Controversial Public Issue discussions. He wants the students to experience different perspectives but admits, "I don't have too many controversial kids. But in class, we stay pretty focused." He connects the Controversial Public Issues to his curriculum guide and state standards. He explains,

we have our state standards and we also take state mandated tests. There's a percentage based on these units that test questions are taken from. They might have 10 questions for the Civil War and 10 questions from this or that. So what I do is sit down and get a calendar...and I go backwards from April 1 and will count how many days I have teaching in class. I will take the last years test questions, like 10% from the Civil War and I will take 10% of those days that we have and that is how many days we will stay on the Civil War.

Both students and teacher enjoy Controversial Public Issues used in the classroom, however, Joey admits, "I have to be careful...I try to stay neutral." Adding Controversial Public Issues to the set curriculum require Joey to connect state standards to the topics discussed. He believes state standards do not get in the way of teaching Controversial Public Issues because it requires students to read primary documents and look at data, which is required by state standards. He likes having state standards and state tests. "I like all of the state standards; it gives me a place to

start...and gives me something to judge myself and [how well] I did my job.” He shares that his students have a passage rate of 20% above the state average.

His only complaint is the test questions. “Sometimes they...are too vague. Instead of asking who was the first President of the United States, a very clear cut question, they may ask which of the following would have been the best president of the United States.” He doesn’t feel those types of questions are direct enough. If the test has indirect questions, how are the teachers going to have time to teach “that way.” He feels test questions should complement the state standards because “they are very basic and it tells what is going to be on the test.” Through Joey’s experience 6 themes that emerge. 1.) Controversial Public Issues are compatible with state standards, 2.) Controversial Public Issues are important for students to see different perspectives, 3. ) teacher is cognizant to keep opinions out of Controversial Public Issue discussions, 4.) teacher and students like Controversial Public Issue discussion and 5.) teacher connects Controversial Public Issues to content.

#### Chandler’s Textual Description

Chandler is a first year teacher, assigned to teach geography and social studies elective. Chandler describes Controversial Public Issue as people staying in one mindset and “closing everything off...becoming fundamental. A Controversial Public Issue stirs a lot of emotion in people and they may have rash actions or irrational thoughts.”

Chandler describes his curriculum for geography as test-based. It includes processes and patterns and reading a map, graph or chart. He does not believe that geography has controversial issues set forth in the state and district guidelines. He

stated, “maybe the caste system in India.” On the other hand, Chandler’s social studies elective is teacher driven and includes Controversial Public Issues almost every day. He says the elective class has more freedom to discuss different Controversial Public Issue topics. In both courses, Chandler provides loose guidelines for discussion.

During a Controversial Public Issue in geography, Chandler states, “what I try to do there is just give them [the students] perspectives of other people around the world. But this [Controversial Public Issue] is not guided by anything in particular. There is no set standard of how to talk about it.” He continues giving more Controversial Public Issue topics discussed in geography such as China’s one baby rule, nuclear weapons in hostile countries, and terrorism. “I try to make them think about it.” Chandler likes Controversial Public Issue because “it gives me an opportunity to talk about stuff.” He continues, these Controversial Public Issue topics affect their lives, even if the students do not realize it or not. Chandler wants the students to have a foundation of knowledge in 7<sup>th</sup> grade to help in later live understand the controversy. “It’s fun. I like it. It gets them involved talking about stuff that you normally don’t talk about in the classroom.” Different perspectives are a top priority for Chandler. He wants the student to “compare” their lives with the lives of others. “It gives them a little perspective.”

Chandler admits the state standards do not give objectives to teach controversial issues. He has to incorporate Controversial Public Issues into his lessons but “it is hard to get through that stuff, the entire world in one year, with a 7<sup>th</sup> grader. It’s hard to find time to talk about stuff that is controversial or [Controversial Public

Issues] that matter. Like immigration. We did not get to talk it as much as I would have liked too.” Chandler would like the state standards to have more “dialogue in schools” and learn ways to come to a resolution. He states, “it might help our leaders out quite a bit to actually know how to dialogue with each other.” Through Chandler’s experience 10 themes emerged. 1.) the geography curriculum is test based, 2.) freedom to discuss Controversial Public Issues often in the elective course, 3.) different perspectives, 4.) state standards do not have Controversial Public Issue objectives, 5.) loose guidelines, 6.) Controversial Public Issues are “real life” 7.) teacher and students enjoy Controversial Public Issue, 8.) time issues to add Controversial Public Issues to lessons and 9.) Controversial Public Issues are compatible with state standards and 10.) teacher connects Controversial Public Issues with state standards.

#### Jerry’s Textural Description

Jerry is a career teacher of over 35 years. He teaches middle school 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography and 8<sup>th</sup> grade United States history. Both subjects are mandated state testing subjects. Jerry states,

controversial issues are controversial because they have two sides to the issue or at least two sides. Most of them, there’s a continuum. I want the students to have some information, I want them to base it somewhat a chronological or global perspective. I want them to understand what other people think whether they agree with it or don’t agree with that and then I want them to eventually formulate their opinions based on some facts, but also recognize that other people have other opinions.

Jerry connects Controversial Public Issues with state and district standards but he states, “it is important that the state standards be the minimal” standards taught in the classroom. Jerry “pays attention” to the national standards and even though the state standards and the national standards show similarities, Jerry points out the national standards are broad and more thematic. The national and state standards are compatible to Controversial Public Issue instruction.

Jerry chooses his Controversial Public Issues according to historical content, but also current events. He explains, depending on world events, he is flexible with his schedule. “If there is an election we spend a little bit more time on it. We are always going to hit the Electoral College in Congress and so on but when there are certain issues [in current events] we will spend more time and sometimes move things around.” He is interested in connecting Controversial Public Issues and content with citizenship education. Sometimes a guest speaker or current event may not coincide but it is about “being a better citizen” and learning citizenship skills throughout the course of the year. Jerry presents controversial issues differently. He says, “I don’t set out and say well, these are controversial because we are going to talk about them. What we say is these are concepts we need to deal with.” Content is connected to daily life of the student and Jerry connects the past with the present.

I hope what my students get is not just seeing what happened in the past but how the same issues come up today. Issues of liberty verses safety is an ongoing issue in the Bill of Rights, the federalist verses the anti-Federalists. We still argue over that with the Patriot Act and other acts today. How much



should the government do to obtain security of people but when is it an infringement on the people's rights.

Jerry also states the students will have debates, evaluate resource material and filter the material to make an informed decision. Though this process the students see the relevance of history. "The things we are learning are not just all these dead people from 200 years ago, but they are real human beings with real passion." He wants students to experience history as alive rather than fact after fact.

Jerry continues with a discussion concerning social studies teachers. He puts the sole responsibility of Controversial Public Issue discussion on social studies teachers. They are responsible for Controversial Public Issue discussion because other subjects are not going to relate it to their content. It is the job of the social studies teacher to teach civic education and have students realize they are global citizens, not just a member of a social studies class. This cannot be accomplished unless Controversial Public Issues are incorporated in the social studies classroom. He even states, "our country would be a richer, stronger country if some of our leaders had a more of a background in this area, so I think it is a citizenship issue."

Jerry teaches the students citizenship skills in the classroom such as listening and communication skills. The students look at primary sources, newspapers, TV media and filter out information. Students learn an attitude to deal with controversy. That attitude is mutual respect. It is okay to disagree with each other as long as students are listening and gaining different perspectives. Throughout this process, the teacher does not give a personal opinion associated with the topic but presents both sides, even playing devil's advocate on occasion. Jerry's classroom is an open forum.

He builds relationships with the students so they can practice discussion in a safe environment and often gives the student choices on their assignments. Students will “feel free to express themselves...and express their opinions and are able to interact” with their peers. He also had students take action after a controversial issue. After his class discussed the issue, students in his class took action and guided the school through a donation drive. Jerry states the students and the teacher enjoys Controversial Public Issue lessons in his courses. Jerry admits Controversial Public Issues should be a prepared lesson for the students. Those students need guidelines and skills to accomplish these types of lessons. Students learn that some controversies are not a solid yes or no but have shades of gray.

Jerry is confident that his students handle controversies in the classroom because he sets guidelines, teaches skills and attitudes of respect and guides the students through the issues. He uses Controversial Public Issues often enough with the content that students are used to this type of lesson in his class. Jerry finally says, “I have more than motive [in teaching], I have my academic motive, I want kids to do well...but I want the students to be people who can think and be exposed to more than just what they have in their family, their church, in their own little small world. I want them to see the world is bigger.” Through Jerry’s experience 7 themes emerged. 1.) state and national standards are compatible with Controversial Public Issues, 2.) state standards connect with Controversial Public Issues, 3.) different perspectives, 4.) Controversial Public Issues enhance citizenship skills and connect with real life, 4.) social studies teachers are expected to teach Controversial Public Issues, 5.) teacher and students like Controversial Public Issues, 6.) teacher’s opinions remain out of

Controversial Public Issues and 7.) guidelines are established and skills learned for Controversial Public Issues..

### George's Textual Description

George is a career junior high 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography teacher. He describes a typical controversial public issue as a way of helping others understand viewpoints. "It is better to hear opposition or additional...information" to help think the topic through. He explains different perspectives deserve respect from each speaker.

The most important point to George is to realize 7<sup>th</sup> graders are not adults and keeping Controversial Public Issues at their level letting students repeat criticism, information from parents and the news media. After the students share their knowledge, then George always connects the Controversial Public Issues with state and district standards. Even if the student asks a question that is not in the lesson plan, the class will discuss it, but George will always bring the topic back to the content. For example, if a student asks about the Afgan/Iraq War, he will connect it to the region and culture studying at the time or use analogies to help the students understand the concepts. He allows the students to discuss but uses loose guidelines. George feels developing the guidelines slowly will help the students analyze Controversial Public Issues and discuss in a safe environment. He understands 7<sup>th</sup> graders need to have guidance to control emotions that may interrupt the learning process. "I like and enjoy having them participate and know enough to bring it [Controversial Public Issue] up so I don't really cut it off quickly. Then once we get it out in the open, we can explain it geographically and I [always] try to apply geography to it."

The teacher and students enjoy Controversial Public Issue in the classroom lesson plans. “Occasionally, I think they would like it more of the time but whenever we do spend some time, especially the honors kids, they just eat it up.” He adds, the students need to research and even be shocked “...a little out of complacency.” Although George enjoys supplementing Controversial Public Issue in the lessons, he adds, “I have the school district breathing down my neck asking, ‘have you covered this and have you covered that’ in the curriculum guide.”

George has been teaching for 45 years and states, “I have some thoughts about what I like my kids to do, some life skills...” to learn in the classroom. Adding Controversial Public Issues in the classroom is like “trying to outwit the higher authorities in order to get done what...” needs to get done. George feels pressure from the state and district guidelines to perform in the classroom and for students to succeed on the state mandated tests. However, he remembers a time teachers did not have required mandated curriculum; rather, the teacher was expected to develop the curriculum for the needs of the students.

Well, they’ve [district and state] have worn me down, I except it and go along with the state mandated thing, even though it ruffles my feathers, it’s here to stay. With my career soon ending, I’m at the end of it so to speak; eventually I’ll get out of the way and let somebody else fight those battles. I accept the tests, but that doesn’t keep me from dealing with the things that I think my kids need to be aware of as growing young kids...it is the real world they have to deal with.

Through the interview, George gave personal examples of his family. He remembers his grandparents had “public debates over who was president then or programs and I thought hey, now that is educational, that is what education is about, an informed community and people sharing their beliefs and so forth.” George uses “old man stories” with the students and brings the importance of citizenship education to their daily lives. He states, the Tea Party is a great example of “...citizens in action. They feel that they have a chance to say something and they’re going to say it.” He tells his students that citizens in action are healthy for democracy. “I want my kids to know that an informed public is more important and go ahead and trust the masses...”

For his students to really benefit from the Controversial Public Issues, George would “like to see the state apply some thoughts...some open discussion” in the classroom and on testing. Student’s ability to write in complete sentences and analyze material is more important than filling out a scantron sheet. “...checking spelling, checking thought...” is more important than grading with a scantron. “I think we have to be careful with these tests because of everything we test these kids on are scientific cold facts. We are leaving out some of the better stuff that makes us human.”

Citizenship skills may be more important to student learning than fact based testing. “But we can’t expect education to be fit in those darkened circles.” Through George’s experience, 6 themes emerge. 1.) Controversial Public Issues are compatible with state and district standards, 2.) Controversial Public Issues are connected with content, 3.) teacher recognizes student maturity with Controversial Public Issues, 4.) district and state administration has strict adherence to standards, 5.) Controversial Public

Issues enhance citizenship skills, and 6.) teacher creates loose guidelines for Controversial Public Issue discussion.

### Composite Textural Description

Social studies teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated state standards and state testing was positive and all but one used Controversial Public Issue instruction in their classroom on a regular basis. Collectively, the participants established that Controversial Public Issues are compatible to state standards, Controversial Public Issues encourage different perspectives, connecting Controversial Public Issues to state standards is mandatory, guidelines are established with Controversial Public Issues and Controversial Public Issues enhance citizenship education. All 5 themes were presented as strong textural descriptions across participants' interviews.

All teachers except Monica and Karen felt that the compatibility of state standards was strong to teach Controversial Public Issues in their classroom. Will and Chandler state Controversial Public Issues are not listed specifically in the state standards but teachers can fit them in with their lessons. It allows for discussions over topics in United States history and geography. Along with compatibility, teachers connect Controversial Public Issues with content found in the state standards. All teachers gave two or more examples of how Controversial Public Issues connect to the standards. However, Monica feels the standards get in the way for on-level courses. Grace connects the Civil Rights Movement with a Controversial Public Issue creating a lesson comparing and contrasting Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Will explains he connects Controversial Public Issues with the economic panics of the

1800s with current event economic recession. A common statement by teachers concludes, Controversial Public Issues connect student to real life events and also connects them to the past.

Karen, a high school teacher, actually “trained” the students to participate in Controversial Public Issue discussions while the other teacher participants explained rules and regulations or gave the students loose guidelines before instruction. Karen Will, Chandler, Jerry, and George stressed students need to be aware of Controversial Public Issues because it is relative to their own lives and Karen adds Controversial Public Issues can result in active citizenry.

Eight participants focused on different perspectives while conducting a Controversial Public Issue. They emphasize its importance allowing students the opportunity to hear multiple sides of a topic. Skills that were taught in conjuncture with perspective taking is listening to both sides, making informed decisions, mutual respect and proactive communication skills. Although teachers admit that Controversial Public Issues are not specifically stated in the current district and state standards, Controversial Public Issues are a way for students to gain foundational knowledge and perspectives to historical topics, specifically with Ross, or in connection with current events. Teachers are also cognizant of keeping their personal opinions out of the forum. All teacher participants agree opinions are welcome in the classroom.

Five participants specifically stated Controversial Public Issues will enhance citizenship education while the other six participants alluded to citizenship skills being used during Controversial Public Issues. All teacher participants recognize differing

perspectives and mutual respect as basic fundamentals of Controversial Public Issue discussion. Karen comments, “I think they feel like they are better citizens on some level.” Will reminds his 8<sup>th</sup> graders that they may not get to vote, but they have a voice to share information and influence voters. Jack reminds his students of the Constitution and how they are responsible to maintain their rights. If they do not like a law, they can be proactive and get it changed. Karen and George point out Controversial Public Issues help students understand democracy. Students look beyond media “sound bites” and political personalities “yelling at each other.” Ross’ students to learn to collect information first then discuss controversial topics. Jerry’s teaching motive is academic but also democratic. He wants students to be exposed to issues of a global nature and connect students to the world rather than just a social studies student living in their small world.

### Structural Descriptions

Structural descriptions are evaluations of the textural descriptions and “...involves conscious acts of thinking and judging, imagining and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structural meanings...Texture and structure are in continual relationship. In the process of explicating intentional experience one moves from that which is experienced and described in concrete and full terms, the ‘what’ of the experience, towards its reflexive reference in the ‘how’ of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 78-79).



### Will's Structural Description

Will's structures are life relevance and critical thought to trigger students to engage in Controversial Public Issue instruction. He introduces background and different perspectives of a topic to connect the past with the present. Connecting the past with the present stirs the student's interest and allows them to "think" deeper about a topic. Will feels strongly about the outcome of Controversial Public Issue discussion. He wants the students to critically think about the presented background and different points of view so a student may, "change" their way of thinking. Through his interview, Will discussed different lessons in his class and was a facilitator of the each discussion. He let the students have open debates described one discussion (economic recession) as "very interesting." Although he does complement state standards with Controversial Public Issues he stated twice, the current curriculum does not "touch or deal with" Controversial Public Issue in the classroom environment. He however sees the importance of a Controversial Public Issue so the students can "think about issues..." His matter-of-fact acceptance with the lack of Controversial Public Issue in the curriculum does not deter him when supplementing Controversial Public Issues in the classroom. His main goal is for the students to critically think about history, current events and relevance to their life. Adding Controversial Public Issues to his lesson plans accomplish these goals.

### Grace's Structural Descriptions

When I met Grace for the interview, she was very friendly with an outgoing personality. But, seemed apprehensive about the interview even though she had agreed to meet with me the day before via phone. She asked me about confidentiality.

I explained to her the consent form, which she signed, but she still seemed uneasy. “Will my name and school be published in the paper?” I told her no, just geographical location and a pseudo-name. After her question was answered, she wanted to begin the interview and seemed at ease. After the interview was completed, I understood the apprehensiveness. She is a sponsor of a controversial group at her high school and has endured threats at school and vandalism at her home. The administration has looked the other way even though a video camera is placed in front of her classroom door. Every conference she has with administration, a union representative has to be present. She said, “until I sponsored this group, my teaching style was never questioned.” But, she will continue teaching Controversial Public Issues because she feels it is beneficial for the students and a must in social studies.

Grace’s structural experience with Controversial Public Issue discussion is a dominating force in her classroom environment. Her main concern is student’s lack of listening skills and inability to “suspend judgment”. The students are taught guidelines for Controversial Public Issue instruction and are required to postpone opinions until background information is given, all students present their “side”, and data from both perspectives are revealed. She teaches her students to truly listen to all perspectives and not automatically react. She explains her students do not accept other “ways” to live because of the conservative ideology that dominates the community. However, after a couple of Controversial Public Issues are supplemented with the curriculum, the class environment as a whole changes. The students begin to listen to the other side and are more open to the opposing argument. The Controversial Public Issues used in her classroom put the students in the Zone of

Proximal Development which is Grace's goal. She states that the students need to be uncomfortable and taken out of their comfort zone to learn. She sees growth in the students after each Controversial Public Issue exercise.

Grace is quick to discuss district/state required curriculum concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction. She states that state standards does not include Controversial Public Issues nor does the social studies coordinator want this type of instruction in the classroom. She is adamant about teacher's rights when discussing Controversial Public Issues and will not be intimidated by the administration. Grace teaches Controversial Public Issues by supplementing the required curriculum, not substituting. She feels her students get "both" perspectives and it is her job to give the students the opportunity to reaffirm or reconsider their beliefs. Grace is mindful of the conservative nature of the community, but creates a safe environment for all student opinions.

#### Jack's Structural Description

Jack's structures that comprise his experience with Controversial Public Issues are for students to be responsible citizens and tackle challenges with integrity and responsibility. Jack works for a middle school with high poverty and high mobility rates. He is a very confident teacher with a soothing voice. He understands the group he is working with and will not except anything else but excellence from his students and his colleagues. He knows he makes a difference in some student's lives, but maintains he will do his best to teach his students to be confident and pursue life, liberty and prosperity. Jack feels his curriculum envelopes most nationalities but creates a vanilla-ish attitude where Controversial Public Issues are concerned. He

therefore works hard to bring those topics into his class. He is adamant about teaching state standards and making sure his students are prepared for the mandated test, but sees that facts are not the only knowledge students need for the “real world.” Democratic skills are taught in his classroom by using Controversial Public Issues and by the discussions students bring up during class time. He will give the students time to discuss but he is there to tame emotions and bring out different perspectives. He wants his students to behave and think like responsible citizens before they attend high school. His Controversial Public Issue topics relate to his students personal lives and although he empathizes with them, he maintains a professional neutral stance on the controversial topics. He wants the students to look at the laws, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights before making a split second decision. He wants the students to critically analyze data and make an informed decision.

#### Karen’s Structural Description

At the end of the interview, Karen was asked, “do you have anything else to add to the conversation,” and she happily exclaimed, “I think everyone should do it!” Her response provides her structural descriptions of enthusiasm and commitment to teach Controversial Public Issue instruction. Although Karen feels the state standards are “sterile” she connects Controversial Public Issues with required curriculum using themes. Karen begins Controversial Public Issue instruction by training the students to participate in this type of activity. She explains that the students start with apolitical topics to perfect the method and learn a healthy way to discuss Controversial Public Issues. She uses the Socratic Method and facilitates the discussions providing the students with background information and data from both sides of the topic. Karen

encourages the students to express their differing opinions and concludes the Socratic Method opens the student's eyes to different perspectives, open communication, and the ability to make an informed decision about each topic. Karen includes Controversial Public Issue into her daily lesson plans and is committed to teaching the students how to listen and bring their views forward without argument. Her motto is "there are no right answers" and the point of the discussion is to listen and gather information to make informed decisions. Karen is adamant that social studies classes are not complete without adding Controversial Public Issues in the required curriculum. She states, "if you don't tackle Controversial Public Issues, I don't think you're doing it right." Her dedication and willingness to add Controversial Public Issue to her instruction while connecting them to required curriculum allows the students to "sit in that circle and say I agree with you or I disagree with you and that is okay, then that is a pretty good day."

#### Phebe's Structural Description

The structures that comprise Phebe's experience with Controversial Public Issue instruction are critical thinking skills and connecting the curriculum. Phebe energizes the classroom with Controversial Public Issue topics allowing the students to discuss and debate. Her classroom provides an open forum to be heard but also to learn from other students. Phebe is adamant her rules and guidelines are followed throughout the discussion but will allow students a "time out" to collect their thoughts and calm down. But significantly, she brings the topic back to the table allowing her students to "dissect" each person's argument" and think critically about the other perspective. Phebe concerns herself with "connecting or spinning" the Controversial

Public Issue so it corresponds with the required district/state curriculum. When probed about the curriculum, she focused on connecting required guidelines with Controversial Public Issue instruction and never commented if the state standards include Controversial Public Issue instruction. She meticulously adds Controversial Public Issue topics in addition to the curriculum being taught but obviously wants the students to connect history and current events. She encourages the students to be “informed” by collecting data, however, opinions are welcomed in the classroom discussion. She reiterates to the students that opinions stated in the classroom are “not a wrong opinion...or idea” but may be based on different facts. Through the dialog with the students she encourages them to start making “informed” decisions about controversial topics to become an active citizen.

#### Ross’s Structural Description

The structure within Ross’s experience is reserved and careful when teaching Controversial Public Issues. Although Ross defines Controversial Public Issues as “definite polarized sides on an issue...that would be controversial” he does not bring any outside topics into his classroom. Ross teaches Controversial Public Issues that are in the “curriculum and school appropriate...” Historical events such as manifest destiny or Indian removal are examples of Controversial Public Issues used in his classroom. He points out that he teaches the topics as “historical fact” and students can “express” personal opinions or thoughts within parameters or guidelines of the classroom. His guidelines help students take a stand on the historical issue but also listen to other student perspectives. He then encourage students to take a stand, critically analyzing their opinions verses other perspectives voiced in the classroom.

He feels when students discuss and “perhaps modify” their opinion, the discussion is a success. When probed about student discourse in the classroom, he simply replied, “not in recent memory, truthfully, I try to smooth feathers.

### Monica’s Structural Description

When I walked into Monica’s classroom, I knew she was a type A personality and she knew exactly what her teaching outcomes would be—success on state tests. Her lesson plans were impeccable, her classroom was neat and organized and she was a very confident woman. Monica’s structural experience with Controversial Public Issue is her admittance to its importance but excluding it because of time factors associated with state testing. Monica was very forthcoming about her community, her students and her administration. She takes her job very seriously and wants the students to succeed on the state exams. She made the comment many times during the interview she does not have time for Controversial Public Issues, although she knows they will benefit the students in their life. Her attitude toward her students concerning Controversial Public Issues is their need for background information before she can have a discussion with them. Because she stated more than once it was a very conservative community and she was not in the majority in religious and political beliefs, I feel she does not want to deal with complaints from parents on certain topics. Although she assured me that if she had time, Controversial Public Issues would be a part of her courses, it may not be the case. From the interview, the community is very influential with district curriculum. She said a science teacher had been fired mid-year for teaching evolution. When I inquired how many years ago, her answer was two. Monica spoke in detail how she would allow Controversial Public Issues in her

classroom, if she had time and had an elaborate lesson. She would keep her personal opinions out of the topic, make sure different perspectives were available for her students, teach research skills, set guidelines for mutual respect and talk about current events associated with state curriculum. However, after expressing feeling like a bad teacher for not including Controversial Public Issues in her curriculum and describing a thorough lesson she concluded her interview by stating, “If I took time out for stuff like that my test scores would go down.”

#### Joey’s Structural Description

Joey’s structural experience with Controversial Public Issues is to connect it with the state standards. Joey is a coach with a loud voice and quick sense of humor. He prides himself on his conservative viewpoint and attitudes on gun-control and abortion. However, when it comes to student discussion and Controversial Public Issues, he can turn off his views for what is best for his students. Joey always connects the Controversial Public Issues with state standards. He is the only participant that loves dealing with the standards and is forthcoming about correlating his teaching to the students test scores. He jokes around during the interview but when asked if she would like to add any other comments for the interview, he stated simply, “I love to teach.” Controversial Public Issues are fun for Joey to teach. He likes to get the kids “fired up” playing devil’s advocate but quickly states we stay focused on the curriculum. His focus is for his students to learn the content, be successful on the test and treat each other with respect. He takes it upon himself to look out for students that may be in the minority including gay students, new students and students with disabilities. His main focus is teaching standards and state testing



but he also encourages the students to embrace differences and think critically about Controversial Public Issues. He mentioned he has observed some students not change their mind, but becoming more open to topics discussed in his class.

### Chandler's Structural Description

Chandler is a typical first year teacher having one point of view, survival. He is a happy person but obviously tired from two preps and different coaching assignments. The day interviewed, he had received a letter from the district terminating his temporary contract due to budget cuts. Although he was upset, his interview was like talking to a tenured teacher. He was bright and answered the questions with ease. His structural experience with Controversial Public Issues was having more freedom in an elective course rather than at testing course. Chandler liked talking about his elective course. He was excited about the Controversial Public Issues taught throughout the year and the small amount of progress in the class from the students. Although never stating Controversial Public Issues contributed to civic education, his description of his lessons paralleled civic education goals. After asking specific questions pertaining to his geography class and Controversial Public Issues, he remained silent for a while, whispering the question. He looked directly at me and admitted state standards bypasses Controversial Public Issues. He said he could not find a specific standard pertaining to them and because the amount of content he was required to teach he guessed that the caste system would be one he talked about. He described the lesson in detail and then added one more topic. He feels his elective class gives him freedom to include more Controversial Public Issues because the

curriculum is teacher lead. But, he adds Controversial Public Issues in his testing class, it just is harder due to the time restrictions.

### Jerry's Structural Description

Jerry is a career teacher and is very smart. His knowledge base is one of a college professor but is very humble about his intelligence. The structures of Jerry's experience with Controversial Public Issues are academic and civic. Jerry is motivated by students retention of factual knowledge but also citizenship skills learned in his classroom. His eyes light up when he tells me students from years past will remember what I taught them in their 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. Although Jerry does not boast, his test scores are very high every year. However, his focus is on citizenship skills quoting the national standards over the state standards. State standards, according to Jerry are the minimum a social studies teacher should teach. He is very confident in teaching Controversial Public Issues and uses them many times in his classroom courses. He even states that after a Controversial Public Issue one year, the students took action and collected money for the tsunami. Jerry has a wonderful personality taking testing in stride. His goal of civic education and community is visible throughout his classroom. He showed me several different lessons pertaining to content and Controversial Public Issues. His everyday life is civic education and he welcomes student's questions and hopes to teach them to be a global citizen showing them how their lives can impact the world.

### George's Structural Description

George is looked at as a grandfather type to his students, but also to his colleagues. He is the most respected teacher in his department and the most compassionate. He calls his students "sevies" and loves every one of them. His expectations for his students are extremely high and he allows each of them to achieve through discipline and structure. George has been teaching for longer than most of his colleagues have been alive. Needless to say, he is a career teacher. George's structural description is commitment to civic education and following the state standards. George does not like state standards and state testing, even though his scores are very good. He wants the teachers to be responsible for their own curriculum so they can teach the students "human" skills to be successful in life. He told me, district guides are so strict he had to find time to teach his students basic map skills in his geography class. And then he feels like he has to sneak around the administration to get that lesson accomplished. He talks about how his goal is for students to be introduced to civic education; to learn community service matters. He does allow students to initiate current event topics for discussion but connects it to content. He does prepare Controversial Public Issues, but at a level a "sevie" can understand. He wants the students to be comfortable in an open forum so he teaches to their level. He does not want an "emotional" mess on his hands because of a lesson. Education is more than darkening in ovals on a scantron he says with authority. Educators have to give the student life lessons also.

### Composite Structural Description

Teacher participants recognize Controversial Public Issue instruction as an important part of their classroom lesson plans even though the state standards do not include this type of instruction. All teacher participants plan Controversial Public Issues in their lesson plans in at least one of their courses. Monica uses Controversial Public Issues in her elective course but due to time constraints, excludes Controversial Public Issues from her United States history course. The participants always connect state standards to the Controversial Public Issues taught. Three of the four high school teacher's attitudes toward Controversial Public Issue instruction are commitment and necessity. Two high school teachers feel strongly about students hearing different perspectives. They follow state standards but use phrases like "the state standards are sterile," "the standards are not critical enough" and "the national standards do a better job of bringing" Controversial Public Issues into the classroom experience. The teachers were weary of the district 6-week required tests and the district calendar. Instead of a "help" to the district, they see it as a hindrance. Rote memorization and passing the state tests seem to be the focus, instead on critical thinking skills and dialog. The only high school teacher that does not include Controversial Public Issues in her class states she does not have enough time and test scores would fall if she attempted to put Controversial Public Issues in her lesson plans. The junior high and middle school teacher's attitudes were more casual when using Controversial Public Issues. They seemed to think of a Controversial Public Issue as a supplemental teaching technique rather than a commitment and necessity. They used their district and state standards as minimal content teaching guide and pursued goals of using

Controversial Public Issues as civic education, life relevance, critical thought and connection to state standards. However, all teacher participants only expressed positive outcomes of Controversial Public Issue instruction with student involvement. The composite structural description reveals all but one teacher participant had a positive attitude toward Controversial Public Issue instruction. State mandated standards do not deter the other 10 teachers from using this teaching technique in their instruction.

### Summary

This chapter reported the Phenomenological Reduction and Imaginative Variation of the participants in this study. Phenomenological Reduction includes textural and composite textural descriptions. It enables the uncovering and meaning of the experience and allows themes to emerge (Moustakas, 1994). The following step, Imaginative Variation, includes structural and composite structural descriptions and seeks meaning or the how of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological Reduction and Imaginative Variation provides social studies teachers' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues with state mandated standards and testing. This chapter also included the participants' perceptions concerning compatibility of Controversial Public Issue to No Child Left Behind, National Council for the Social Studies and state standards. The next chapter will offer discussion of textural-structural analysis, results, limitations and implications.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion, Synthesis, Limitations and Implications

#### Introduction

This Transcendental Phenomenological study examined teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction while using mandated standards and state testing. It also looked at the compatibility of Controversial Public Issues to No Child Left Behind, National Council for the Social Studies and state standards. Transcendental Phenomenological inquiry is a method designed to determine the essence of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Through an in-depth interview with each participant, themes emerged revealing the non-repetitive, non-overlapping constituents of the teachers' attitudes and compatibility to state standards while using controversial public issue instruction. This chapter includes the final step in the transcendental phenomenological research process called textural-structural synthesis. Textural-structural synthesis includes the meaning and essences of the phenomenon. Through the textural-structural synthesis, each theme is discussed in detail. Following the synthesis, the themes are compared to earlier literature concluding with future implications.

#### Discussion and Synthesis

#### Textual-Structural Synthesis

The participants in this study were social studies teachers using required state standards and testing in the classroom curriculum. Each teacher participant expressed their own attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction; however definite

commonalities emerged. Their interviews were analyzed resulting in 5 descriptive themes:

- 1.) Controversial Public Issues are compatible with state standards;
- 2.) Controversial Public Issues are connected to state standards;
- 3.) Guidelines are put into place for Controversial Public Issues;
- 4.) Students gain different perspectives through Controversial Public Issues;
- 5.) Controversial Public Issues enhance citizenship.

#### Controversial Public Issues are Compatible with State Standards

Participants are quick to define Controversial Public Issues in a similar manner, decisive topics causing differing viewpoints that cause conflict or differing perspectives. Immediately after the definition, all participants listed several Controversial Public Issues dealing with current events or historical issues. All examples connected to state standards. Throughout the interviews, the participants would list a controversial topic and then list the standard associated with it. Not one participant, including Monica and Karen, gave an example of how the standards and state testing were not compatible. Although, Monica and Karen stated that Controversial Public Issues were not compatible to state standards each gave examples of a Controversial Public Issues coinciding with state standards.

#### Teachers Connected Controversial Public Issues Topics with State Standards

All participants interviewed stressed the importance of connecting Controversial Public Issue topics with state standards, including Monica. Ten participants used current events or historical issues as Controversial Public Issue

discussions. Participants insisted Controversial Public Issues enhance state standards but are not a substitute for the required curriculum. Overwhelmingly, the teacher's styles were very similar; teaching a state standard then connecting the Controversial Public Issue allowing discussion to follow. They explained although the Controversial Public Issues were current events, the topic fit the theme of the state standard. Each teacher taught a standard supplementing with outside information from both sides, facilitated the discussion and permitted the students to draw their own conclusions. Teachers were careful choosing Controversial Public Issue topics that would fit the curriculum and have relevance to the student's personal lives.

#### Controversial Public Issue Discussions Have Guidelines in the Classroom

Ten participants establish guidelines for conducting a Controversial Public Issue in the classroom. Although Monica excluded Controversial Public Issues from the course requiring state testing, she did allow controversial topics in her elective course and created guidelines. Only one of the teachers actually "trained" the students for Controversial Public Issue discussion using the Socratic Method. All teacher participants facilitated the discussions and allowed the students an open forum to express their opinions. Additionally, all 10 classrooms developed a healthy, safe environment for students using the guidelines established. Mutual respect, appropriate language, and debate were key guidelines used by the teachers. Some participants were equipped with a "cool down" method, but, kept the students on task. Guidelines made the Controversial Public Issues successful for the students to listen, critique points of view and make informed decisions while teacher participants kept an orderly



classroom and avoided heated arguments.

### Different Perspectives are Learned by Students During Controversial Public Issue

#### Instruction

One of the most mentioned phrases during the interviews were “different perspectives.” Each participant made a conscious effort to create a healthy environment for students to voice opposing viewpoints. They carefully presented both sides equally by collecting outside information, background information and remaining neutral during the presentation of the Controversial Public Issue. Ten participants made the Controversial Public Issue discussion student-centered. They facilitate during the open forum giving equal time to all opinions and both sides of the topic. However, three teachers made an observation that students concealed their opinion if it opposed the majority opinion due to backlash from classmates. Some teachers played the “devil’s advocate” to encourage students to speak up or bring balance to the discussion. However, overall the teachers consciously included several different sides of a controversial topic for students to gain a better understanding to make an informed decision.

### Controversial Public Issues Enhance Civic Education

Enhancing civic education was a central theme in each participant’s interview. Although Jack, Karin and Jerry mentioned citizenship education, all participants gave specific examples of the components of civic education. Participants established an environment for students to express their opinions, gather facts from both perspectives and ponder controversial issues. Participants emphasized student struggles with

Controversial Public Issues instruction however, guidelines or training generated development of critical thinking. Essentially, students improved listening and debating skills, postponed judgment until completion of the Controversial Public Issues and possessed an open-mind toward opposing viewpoints. Some teachers observed classroom dynamics changed throughout the school year to a more accepting or tolerate atmosphere due to participation of Controversial Public Issue discussions.

Through Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation and Synthesis the researcher concludes teacher's attitudes' toward Controversial Public Issue instruction while using standards and mandated state tests were positive. Nine participants felt that state standards were compatible to Controversial Public Issues. Of the nine, two participants felt that the national standards were compatible to Controversial Public Issues, however, no participants mentioned No Child Left Behind.

#### Participants and Previous Research

It is possible the attitudes toward teaching Controversial Public Issues may be producing a reversal of patterns that have been scrutinized in earlier studies. The literature review and framework addressed citizenship education, discussion, controversial public issue curriculum, standards, empirical studies and civic republicanism. Through the next section, participants ran parallel to the research, however in many aspects they ran counter to the research.

Citizenship education encompasses democratic ideology and citizen interaction (Chiodo & Martin 2005; Heater 1990; Heater 2004; Isin & Turner 2004; Kivisto & Faist 2007). Heater (2004) states citizenship "defines the relationship of the

individual...to the idea of the state...The civic identity is enshrined in the rights conveyed by the state and duties performed by the individual citizens..." (p. 2). Through the literature review, it is apparent; budding citizens need citizenship education to learn skills for citizenry. Citizenship education is "the means by which individuals are prepared to gain the knowledge skills and values that enable them to understand, examine, decide and participate in public affairs and in (the means for) forwarding the well-being of other individuals and of their society" (Dyneson, 1998, p. 114). According to 10 participant interviews, Controversial Public Issue instruction correlates with citizenship education and civic virtue in their classrooms. Although only three participants use the phrase citizenship in their interviews, seven other teachers give specific examples of citizenship education. Participants choose controversial topics that relate to the student's lives, presenting different prospective and allowing students to discuss those specific issues. Most importantly, the students are asked to make informed decisions. Through the practice of discussion in the classrooms, students are practicing active participation found in civic republicanism. Participants account for topics that are popular and unpopular. According to civic republicanism, "the more extensive the deliberation the more likely the decisions and compromises made reflect the citizens involved" (Honohon, 2002, p. 1).

As noted earlier, Rossi and Pace (1998); Rossi (2006); Malikow (2006); Hess (2002) and Preskill (1997) listed obstacles, presenting problems for teachers to present Controversial Public Issue instruction. Among these obstacles were mandated state standards and mandated state testing in the social studies classes. According to nine participants interviewed, Controversial Public Issue instruction was not an obstacle.

Instead, they connect state standards to controversial issues, for example, Will connects historical economic panics to current economic trends and George allows open discussion of the Afgan/Iraq War. Both connect the topic to the region or time period studying. Will actually states, “I look for things like that [controversial topic] to tie in.”

Research found that most teachers are not engaging students in classroom discussions using Controversial Public Issues and blame mandated standards/testing as a major reason (Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009; Godland, 1984; Grant 2005; Hess, 2002; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Preskill, 1997; Rossi, 2006; Rossi & Pace, 1998). The researcher found the opposite of this conclusion. According to the participants, their classroom is an open forum for students to discuss. Along with guidelines for a discussion, participants encourage opposition opinions, even playing the “devil’s advocate.” One central them in civic republicanism is freedom. Freedom is “political autonomy...citizens act according to purpose they endorse and continually participate in social practices that create a common good” (Honohon, 2002, p. 1). One example of freedom discussed by Jerry involved students taking action after a controversial topic discussed in his classroom.

Hess (2002) and Rossi and Pace (1998) explicitly list academic and civic benefits to students if Controversial Public Issues are applied to classroom lesson plans. Participants echoed these sentiments concerning Controversial Public Issues. Ten participants connect state standards to controversial issues; therefore content is attached to discussion. Jack stated in his interview that through discussion students learned content. Karen attests, “I think they (students) feel like they are better citizens

on some level” and “In my opinion, citizenship is being able to navigate controversial issues and being informed about them...and not pretend to be informed. Not just taking someone else’s word for it. In my mind, that’s the most important piece of social studies, choosing to make a choice.” Phebe adds her students practice citizenship by starting to “investigate the other side...they’re going to go out and get more information for themselves” and educate themselves about different perspectives. Jerry stated his goal is academic and civic. Jerry admitted his job as a social studies teacher is to teach civic education and have students realize they are global citizens, not just a member of a social studies class. Jerry mimics recognition is civic republicanism. Participants bring different perspectives in a variety of controversial topics to their classroom. Not all topics are domestic but stretch throughout the world. The students are receiving a global perspective of social studies connecting to content.

My data suggests teacher participants enjoyed incorporating Controversial Public Issues into their daily lesson plans. Unlike the literature review suggested, teacher participants did not shy away from teaching Controversial Public Issues rather choose to connect them with state standards. Guidelines and training, also suggested in the literature, proved to be beneficial to the students because it enhanced analytical skills and exposed students to different perspectives of a topic. The teacher participants paralleled the literature reiterating Controversial Public Issues extended the understanding of the state standards while increasing student’s critical thinking skills. Teaching Controversial Public Issues can be a daunting task. However, 10 participants unequivocally added Controversial Public Issues into their lesson plans to

benefit the student's academic performance and civic competence. The study concluded that teacher participants are able to successfully apply Controversial Public Issues to their lesson plans without compromising state mandated standards and testing scores.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in a southwestern state and included junior high, middle and high school teachers. This type of research is not generalizable because there is no guarantee the results would be the same and would occur in every situation. Volunteers may not accurately represent all social studies teachers because the methodology used does not require observations or any type of triangulation to determine the essence of the phenomenon. Since the methodology does not require triangulation, the researcher can only assume their comments are accurate.

#### Implications for Further Study

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study of eleven social studies teachers identified a number of personal attitudes concerning Controversial Public Issue instruction with state standards and testing along with its compatibility of No Child Left Behind, National Council for the Social Studies and state standards. Although the conclusions of this study found 10 social studies teachers' attitudes are positive toward Controversial Public Issue instruction while using state standards and testing, a further qualitative study including observations and student interviews may provide a broader spectrum of attitudes and compatibility. Furthermore, a study using

Controversial Public Issue instruction in the classroom and Common Core may be more beneficial during this transitioning time in education.

### Summary

Using a transcendental phenomenological study the researcher was able to draw two conclusions about teachers' attitudes concerning Controversial Issue Instruction while using state standards and tests. By connecting the literature review and framework, the study concluded teachers' attitudes ran parallel to the research, however in many aspects they ran counter to the research.

### Conclusion

Events in the world today allow social studies teachers to introduce Controversial Public Issues to students in the classroom. A democratic society depends on its citizenry to provide discourse and possible solutions to these problems. Social studies teachers help students train for the civic responsibilities by using a safe environment as a forum for democratic skills such as discussion. Previous literature finds teachers fighting obstacles to allow civic education in the classroom. One obstacle is state standards and state mandated tests. However, this study shows social studies teachers using Controversial Public Issue instruction with state standards to further civic education and future citizenry.

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## APPENDIX

### Questions/Statement

1. Describe Controversial Public Issues.
2. Describe your curriculum involving Controversial Public Issues.
3. How do you feel about teaching Controversial Public Issues?
4. Describe a lesson where you used Controversial Public Issues.