THE POWER OF THE PROVOCATIVE:
EXPLORING WORLD HISTORY CONTENT

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Bryan L. Ashkettle

December 2013
This study addresses how my freshman world history students come to understand controversial issues as provocative within the secondary social studies classroom, and in what ways does their engagement with provocative issues influence their understanding of the content and the world around them. In addition, this research study seeks to discover in what ways does the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students.

The three research questions were established to guide this study.

1. How do my world history freshman students come to understand provocative materials in regards to the historical content?

2. How does my students’ engagement with these provocative materials influence their understanding of historical events and the world around them?

3. In what ways does the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students?

Self-Study methodology was selected as a way to personally explore and examine my students understanding of provocative issues as well as my instruction. Grounded theory was utilized exclusively as a coding and analyzing device. To address these
questions, thirteen student participants were selected for this study based on the criteria assumed by the questions. Data was collected from individual interviews, group interviews, student blog posts, and my own journal.

As the data was analyzed and coded, nuanced constructs of the students’ thinking began to coalesce on three distinct perceptions of provocative issues which evolved into the findings of this study. The first finding involved students who advocated for the inclusion of provocative issues. Their rationales for this inclusion were; *Real World Phenomenon, Provocative for Grade Sake, Provocative for Interest Sake*. A second finding involved a student who opposed the inclusion of provocative issues. This student’s rationales were labeled *Oppositional*. The first two findings were partnered with the six students’ rationales. The third finding involved the other seven students who had a varying range of nuanced articulation, varied their opinion across time, or lacked a clear robust rationale. This finding was labeled developing rationales. These students’ perspectives were labeled *other voices*.

In addition to the student data, journaling was utilized to explore my own rationale for using provocative issues within my world history classroom. These journals provided a space for reflection on my practice in regards to the teaching of provocative issues, thus addressing my third research question. The journals, like the other data sources, were coded using grounded theory as the main analytical device. Upon completion of the data analysis of my journals, themes began to emerge that progressed into findings. The self-study findings were categorized as; *The Closed Space of Sexuality,*
The Banality of Violence, and Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster Critical Thinking.
As always, for Stefanie, Julia, and Frankie
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My teaching life is one of tremendous importance to me, as it validates my professional existence. I undertook my doctoral study to further my knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, so that I might continue to improve as a practicing social studies educator. This was a selfish act. Because my classroom, regardless of the time and worry I commit to teaching, will always be secondary to my family. The course work, research, and writing represented a tremendous burden. However, thanks to the patience of my loving wife and daughters, I endured.

Stefanie, your strength, wisdom, patience, and unending kindness have continually bettered me as a husband, father, and a person. You are still my dream girl that I fell in love with at Kent State all those years ago. Without you, I am nothing. Julia, your smile and personality moves me forward each day. You have taught me to worry less, and to live in the moment as; all the world’s a stage. Frankie, you are my future teacher, as your compassion is unending. In the end, we will be measure by what we do for others. Because of that Chi-Chi, you will always be in good standing.

Additional thanks to Mom, Dad, Char, Pat, Lisa, Chris, Joe, and Molly for your generous support. Thanks to Great-Grandmother Laura, for starting an educational tradition in the early 20th Century that remains in the Ashkettle family to this day.

Thanks to Bucyrus City Schools, Garaway Local Schools, Elyria City Schools, and Solon City Schools for providing me with a classroom and students to teach. I feel very fortunate to have worked at such great school districts that were so dedicated to professionalism and achievement. The administration, faculty, and students have all
shaped me to become a better educator. Also, thanks to friends and fellow teachers Matt Jablonski and Kevin Costello who are artists in and out of the classroom.

I also owe tremendous thanks to Kent State University for their contribution to my pre-service and graduate years. KSU feels like family with father Russ, mother Kathy, sister Lisa, bother-in-law Chris, sister-in-law Gina, and wife Stefanie; all proud Flashes. Special thanks to Dr. Alicia Crowe, Dr. Lisa Borgerding, Dr. Todd Hawley, Dr. Jim Henderson, Dr. Andy Hostetler, and Dr. Sharon Kruse for their wisdom and guidance. Each of their theoretical perspectives was like a lit candle in a dark world.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the Focus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Rationale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Purpose</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Methods</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Overview of Provocative Issues</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 – 1945 – Sexuality</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 – 1945 – War</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 – 1945 – Race</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945 – 1990 – Cold War / Communism</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945 – 1990 – Civil Rights</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 – Present – Terrorism</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 – Present – Sexuality</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 – Present – Civil Rights</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Teachers Avoid Provocative Issues</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Provocative / Connecting the Literature to my Research Questions</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Study as Methodology</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District and School Context</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection ........................................................................................................................................59
  Group Interviews ................................................................................................................................60
  Individual Interviews ..............................................................................................................................62
  Classroom Blog Posts .............................................................................................................................64
  The Survey ..............................................................................................................................................67
  Journaling ...............................................................................................................................................68
Grounded Theory as Data Analysis ........................................................................................................70
  Introduction ........................................................................................................................................70
  Rationale for Data Analysis / Matching GT to my Research Questions ........................................70
  Evolution of Grounded Theorists / My Application of GT Ideas .....................................................74
  Sorting Provocative Language ............................................................................................................75
  Memoing and Coding Provocative Language .....................................................................................76
  Emerged, Reflexive Provocative Data ................................................................................................82
  Self-Study Analysis ..............................................................................................................................84
Theoretical Framework: Self-Study Pragmatist ....................................................................................85
  Self-Study Pragmatist as it Relates to GT ............................................................................................85
  Self-Study as it Relates to Pragmatism .................................................................................................88
Ethics .....................................................................................................................................................90
Trustworthiness ......................................................................................................................................91
Summary ...............................................................................................................................................93

IV. FINDINGS.........................................................................................................................................95
  The Process and Context behind the Findings ......................................................................................97
  The Participants .................................................................................................................................100
    Finding 1: Students with Clear Rationales for the Inclusion of Provocative Issues ..................100
      Allison – real world phenomenon ..............................................................................................100
      Jason – provocative for grade sake ............................................................................................107
      Emily – provocative for grade sake ............................................................................................114
      Nate – provocative for interest sake / love of history ...............................................................118
      John – provocative for interest sake / love of the macabre ......................................................122
    Finding 2: Student with Clear Rationales Against the Inclusion of Provocative Issues ........127
      Jackson – oppositional ..................................................................................................................127
    Finding 3: Students Who Lack A Clear Rationale in Regards to Provocative Issues ..........130
      Other Voices- Anna, Anthony, Betty, Brian, Dalton, Ely, and Karen ..................................130
      Anna .............................................................................................................................................130
      Anthony ......................................................................................................................................132
      Betty ..........................................................................................................................................133
      Brian and Dalton ..........................................................................................................................134
      Ely ..............................................................................................................................................135
      Karen ........................................................................................................................................137
Self-Study Findings ........................................................................................................ 140
  Self-Study Finding 1: The Closed Space of Sexuality .............................................. 143
  Self-Study Finding 2: The Banality of Violence ...................................................... 148
  Self-Study Finding 3: Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster
  Critical Thinking ........................................................................................................ 153
Summary ......................................................................................................................... 159

V.  IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION .............................................................................. 161
  Discussing Finding 1 and Implications of the Real World Phenomenon .............. 162
  Discussing Finding 1 and Implications of Provocative for Grade Sake .............. 168
  Discussing Finding 1 and Implications of Provocative for Interest Sake .......... 171
  Discussing Finding 2 and Implications of Oppositional ........................................ 175
  Discussing Finding 3 and Implications of the Other Voices ............................. 178
  Discussing Self-Study Findings and Implications ................................................ 181
  Limitations of the Study ............................................................................................. 185
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 188

APPENDICES .................................................................................................................. 190

APPENDIX A: LESSON 1 - PERSONAL BACKGROUND OF
  HISTORICAL FIGURES – IS IT NEEDED TO BE A TRUE
  HISTORIAN? ................................................................................................................... 191
APPENDIX B: LESSON 2 - ISHMAEL BEAH’S ALONG WAY
  GONE – ARE VIOLENT DESCRIPTIONS NECESSARY? ........................................ 194
APPENDIX C: LESSON 3 – THE MOST EVIL EVENTS OF WWII .................... 197
APPENDIX D: SURVEY FOR PURPOSEFUL / SELECTIVE SAMPLE ................ 200
APPENDIX E: RIDGE PRINCIPAL’S SIGNATURE TO CONDUCT
  STUDY .......................................................................................................................... 202
APPENDIX F: PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
  IN A RESEARCH STUDY .............................................................................................. 204
APPENDIX G: INFOMED CONSENT FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS .... 207
APPENDIX H: CONSENT TO AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE .................................................. 210
APPENDIX I: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT ................................................................. 212
APPENDIX J: LIST OF NON-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ...... 214

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................... 218
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Graphic ontology of provocative issues</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Schedule for sampling</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Data method anticipated and scheduled</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Survey and results utilized as initial sorting device</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Represents an exemplar of memoing technique used</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Example of blog posts</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Example of journal posts</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Data Sources for Research Questions</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Summary of the Rationales For and Against the Use of Provocative Issues</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-Study Findings</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Defining the Focus

This study emerged from my interest in the content and my commitment to my practice. The research involved a deliberate focus on how my freshman world history students came to understand controversial issues as provocative within a secondary social studies classroom, and in what ways their engagement with provocative issues influenced their understanding of the content and the world around my students. This research also sought professional enlightenment concerning my classroom instruction. My professional goal as a PhD student at Kent State University has always been to further my knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy so that I might continue to improve as a practicing social studies educator. I am committed to take from this scholarly journey the instructional skills and theoretical understanding that one needs in order to become a self-reflective researcher (Cochran – Smith & Lytle, 2009; Crowe, 2010; Dinkleman, 2003; Schön, 1985, 1991). In addition, I want my instruction to be self-aware to such a degree that I am cognizant of my instructional inferiorities and where I am in a constant state of growth and improvement (Brookfield, 1995). Therefore, this research also represented a concentrated effort to determine through self-study how provocative materials informed and influenced my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students as a practicing teacher.

Through my 17 years of teaching experience, I have come to understand that pedagogical improvement does not come from canned, professional development by
outside consultants (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). I also discovered that my instructional improvement did not spring from the rooted beliefs of the educational theorist at the university level. John Dewey stated that the purpose of educational research is to push back the frontiers of knowledge and to build the foundations for understanding (1929). However, Dewey also wrote that “no conclusion of scientific research can be converted into an immediate rule of educational art” (p. 19). Instead, discovery of personal growth is embedded within the daily life of the school, the classroom, and interactions with students (Cochran – Smith & Lytle, 2009; Cochran – Smith & Donnell, 2006).

**Personal Rationale**

Like many of the social studies educators before me, my original rationale for becoming a teacher involved love of the content (Ravitch, 2010). I grew up loving history. As a child, I read the fictional paperbacks that were ordered from my elementary school through the Scholastic Book Club. The books taught me that George Washington was a brilliant leader, Abe Lincoln was honest, Ben Franklin was smart, and Dr. Martin Luther King was courageous. Through middle and high school, a similar content driven approach was taught to me. The historical prose presented to me omitted any controversial aspects of the individual lives, and was devoid of any details that would conflate the heroic narrative. Washington’s treatment of Loyalists, Lincoln’s hesitation to free the slaves, Franklin’s promiscuity, and King’s infidelity were never mentioned. My textbooks would follow a similar pattern of just the facts approach, with the provocative, unpleasant, and uncomfortable historical realities excluded (FitzGerald, 1979;
Moreau, 2004). To me, those books represented social studies as a subject. The text could be studied as static events, stories, dates, and outcomes that accumulated into historical facts (Evans, 2004; Thornton, 1994, 2005). I loved history and not knowing any differently, I wanted to teach the subject in the same way that I had learned. I was missing the larger story in regards to my social studies education. I knew the content, but I lacked the instructional skills to have my students critically analyze history beyond simple memorization of facts and dates.

My undergraduate experience at Kent State University only increased my obsession with content. It was there for the first time, that I was introduced to some provocative elements of history. However, as a pre-service teacher, these provocative elements served as nothing more than anecdotes that could be added to spice up a lecture. When I entered the College of Education at Kent State University, I began to focus on curriculum and pedagogy development, but this was done all under the guise of making the content more exciting. My loyalty to history and my commitment to becoming a content expert were never in question. Critical thinking rarely showed up in my pre-service and student teaching lessons, which were centered on traditional, lecture delivery. My instruction followed a play it safe (Darling Hammond, 2003) approach in which I did not dare include any controversial aspects of the content as they might have made my students and me uncomfortable. Violence, race, sexuality, and anti-Americanism were excluded from my content for fear of angering my students, their parents, or administrators. These provocative issues represented inconvenient truths in human history that I found difficult, at the time, to incorporate into my traditional
curriculum and pedagogy. During those pre-service years, I mimicked the style of teaching that I experienced as a student.

My first ten years of teaching followed a similar pattern of instruction. Through occasional in-services, I realized that some social studies teachers were using provocative items within their instruction. However, my own personal commitment for improvement, at that time was not there. Research demonstrates that my experience as a novice classroom teacher was not unique (Darling-Hammond, 2003). It was not until I entered my eleventh year of teaching that I started to incorporate critical thinking and provocative topics into my instruction. Even then, prior to my entrance into the PhD program at Kent State University, my approach to using these provocative topics was undisciplined and haphazard.

I do not describe these early experiences as a way to criticize teacher education. Instead, when reflecting on my formative years as a social studies teacher, I have come to see my own content fixation as part of a natural maturation process (Cuban, 2003). This is not to say that content knowledge is unimportant (Ravitch, 2010); nor is passion for the subject a hindrance to improving instruction (Wineburg & Wilson, 1988). It is to say that content knowledge is not enough, and that my own understanding of what constitutes good teaching was faulty and incomplete (Newmann, 1996). Like many inexperienced teachers (Hawley, 2012), I was fearful that I would never know enough, that I lacked the ability to control my students, and that there would not be enough time to cover the content (p. 9). I am haunted by my pre-service and novice years of teaching, as I now view that time as wasted opportunities for self-improvement (Brookfield, 1995).
Lectures focusing on content and day to day survival (Darling-Hammond, 2003) dominated my instruction. They did little to prepare my students to be critically thinking citizens that we need them to be in the new century (Evans, 2004; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007). During those early years of education, I spent too much time asking the question of what to teach, and then countless hours of research on historical events and terms in order to understand the content better than the students (Darling-Hammond, 2006). My time would have been better spent asking questions about how to teach (Brookfield, 1995). If more of my focus would have been spent improving my instruction, rather than learning content, those early years would not have been folly (Newmann, 1996).

In 2004, after ten years of teaching experience in three different schools, I made the move to Ridge High School. This move happened at a time when I was extemporaneously experimenting with improving my instruction through the incorporation of new student-driven lessons. Ridge High School was incredibly data driven and my success as an educator was sometimes measured, not on what the students believe about the issues, but instead what they knew about the content. Because of this, I temporarily abandoned my experimentation with critical thinking lessons and developed over the course of three years a bad habit of lecture based, drill and kill (Popham, 1999) teaching in preparation for the standardized tests.

My fear was that I would digress into those miserable early years of content driven instruction. This realization occurred at a time of professional soul searching and reflection on my first ten years of education. My instructional habits, pedagogy, and
interaction with my students were rooted in the content standards based on the sole objective of achieving higher test scores. I, as teacher, had become as Paulo Freire (1972) described a *narrating subject* and my students were *lifeless, listening objects* (p. 52).

There exists ample evidence to demonstrate that my experience was not unique, and that many states are mandating the information students need to know, resulting in instruction becoming more teacher-centered to ensure students learn all of what is tested (Kohn, 2000; Popham, 1999; Ravitch, 2010; Volger & Virtue, 2007). I decided to get serious about my teaching. I quit coaching football because I saw it as a distraction to my goal of improving my teaching, and began to look into further schooling to help me find a way forward.

In 2007, I applied and was formally accepted as a part-time PhD student at Kent State University. I would continue teaching full time at Ridge High School as a World History / Advanced Placement Government teacher while I worked in the evening as a graduate student. I made this decision for the sole purpose of improving my instruction and not to, upon completion, seek a tenure track position at the university level. My course work began to inform my thinking in such a way, that I became very interested in practitioner based research. I felt that such inquiries might allow me to pivot away from the content driven lectures in order to create meaningful instruction for my students (Evans, 2004; Thornton, 2005). In 2008, I was asked to take part in a self-study research group early in my course work at Kent State University that involved my advisers, other professors at the university level, and fellow doctoral students who were also social studies teachers. This self-study experience taught me to turn inward towards my
instruction and intimately focus on my lesson planning, instructional habits, interactions with the students, and my assessments in order to better my practice. When I participated in this self-study research projects, I learned to develop a *rationale for my practice* (Hawley, 2012). I originally focused this self-study investigation around the general guise of *risk taking* (Brookfield, 1995), as I negatively viewed my non-meaningful instruction as safe.

Diane Hess’s groundbreaking book, *Controversy in the Classroom* was released in 2009, around the same time I was conducting my self-study research. Hess’s formative book allowed me to frame my self-study by focusing in on lessons that forced the students to actively debate controversial topics without abandoning the content that I was required to teach (2009). What I once labeled as risk taking evolved into controversial. I began to use the word controversial with the students when I introduced content or a lesson that involved a critical lens or involved provocative material. I originally planned for one controversial lesson in a traditional five day week. Thanks to my on-going self-study, I now average two of these controversial lessons per week.

My course work, literature readings, and my on-going self-study have all helped focus my line of inquiry on practitioner based research that centers on controversial issues. My dissertation represents a more concentrated, disciplined investigation to see how my students came to understand controversy as provocative and how these provocative issues influence their understanding of the content and the world around them.
Research Purpose

The greatest hurdle in this type of research lay in defining controversy as it relates to my own practice. After doing several extensive literature reviews over the course of the last three years in regards to controversial issues, a gap in understanding was exposed. The literature demonstrates that a complete ontological understanding of the subject currently does not exist. The bodies of literature expresses controversial as critical or lacking a right answer (Harwood & Hahn, 1990). However, the research neglects to reveal a more expanded, rigorous, understanding of how provocative as controversial influences student understanding of the content as well as teacher’s pedagogy.

There are ample pieces of literature and lines of inquiry on the affects of controversial issues as critical or open-ended (Hahn, 1996; Hahn & Tocci, 1990; Hess, 2009). The research defines critical or open-ended as issues that allow for debate and discourse amongst the students (Cherrin, 2004; Hahn, 2005; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996). Controversy under these parameters would constitute the reflective dialogue among students, or between students and teachers, about an issue on which there is disagreement (Harwood & Hahn, 1990). These authors argue that students enjoy debating historical content that lacks the traditional right answer of a multiple choice question, and that the value of critical thinking might connect the students to the content in a more personal way (Oulton, Day, Dillon & Grace, 2004; Hahn, 1996; Soley, 1996). The (National Council for the Social Studies, [NCSS], 2010) has incorporated these controversial elements into their standards and benchmarks as a way of increasing student efficacy and citizenship skills (National Council for the Social Studies, [NCSS],...
Even before the NCSS endorsement, many states had begun to incorporate these critical thinking skills into their state wide standards and curriculum. A cursory search revealed that a majority of the states have adopted some type of critical thinking language into their state’s curriculum (Paul & Elder, 2010). This recognition of teaching controversial topics that are critical and open-ended has even filtered down into my own school. My administration willingly gave me permission to conduct my pilot study as preparation for my dissertation research, citing the new Ohio Department Social Studies Standards (Ohio Department of Education, 2010) as why my research might be valuable to increase student learning and teacher effectiveness. It is interesting that this embrace of critical thinking by my school’s leaders, came only when such skills were to be rewarded through some type of end of the year exam based on the new standards.

I too, personally, see the inclusion of these critical thinking skills as vital in the maturation and betterment of social studies curriculum, and I am pleased to see these types of proficiencies addressed in state and national standards. This change in what is considered social studies content allows teachers and students to move away from standards used only for test preparation (Ravitch, 2010) and to modernize the content so that students are prepared to be the problem solvers as adults in the professional world (Popham, 1999). However, the literature and research demonstrates that the ontology of critical thinking, as it pertains to controversial issues, is nearly saturated (Bowen, 2008) in its understanding. The existence of such an extensive body of work (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Soley, 1996) leads me to
believe that my own original contribution to the field of understanding of controversial issues as critical, open-ended topics might somehow be diminished.

I felt strongly that my research would be far more meaningful to my students, the academy, practicing teachers, and myself, if I was to focus my line of inquiry on the less researched and less known; controversial as provocative. The following definition teased out from the literature and further clarified by Evans, Avery, and Pederson (2000), served as a common foundation of understanding to be expanded upon as I developed my research questions and organized my methodology. Evans, Avery, and Pederson (2000) define provocative as *beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged* (p. 218). These types of forbidden discussions and topics can often create *closed spaces* in which teachers and students alike avoid certain issues as they create intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955). Although this limited definition was shared with my students as a basis of common knowledge, my hope was that a more expanded level of how students understand provocative would emerge from their interactions and thoughts on provocative issues.

The definition of provocative as beliefs that constrain actions (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000) was incomplete. The limited research pieces dealing with provocative issues were mainly couched around educators’ perceptions towards the teaching provocative topics (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955) rather than student perceptions. The research lacked the student voice (Freire, 1972) in determining what was controversial in a provocative way. Furthermore, although Metcalf and Hunt
(1955) as well as Evans, Avery, and Pederson (2000) sought reasons why certain provocative issues have been avoided by teachers, there had never been an intimate attempt through self-study to personalize this pedagogical engagement (Berry, 2007) with provocative issues. Therefore, the argument could be made that these excluded, vital stakeholders (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) who needed to be integrated into the study in order for their influence to better inform my practice and the practice of other secondary social studies teachers.

My research concentrated on this lack of understanding of what constitutes provocative, so that my students and I, together, could reach a greater level of clarity and perception (Freire, 1972). This explained my deliberate decision to position myself as researcher amongst my students, rather than as a passive observer of other educator’s classrooms (Merriam, Ntseane, Lee, Kee, Johnson-Bailey & Muhamad, 2000). It also matched my methodological and theoretical philosophy of self-study as I sought to determine my own particular aspects of practice (Berry, 2007). The egalitarian approach (Freire, 1972) to my line of inquiry has forced me to consider my own positionality (Marshall, 1996) within the research study. My commitment to self-study as a practitioner mandates a level of inclusivity with my students in that their personal reflections as participants occurs simultaneous with my own introspection of who I am as a teacher (Berry, 2007). The following chart represents a graphic ontology of controversial issues and where the exposed gap in understanding exists as previously described and revealed in the literature and research. See Figure 1.
Controversial as Critical Thinking or Open-ended.
The research defines critical or open-ended as issues that allow for debate and discourse amongst the students (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996). Controversy under these parameters would constitute the reflective dialogue among students, or between students and teachers, about an issue on which there is disagreement (Harwood & Hahn, 1990).

Near Saturation

Controversial as Provocative.
Evans, Avery, and Pederson’s (2000) define provocative as beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged (p. 218). These types of provocative discussions and topics can often create closed spaces in which teachers and students alike will avoid certain issues as they create intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955).

Incomplete because the research lacks student and teacher voice of what constitutes provocative and how it influences their understanding of historical events and the world around them.

There still existed an incomplete understanding of how the definition of controversial issues could be framed as provocative. After I had completed a saturated literature review, I discovered only limited research of controversial issues as provocative, and these pieces were mainly couched around educators’ perceptions towards the teaching of provocative topics (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000) rather than student perceptions. I felt strongly that a well constructed, practitioner based research study could provide a powerful insight from a student perspective of how provocative issues influenced their understanding of the content. My intention was to address this deficiency of understanding of controversial as provocative by having my students and myself construct an authentic understanding of what issues they saw as provocative and then determine how their engagement with these provocative issues influenced their understanding of the content and the world around them. I would also seek to determine through self-study, the ways teaching of these provocative materials influenced my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students.

Figure 1. Graphic ontology of provocative issues
Research Questions

Using my own classroom instruction as the setting for my research and my students as subjects, I sought to inquire how my students came to understand controversial issues as provocative. I also sought to discover how the introduction of these provocative issues influences student understanding. Provocative was originally framed around issues that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged (Evans, Avery, Pederson, 2000), thus possibly leading to interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968). However, my hope was that an expanded level of understanding would emerge (Charmaz, 2005) from the data. The course where this research was conducted was my own 9th grade world history class. Data was gathered throughout the 2012-2013 school year. I felt that the prolonged engagement and one year commitment would assure the trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of the study was to provide a pragmatic and student driven understanding of provocative issues. In addition, I felt that the self-study methodological features would provide an important rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of provocative materials into the secondary social studies classroom. With that end in mind, my three research questions were as follows:

1. How do my world history freshman students come to understand provocative materials in regards to the historical content?

2. How does my students’ engagement with these provocative materials influence their understanding of historical events and the world around them?
3. In what ways does the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students?

**Overview of Methods**

The following methodology and theoretical framework were chosen because I believed they represent the best tools in allowing me to answer my research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1994). My methodological and theoretical consideration was done solely to help me define the problem, clarify my purpose, and answer the questions in regards to provocative issues (Schram 2006). Flowing from the research questions and initial definitions, the methodology and theoretical framework was intended to interact with data generation and analysis in order to create a new understanding of the affects of provocative issues on student learning and teacher decisions (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

This dissertation research represents a concerted effort to utilize self-study as methodology in order to inform my practice in regards to teaching provocative issues. Research in the area of reflection and reflective practice has had a strong influence on self-study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Crowe, 2010; Kosnik, Lassonde, & Galman, 2009; Schön, 1983). Although grounded theory was utilized as a data analysis tool (Charmaz, 2006); self-study served as my method of inquiry into the provocative issues. Self-Study methodology influences the choices I made in organizing my study, but more importantly represent how I choose to live my professional and scholarly existence.
Definition of Terms

Provocative: Evans, Avery, and Pederson’s (2000) define provocative as beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged (p. 218). These types of provocative discussions and topics can often create closed spaces in which teachers and students alike will avoid certain issues as they create intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955).

Critical Thinking: Issues that allow for debate and discourse amongst the students (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996). Critical thinking involves reflective dialogue among students, or between students and teachers, about an issue on which there is disagreement (Harwood & Hahn, 1990). The literature and research demonstrated that the ontology of critical thinking, as it pertains to controversial issues, is nearly saturated (Bowen, 2008).

Self-Study: A methodology in the area of reflection and reflective practice (Kosnik, Lassonde, & Galman, 2009). Specifically within the field of education, self-study represents the movement towards developing reflective practitioners who focus their own practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), by examining and problematize their teaching (Schön, 1983). Self-Study has personally provided me with a way forward in my desire to improve my teaching (Crowe, 2010; Dinkelman, 1999, 2003; Kosnik, Lassonad, & Galman, 2009; Loughran, 2006).

Social Studies: The integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence (National Council for the Social Studies, [NCSS], 2010). World History was the particular social studies course used in this research.
The Participants / Setting: The participants and setting of this research involved my own 9th grade world history classroom in a 9-12 high school in Northeast Ohio. The thirteen participants were students in my world history class during the 2012-2013 school year. They were labeled Allison, Anna, Anthony, Betty, Brian, Dalton, Ely, Emily, Jackson, Jason, John, Karen, and Nate

Summary

In Chapter 1, I provided a personal rationale for this study, a purpose statement, and a brief overview of the research design. In Chapter II, I present a literature review organized both thematically and chronologically in order to explain how provocative issues have been viewed by teachers and students within the secondary social studies classroom over the last century. Chapter II will also demonstrate how political, social, cultural, and historical trends affect society and in turn classrooms when considering provocative issues (Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1988). In Chapter III, I describe the research questions, self-study methodology, the research design including data sources, grounded theory as data analysis, theoretical framework, ethical implications, and trustworthiness. My methodology is self-study (Crowe, 2010; Dinkelman, 1999, 2003; Kosnik, Lassond, & Galman, 2009; Loughran, 2006; Schön, 1983). The data analysis system relates to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). My theoretical framework is rooted in self-study pragmatism (Dewey, 1897, 1916, 1934; Menand, 1997, 2001; Powell, 2010).

In Chapter IV, each student participant is described to help the reader contextualize the students thinking in regards to provocative issues and how it relates to
my instruction and interaction with the students. Chapter IV will also present the findings of the research. Three major findings emerged (Charmaz, 2005) from the thirteen student participants. The first finding involved various rationales for the inclusion of provocative issues. These rationales were labeled *provocative for interest sake* in which students advocate for provocative issues as it increases interest in the historical material. The first rationale also involves students who value the macabre and therefore are interested in provocative issues. The second rationale is labeled *provocative for grade sake* in which the students see the inclusion of provocative issues as a way to further their academic performance. The third rationale is labeled *real world phenomenon* in which students advocate for provocative issues because they see the provocative material as reality where as their own existence is some sanitized version of reality. The second finding involved a student who opposed the inclusion of provocative issues. The student’s rationales were labeled *oppositional* as provocative issues were seen by the student as having a negative influence on their understanding world history. In addition, Chapter IV will reveal the findings of my self-study which will demonstrate how the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students. The self-study findings were categorized as; *The Closed Space of Sexuality*, *The Banality of Violence*, and *Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster Critical Thinking*. *The Closed Space of Sexuality* dealt with the perception that sexuality as a historical topic felt somehow taboo. *The Banality of Violence* finding revealed that violence seemed less provocative to my students. *Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster Critical Thinking* finding
revealed that the students believe that critical thinking is embedded within my teaching and their learning of provocative issues. Chapter V will provide a detailed discussions and implications of the findings.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This is one of several literature reviews that I conducted on the topic of teaching controversial issues within the secondary social studies classroom through my graduate studies. However, since I adjusted my line of inquiry away from the controversial as critical thinking to the controversial as provocative (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955), similar adjustments were necessary to distinguish what has been done from what needs to be done as it pertains to the teaching of provocative issues (Hart, 1998). The reviews of this literature, past and present (Randolph, 2009), were all undertaken in order to inform my thinking in regards to my research questions.

There exist an extensive body of literature and research on the topic of controversial as critical thinking. Controversy under these parameters is issues that allow for debate and discourse amongst the students (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Soley, 1996). Critical thinking involves reflective dialogue among students, or between students and teachers, about an issue on which there is disagreement (Harwood & Hahn, 1990). The literature and research demonstrated that the ontology of critical thinking, as it pertains to controversial issues, is nearly saturated (Bowen, 2008).

Adjusting my line of inquiry towards provocative (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955) necessitated another, more focused (Randolph, 2009), literature investigation in order to discover the previous body of knowledge surrounding
the provocative nature of teaching controversial issues. This proved a difficult task, as there were far fewer sources on the topic of teaching provocative issues within the field of secondary social studies education. This modification to my literature inquiry, although laborious, further served as evidence that, upon completion of my dissertation, I will have an original, meaningful contribution to the field of secondary social studies curriculum and instruction (Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Pinar, 1975).

An Overview of Provocative Issues

The ontology behind provocative issues has not undergone the linear, evolutionary change that I assumed it would have over the course of the nineteenth century to present. I wrongly believed that the topic of provocative would advance from a docile level of benevolence increasing chronologically over the years, to a more sinister stage. In other words, provocative would grow through time in its level of severity. Research studies starting in the beginning of the 20th century demonstrate that what was considered provocative topics in the social studies classrooms then are very similar to the same topics of today (Buchanan, 1940; FitzGerald, 1979; Hoover, 1967; Keezer, 1940; Morrison, 1944; Moreau, 2004). Issues like peace in a time of war, the role of the national government, civil rights, sexuality, indoctrination, socialism, autocracy, and communism appear to be as prevalent then as they are today (Buchanan et al., 1940). The provocative issues, as used in the classroom, seemed uneven in their evolution, and popped up like forest fires, depending on the social and political events of the day (Hahn & Tocci, 1990). This forced social studies teachers and schools to make a decision to ignore them in order to avoid controversy, or teach them in order to further their student’s
knowledge of the historical content and the world around them (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004; Hess, 2009).

The early research demonstrates the difficulty that the early social studies educators had in providing a clear definition of controversy as provocative (Buchanan, 1940; FitzGerald, 1979; Morrison, 1944; Moreau, 2004). One of the most monumental tasks of my research was finding any authors who sought to formally and concretely define provocative issues. Most of the authors sought to clarify reasons and benefits for the inclusion of provocative issues in the classroom rather than fully explaining what they were (Buchanan, 1940; FitzGerald, 1979; Hoover, 1967; Keezer, 1940). When seeking a true characterization of controversial issues as provocative within the secondary social studies classroom, it became problematic to fully comprehend what constituted provocative. The only consensus found through the readings was that the teaching of provocative issues was also rife with peril for the teacher that undertakes such an adventure. Perhaps, Dexter Merriam Keezer, said it best in his (1940) piece entitled, The Problem of Handling Controversial Issues when he states:
These words resonate to any teacher attempting to undertake the topic of provocative issues in order to improve their instruction and expand their students’ knowledge. The statement makes clear that great risks can generate great rewards (Keezer, 1940).

Since political, social, cultural, and historical trends so affect what we as a society consider provocative (Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1988), I chose to organize this literature review around historical events and then match them with the provocative issues of their time period. These constructs of organization do not represent an exhausted saturation (Randolph, 2009) of provocative topics in secondary schools of those time periods, since such an all-inclusive approach would prove to be too cumbersome and would only conflate my investigation (Copper, 1988). There were many provocative research studies and lessons that I read but omitted, as they drew me away from the clearer focus of my research questions (Cooper, 1988). Instead, this literature review constitutes a representational survey (Cooper, 1988) of the provocative nature of the major historical events and issues of the day, and how these events became provocative issues in regards to social studies education. The constructs of organizations have not been duplicated, to my knowledge, and were only created because they served as compartments of understanding that would allow me to systematize my thinking in regards to the evolution of provocative issues within the field of secondary social studies education.

**1900 – 1945 – Sexuality**

In regards to sexuality, social studies classrooms at the secondary level today mention provocative issues like censorship of pornography, sexual exploits of historical
figures, and same sex marriage (Armstrong, 1994; Kohn, 1997; Moran, 2000; Taylor, 2000). However, at the time controversial and provocative issues were first being addressed in the early twentieth century, sexuality as a topic was rarely mentioned. When matters of sexuality were introduced, they were mostly centered on issues like pre-marital sex and venereal diseases (Moran, 2000). I use the Bigelow study as citation, despite the fact that sex education was mostly taught in science classes like biology, rather than social studies (Moran, 2000). My decision for this inclusion is because Maurice Bigelow provided valuable insight on the norms of secondary education and students at the turn of the 20th Century (1916). In addition, I feel that the content that Bigelow presented would fit into today’s psychology or sociology curriculum. I found his words to be surprisingly enlightened, given that the US was just coming out of the Victorian Age, and the conservative time period in which he lived (FitzGerald, 1979). When discussing the push back received from the inclusion of sex education, Maurice Bigelow (1916), in *A Series of Lectures Concerning Knowledge of Sex in its Relation to Human Life*, writes in eloquent terms:

It is absurd to suppose that the free, dignified, and scientific use of the word “sex” is going to make people more sensual, more uncontrolled, and more immoral. There is much more reason for fearing the free use of the word “love,” which has both psychical and physical meanings so confused that often only the context of sentences enables one to determine which meaning is intended. In fact, many writers and speakers seek to avoid all possible misunderstanding by using the word "affection" for psychical love. Now, in spite of such confusion, and the fact
that too many people the word "love" in connection with sex suggests only gross sensuality, we continue to use it freely and it is one of the first words taught to children. Why then do we not hear protests against using the word “love”? Simply because we have been from childhood accustomed to the word, first in its psychical sense, and it is only later that most of us have learned that it has a sensual meaning to some people. In short, familiarity with the word “love” in its psychical sense has bred in us a contempt for those who mistake the physical basis of love for love in its combined physical and psychical completeness. (p.8)

These words speak clearly to me as a teacher and researcher in regards to bringing provocative issues into my own instruction. Although words like sex have meaning, it is important to note that, often times, the meanings are incorrect. Just because words are sometimes considered provocative, it should not preclude or prejudice their introduction into classroom vocabulary. Bigelow’s words are enlightened and very forward thinking for his time. Although he speaks in graphic terms about the physical act of love for the purpose of education, he also devoted whole sections of his research to the respect and dignity of women (1916). The following passage represents Bigelow’s (1916) female empowerment ideal:

Now, we of the older generation, who as parents and teachers are largely the makers of the boy's view of life, may play a very important part in developing in him a love for "the woman," a reverence for womanhood. The greatest opportunity falls to the lot of that mother whose natural gifts and education adapt her for impressing her son profoundly with appreciation of womanhood. The next
greatest opportunity comes to the woman who as an instructor in school, church, or other institution comes into intimate relations that sometimes give the teacher greater influence than the mother is able or willing to exert. Finally, we must not discount the value of men's cooperation in this problem, for many a boy's attitude towards women is largely the reflection of what he has seen in his father and in other men, particularly in his teachers both secular and religious. (p. 158)

Although, admittedly, these words fall short of a true modern feminist perspective (Lather, 2006), one would have to acknowledge that they represent a step in this direction in regards to teaching young men not to view women as sexual objects, but instead, persons to be revered. They also serve as a reminder that when addressing provocative issues, it is important to acknowledge, with respect, the many different stakeholders involved in the research. Despite these early attempts at sex education, it is worth noting that a large scale study in 1936 revealed that not much headway had been made in the matter of sex education (Moran, 2000). The Willoughby Study determined that only 9% of twenty year olds of both genders considered their knowledge of sex to be good, while close to 80% labeled it as bad (Willoughby, 1937, p. 4).

The earliest reference to sexuality strictly couched within social studies education came in James Michener’s article in 1938 entitled, Sex Education: A Success in our Social Studies Classes (1938). It was fascinating to me to see that a fairly contentious issue, such as sexuality, would be addressed at such an early date with a high school social studies classroom. I was also surprised at the candid nature of the discussion. The author, Michener (1938), begins the article by stating that whenever secondary schools
permit students to participate in the determination of the social – studies curriculum, sex education is almost always demanded (p. 461). I wrongly perceived that the topic of sexuality would be largely ignored or repressed in any content area. To see it brought up in such candid terms in secondary social studies classrooms in the 1930’s, shows that some high school social studies instructors had begun to address elements of teaching controversial issues (Michener, 1938). Michener (1938) mentions that it did take courage to undertake the topic of sexuality in a social studies classroom. He stated that he expected unfavorable reactions from the parents when he started his work. However, when given the chance to get feedback from parents and students, the positive feedback “quite unarmed us.” He goes on to say that most American communities will eventually react in this way if “sane teachers” teach these fields (p. 464).

The first time homosexuality was mentioned in the social studies classroom was through the lens of a clinical study by Bromley and Haxton in the late 1930’s (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2000). It is important to note that this study had very little to do with issues such as gay rights. There was no mention of social studies educators using the topic of homosexuality within the context of some type of pedagogical rationale (Pinar, 1998). Instead, the research study tended to center on the perceived deviant behavior of homosexuals. The archaic language of the study was also revealing in that lesbianism, as a term, was instead referred to as girl homosexuals, and was certainly viewed in a negative light (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2000).

I found this document extremely disturbing in that one would have to imagine gay students in those classes sitting in desks, alone, secretly despising themselves as part of a
teacher’s directive. Teaching provocative issues today, if nothing else, allows for these students to be included in a larger debate that recognizes their narrative or story as normal and valuable to diverse discourse. However, a peculiar philosophy is occurring today that complicates the gay rights issue, especially when compared to this early piece (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2000).

There exists a small, independent movement amongst some gay educational leaders who value a cultural and theoretical severance from perceived traditional values (Rodriquez & Pinar, 2007; Pinar, 1998). This has been bracketed under Queer Theory (Pinar, 1998). Curriculum theorist, Bill Pinar (1998) writes, “Queer has become the chosen term for many who have come to be dissatisfied with what they perceive to be the assimilationist politics associated with the terms gay and lesbian” (p. 3). As terms of identity, the usefulness of lesbian and gay has been criticized for having a perceived attachment to classism, racism, and Euro-centrism (Pinar, 1998). It makes me consider how inclusivity and assimilation might be used as provocative issues within my instruction. This could be done by asking the students to reflect on whether assimilation of suspect classifications is beneficial or harmful to marginalized groups (Rodriquez & Pinar, 2008). I can work these types of questions into discussions based on race.

The consideration of sexuality as a provocative but irrelevant theme within the field of social studies must be considered. My choice to include elements of sexuality sprung from these early pieces as well as my realization of how sexuality is part of the historical narrative. The curricular movements within historical teaching towards primary sources reveal the humility of historical figures (Zinn 1980; Ravitch, 2010).
Students will understand that these historical figures are, like all human beings, sexual creatures (Zinn, 1980). I believe we can and should have the debate on whether the inclusion of these sexual antidotes enhance or hinder student understanding of the historical content; for that was the purpose of this study. However, it is silly to ignore for any reason, these historical narratives as if they never have existed.

1900 - 1945 –War

In regards to teaching social studies during war, the research revealed that many world events of the day often created a vacuum within the field of social studies education in which provocative issues were avoided, or in some cases excluded, by state and national law (FitzGerald, 1979; Thorton, 1994; 2005). The provocative issue that was the most contentious prior to the Second World War centered on the topic of collectivism or communism (Buchanan, 1940; Keezer, 1940). The apprehension in regards to communism first appeared in Controversial Issues in 6 Cities: Factors Affecting their Discussion in the Social Studies Classroom written by Rex Turner in 1936. The article addresses a California state statute prohibiting the presentation of controversial issues to students in the public high schools (Turner, 1936). The state government seemed most concerned with the inclusion of collectivist, or communist, issues into social studies classroom. Specifically, Turner noted that a case appeared in the California Attorney General Office in which a teacher had his students address whether the Communist Party was necessary in the United States (p. 207). Turner does take a position on the state of California’s intrusion into public classroom. This might suggest the existence of some type of fear of advocacy, rather than an attempt to remain
politically neutral. Instead, his research study strictly focused on the overall influences on and the attitudes of California public school teachers (1936).

The consequence of world events on provocative issues is further demonstrated as the United States crept closer to becoming involved in the Second World War (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004). The emergence of fascism seemed to conflate the argument against collectivism, causing some state governments and educational leaders to take more of a stance against autocracy and dictatorships within the social studies classroom (Counts, 1938; Dewey, 1934; Everett, 1944; Morrison, 1944). This change from being against communism, to being against any type of autocratic rule, is not only due to the emergence of Nazism, but also the Soviet Union joining the Allied cause when invaded by Hitler in June of 1941.

Fear of indoctrination created a rationale for social studies educators avoiding provocative issues. This was revealed in early research (Hoover, 1967; Morrison, 1944; Turner, 1936). In the article, Issues for Postwar Elementary Education, Morrison claims that the avoidance of (provocative) issues would be the surest road to the Republics downfall. Furthermore, Morrison (1944) suggests that our inherent fear of indoctrination is due primarily to teachers’ inadequate knowledge of the social and economic problems of the day (p. 19). The research also points to the fear that secondary, and certainly primary school students, are susceptible to indoctrination due to their flexibility and idealism (Morrison, 1944).

These early pieces involving social studies teaching in a time of war helped me formulate the provocative theme of anti-Americanism. The literature demonstrated that
topics that conflate America as an unquestioned source of good in the world, especially during war times, is rife with peril (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004). Furthermore, topics that have students objectively consider the political and economic institutions of American enemies during war are equally dangerous. These literature pieces and research studies demonstrated that unconventional thinking like questioning nationalistic pride (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004) deserve equal footing with other provocative themes.

1900 – 1945 – Race

The articles that expressly deal with the teaching of race and racism within the social studies classroom focused more on measuring attitudes of black and white students and how these attitudes might affect instruction and learning (Baumgardner, 1935; Russell & Robertson, 1947). The most telling research, in regards to the teaching of racial issues within the social studies classroom, came from David Russell, a professor from University of California, Berkley, and his article *Influencing Attitudes Towards Minority Groups in a Junior High School* (1947). I found this piece to extremely informative, in that Russell’s research centered on a California school district and how it dealt with a demographic change within its community. The study was done in Richmond, California during the last of the war years. Richmond schools saw its population double with a huge influx of African-American families who came to the town to find work in the ship building industry that went through a boom during the war years. This transition might have ended very badly had it not been for the school district’s decision of tackling race issues head on through the inclusion of issue-based
instruction at the middle school and high school levels (Russell & Robertson, 1947).

After some white families approached the school board and demanded segregated schools, the administration set about to, not only fully integrate, but to also create curriculum and instructional strategies that would foster understanding (Russell & Robertson, 1947, p. 207-209). The district made sure that subjects taught the *Negro experience* through literature and lessons geared towards diversity.

These lessons were not exclusive to just social studies. Instead, the district took a very progressive stance and included multiculturalism across the curriculum. This could be seen in the inclusion of Negro-spirituals in choir, as well as, mandatory reading of *The Souls of Black Folk* by Du Bois (Russell & Robertson, 1947, p. 207-208). Within the social studies classrooms themselves, students were encouraged to openly discuss and debate the changes within their communities (Russell & Robertson, 1947, p. 209).

Russell (1947) then measured the student’s attitudes within a quantitative study. Through a Liker-scale quant measure, Russell was able to show that most of the students favored the school’s curricular decisions and that they reached a greater level of appreciation for each other’s differences (p. 210 – 213). Russell, at the time the article was published, concluded that the school experienced no racial incidents that he knew of, which is affirmation to the success of this program (1947). The level of sophistication of this research study is quite astounding when one considers that it pre-dates the Civil Rights Movement and occurred in Jim Crow America. It speaks volumes on the power of these types of educational endeavors and how the inclusion of provocative issues like race can reshape the culture and thinking of a school and its students (Russell & Robertson, 1947).
However, even when teachers have the best intentions in mind in regards to teaching provocative issues dealing with race, the outcomes can prove to be disastrous. This example comes from the English Journal in 1944 entitled, *You Don't Teach Until You Get under Their Hides* (Hartman, 1944). Although not directly within the field of social studies education, the description and narrative of the article matches my research, thus far, and proves to be a beneficial historical artifact in regards to the sometimes negative consequences of teaching provocative issues in 1940s America. A progressive English teacher in Ashland, Ohio in the early 1940s, created his own curricular unit entitled, *The Negro*. The goal of this lesson was to have his students reach a greater level of appreciation for the cultural achievements of African-Americans by researching Black history (Hartman, 1944). The end of the unit was a play put on by the senior English students at Ashland High School, with the rest of the student body serving as the audience. Since there were no African-Americans in the school at the time, the teacher allowed the students to dress in black face and don mammy rags in order to dress the part of American slaves (Hartman, 1944). The teacher, who wrote most of the play, used the vernacular of slave times. The first line of the play is, “This is the story of the Negro, the black man, the nigger” (p. 295). The play then followed Negros through time, highlighting their achievements, as well as, the barriers they faced.

Reflecting on the unit, the teacher admitted that, rather than increasing a sense of awareness and appreciation for others cultures, the play simply confirmed the many stereotypes that it was designed to deconstruct (Hartman, 1944). The lesson serves to illustrate the difficulties in teaching provocative issues, and how messages and intentions
can become muddied with the complexity of subjects like race. It further illustrates the inherent tensions that exist in teaching provocative pedagogy (Burkholder, 2011). It is easy to criticize the teacher’s apparent lack of judgment today, but such criticisms are foolish if we do not consider time, place, and intent. Although black face is horribly offensive by today standards, in 1940s Midwest America, the black face makeup would represent nothing more than a prop for a high school play. Minstrels were exceedingly popular in America just ten years prior to this lesson (Mahar, 1999). The author uses the teacher’s descriptions of how the play went wrong, and how students seemed to be acting out stereotypes rather than truly understanding the true Negro experience. However, neither the author nor the teacher shared that the fault in the lesson involved their own racial ignorance or insensitivity. Instead, they discussed the shortcomings of the lesson in terms of lacking a true Negro voice in the unit content and the play (Hartman, 1944).

From a practitioner standpoint, I admire the teacher’s intentions and courage to undertake such a precarious lesson, although the result was unfortunate.

These historic articles and lessons, as I read them in preparation for this literature review, influenced my thinking in regards to my own curricular decisions. This lesson, in particular, serves as an important caveat to any teacher seeking to use provocative issues as an instructional tool. Benign purpose is meaningless when it involves malignant practice. The teacher’s best intentions were ruined through poor planning, judgment, and instructional decisions. Although my line of inquiry does not involve teacher education, I do wonder how teacher experience and skill effect the use of provocative issues, and
whether novice teachers should attempt to practice such risky pedagogy (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Hess, 2009).

From a strictly African-American perspective, I relied heavily on the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois. Although the article did not directly deal with the teaching of provocative issues in social studies, W. E. Burghardt Du Bois’ piece, *Does the Negro Need Separate Schools*, was the most revealing (1935). Du Bois, the great civil rights leader, makes an incredibly articulate argument for the need of segregation. Du Bois (1935) states that segregated schools are needed and necessary for the proper education of the Negro race because he believed that assimilation into white culture was an impossibility (p. 328). He also references his fear of voluntary integration in the North as an occurrence that might lead to the disenfranchisement of African-American students (1935). Du Bois (1935) claims that only segregated schools would assure that black students can meet their full potential. Segregation, to Du Bois (1935), was a mechanism to assure that black teachers, who he believed had a greater understanding of the needs of the black community, could intimately mentor their students (p. 329-331).

This article illustrates the broad changes that the civil rights movement has undergone in regards to public education in the United States. It also exemplifies the difficulty for researchers to make sense of their topics when the topics encompass such a large time span. This type of language mirrors some of the *Black Power / Black Nationalism* movements of the 1960’s and 70’s that appeared in the social studies textbooks of those decades (FitzGerald, 1979). The rationale in support of segregated
schools is incredibly surprising when one considers the Civil Rights movement that will begin just some twenty years after Du Bois writes this article (1935).

1945 – 1990 – Cold War / Communism

Following WWII, the United States secondary social studies classrooms turned their hatred of fascism back towards the familiar enemy of communism and the Soviets (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004). Virtually all history textbooks made estimates of Soviet power and aggression in foreign policy matters, sometimes painting a darker picture of communism than the textbooks ever had of the Nazi’s in the 1940s (FitzGerald, 1979). This almost paranoid hatred of communism is exemplified in the writing of one of the most prominent American History textbooks of the 1950s and 60s, Bragdon & McCutchen (FitzGerald, 1979), in which they confidently claimed, “party members are found everywhere. Everywhere they are willing to engage in spying, sabotage, and the promotion of unrest on orders from Moscow” (p. 121). When one considers the directive of the textbooks of the 1950s and 1960s America, it is difficult to imagine any teacher allowing even neutral discussions on Marxist and collectivist ideology. Teachers and administrators who advocated non-biased approaches to communism or criticism of capitalism could be quickly labeled sympathizers (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004).

An obscure historical example of this type of hysteria is the Samuel J. Tilden High School Incident of 1948, in which the faculty and administration of the New York City public high school were accused of indoctrinating their students towards the tenants of communism. The controversy occurred when the school’s principal, Dr. Abraham Lefkowitz, distributed a pamphlet amongst the students urging them to critically question
the concept of complete free enterprise (The Abraham Lefkowitz Collection, n. d.).

Lefkowitz had been greatly influenced by the *Progressive Education Association* out of Columbia University led by George Counts and his aggressive stance on what Counts called the evils of unrestrained Capitalism (Burkholder, 2011). The results of Lefkowitz’s pamphlet, following parent complaints and newspaper coverage, was a Congressional hearing and investigation into the school’s Teacher Union 555, in which some members of the faculty, including Lefkowitz himself, were accused of being communists. No formal charges were ever brought against any member of the faculty. Although Lefkowitz would keep his position, the New York General Assembly and New York Board of Regents passed an oath that all New York seniors had to pledge in order to graduate (The Abraham Lefkowitz Collection, n. d.). The oath, which was sporadically followed for around five years, is as follows: “I hereby declare my loyalty to the Constitution and Government of the United States and the State of New York and promise to support their laws” (New York State Law, 1949).

This event was poorly documented and, therefore, was difficult to reconstruct and reference. The historical event, like others I have researched, made me consider my own practice in regards to provocative issues. During the 2011-2012 school year, as part of the curriculum and state standards on economic systems, I had my world history students research both American capitalism and European socialism to determine which system they believed to be superior and why. In order to scaffold their research, I provided them with a sheet outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each. On the second day of this two day lesson, the students conducted a *Socratic Seminar* in which they civilly debated
and discussed the differing systems in a fair and intellectual way. No students or parents ever questioned the lesson in terms of indoctrination or anti-Americanism. In fact, my more thoughtful students on both sides of the political spectrum seemed to come to a sort of deliberated end and felt that both systems had their strengths. Time and again, through this literature investigation, I have come to realize that historical context and one’s place in time determines provocative, and not teacher directive (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000). These historical lessons have help inform my research and led to my decision to include provocative issues that might conflate the American Exceptionalist narrative. I labeled these types of lessons as Anti-American.

1945 – 1990 – Civil Rights

The Cold War hysteria also affected how race was taught as a provocative issue in the post-war American social studies classroom (Burkholder, 2011). Many social studies teachers who openly taught race prior to the Cold War, moved away from the topic, especially during the 1950s, for fear of being labeled a communist (Burkholder, 2011; FitzGerald, 1979). Educators, like many Americans, were witnessing the McCarthy Hearings, in which questions were asked of the witnesses to determine whether the individual supported racial equality, or whether the individual ever entertained a member of another race at their home (Burkholder, 2011). The New York City Teacher’s Union in the 1950s considered halting an intercultural program sarcastically noting, “Teaching kids not to hate each other because of race or religion is now communistic, and must be done away with (Burkholder, 2011, p. 73).
The movement away from this archaic pedagogy came from an unlikely educational leader. Anthropologist Margret Meade became a peculiar, but powerful voice in the advocating for the teaching of controversial issues. Margret Meade’s study of adolescents in Samoa in the 1930s made her a celebrity amongst American intellectuals (Burkholder, 2011). The provocative book looked at the sexual behaviors of young Samoans as compared to that of American teenagers, and reached the top of the New York Times best sellers list, spawning an increase in interest in the field of anthropology (Burkholder, 2011).

Driven mostly by her concentration in adolescents, Meade, during the 1940s and 50s, began to turn her attention towards racial interactions in American schools. Using her anthropological background, Meade began to advocate for race teaching through a scientific lens. Meade began to urge secondary schools to bring scientific investigations into their social studies and English classrooms as part of a larger race study. Meade proposed that when a student introduced a racist idea to the class, such as blacks were inferior to whites because blacks were not as economically successful; the teacher should incorporate a lesson to discover why African-Americans seem to lag behind economically. The idea being, of course, that the students, through their own research, would discover that years of cultural and societal racism have created barriers that made success difficult for black America. Meade proposed that students would conclude that if blacks were given the same opportunities as whites, they would succeed just as well. Meade would go on to organize cultural exchanges throughout the 1940s and 50s in
which students of many ethnic and racial backgrounds came together for social events in order to gain greater levels of understanding (Burkholder, 2011).

Although the course in which I conducted my own dissertation research was world and not US history, topics like American race and racism were routinely broached. Throughout the year, I had opportunities to discuss racism through cultural contexts using imperialism, and genocide as connecting points. Towards the end of the year, I once asked my students to consider how the USSR during the Cold War would view the Civil Rights Movement in the US. I then asked the class to look at headlines from Pravda during the 1950’s and 60’s to see how the Soviet newspaper framed the American claim of freedom in light of Jim Crow in the South. These early pieces helped me consider how race and racism work as provocative themes.

1990 – Present – Terrorism

The effect that world events have on social studies education is visible with the recent historical events of September 11th. In times of war, our classroom curriculum reflects a more conservative stance as demonstrated throughout the last two centuries (FitzGerald, 1979). The issue of terrorism versus national security was avoided by classroom teachers for fear of parent or administration backlash (Hess, 2009). A favorite example of how this dilemma played out just after 9/11 involved a lesson provided by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program, Case Studies: Revolutionaries or Terrorist. This provocative lesson plan was geared towards social studies secondary classes. The students were asked to consider real life examples of groups of individuals who chose to fight against perceived oppressors. The case studies involved, along with
Al-Qaeda, the IRA, Chechnya, Chiapas, and South Africa. At the end of each case study, the students were asked to consider whether the use of force was acceptable and whether the group’s existence was justifiable. This lesson made students and teachers alike consider Al-Qaeda in the same category as other, more banal organizations, such as Mandela’s African National Congress. Students would find it easy to demonize Al-Qaeda after the events of September 11th. However, the difficulty and the controversy lie in labeling Mandela as a terrorist. Many teachers refused to use these plans and Choices for the 21st Century Education Program received criticism for advertising the lesson on their website (Hess, 2009).

When given the chance to study the lesson plan in its entirety, I reached such a level of appreciation that I made copies for the entire social studies department at my school. However, it would be less than truthful to say that I would have the courage to distribute such a lesson plan to my colleagues or teach such a lesson to my students immediately following the events of September 11th. One might argue that there was no better time to teach such a lesson than immediately following that horrific event. When reflecting on this realization, I came to appreciate why provocative issues are avoided to such a high degree and fully understand the true reason for the silence of controversial issues within the social studies classroom. Teachers might often sacrifice good instruction in order to avoid offending those (administration, parents, community, and media) who might not fully comprehend the true intention of the lesson (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000).
Another article demonstrating how historical events can influence instructional strategies involving controversial issues is *Teaching Anti-Militarism during War* by David Freedman. Freedman’s research, devised during the first Gulf War, provides a strategy in which teachers could introduce the topic of pacifism at a time when the country was at war (1996). Freedman created an *Inside / Outside* strategy in which students might consider issues from differing perspectives. This dichotomy (Freedman, 1996) has students consider the American invasion into Kuwait and Iraq through the traditional lens of nationalism. Students were asked to consider the Iraqi and Kuwaiti position, as well, (p. 135 – 137). The brilliance of this lesson is that it allows a politically neutral pedagogical approach to provocative issues in social studies. Students in this study were asked to consider positions of familiarity for an American high school students, like militarism and nationalism. In addition, the students were also asked to contextualize how the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government might feel about the invasion. Critical analysis allowed students, according to Freedman (1996), to undermine the “dichotomous myth” that they might have relied on in regards to the Gulf War (p. 136). These ideals allow students to empathize with, what might be considered, traditional enemies (Freedman, 1996).

These instructional practices certainly allow for analysis and higher level evaluations that are meaningful to students’ growth and full understanding (Hess, 2009). When given a chance to reflect on the lesson, I reach a level of appreciation of its neutrality. However, one would have to consider to what extent a secondary teacher might go to if the war involved other *dichotomies* (Freedman, 1996). Take the Second
World War as an example. Some teachers might feel extremely uncomfortable having their students empathize with the German people, many of which embraced the immoral doctrine of Nazism. These circumstances force teachers, who advocate for the inclusion of provocative issues into their instruction, to temper their support. What level of controversy is too provocative? When does controversy cross over from good instructional techniques into the realm of advocacy of malicious principles? Certainly, there exists immoral ideology that is not up for deliberative analysis. Even within post-modernist principles, there exists right and wrong. These are the issues that must continue to be addressed within the field of secondary social studies education.

**1990 – Present – Sexuality**

When looking at the work of sexuality within the field of social studies in the modern era, the topics tended to center on homosexuality and its legality (Armstrong, 1994; Kohn, 1997; Taylor, 2000). The most telling of these pieces was Taylor’s article, *Meeting the Needs of Lesbian and Gay Young Adolescents* (2000). This article advocates that topics of homosexuality should be addressed within the social studies classroom as early as middle school, since many students begin the sexual maturation process around that time (Taylor, 2000). When this occurs, Taylor writes that middle school students often feel alone and hopeless with a very low self image (2000, p. 221). When these negative self-esteem issues take hold, the results are higher risks for truancy, dropping out, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, sexual abuse, AIDS, and suicide (Taylor, 2000, p. 221). These disturbing outcomes seem to create a need for social
As stated previously, my own inquiry did not seek the paradigm shift of social reform that mandates a *new morality* (Freire, 1972; Lather, 2006; Pinar, 1998), but allows the students to play with these provocative issues so that they might construct their own sense of right and wrong. Because of this, I think that Taylor might have moved into the realm of indoctrination (2000). As a progressive, I feel that it is especially important to try to distinguish between the *introductions of versus advocating for* provocative issues. Certainly, we can agree that social studies teachers have an obligation to prevent discrimination of any student demographic. The problems arise when we move past a position of protection of one group to a position of mandating personal opinions on others. When teachers lack neutrality in regards to teaching provocative issues within social studies, students will not critically evaluate the content. Instead, they will simply adopt, mimic, or memorize the position of the instructor (Hess, 2009). This leaves the teaching of controversial issues no more superior than the memorization of facts (Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

**1990 – Present – Civil Rights**

There were many articles, dated 1990 to present, that addressed the topic of civil rights and race relations as being taught in the secondary social studies classroom (Hess, 2009; Lusk & Weinberg, 1994; Ochoa-Becker, 2007). The research that most mirrored my investigation into the teaching of provocative issues in regards to race came from the work of Lusk and Weinberg and their article *Discussing Controversial Topics in the Classroom: Creating a Context for Learning* (1994). This study not only addressed the reasons why student and teachers alike move away from controversial issues such as civil
rights, (fear of being called a racists or fear of stereotyping) but it also provided lessons and skills that teachers can adopt to circumvent these obstacles (p. 304-306). The most powerful of these strategies dealt with classroom culture. This is the idea that if an instructor was to undertake the teaching of provocative issues, such as race, they should provide a classroom atmosphere that inculcates trust and understanding (Lusk & Weinberg, 1994, p. 305). Students, especially middle school and secondary students might not be capable of coming into your social studies class on the first day and begin to talk about racial differences. A certain level of scaffolding needs to be created in order for the students to reach a level of comfort so that they will be honest and authentic (Lusk & Weinberg, 1994). Lusk and Weinberg worked hard, in both of their classes, to foster a level of appreciation for the difficulty in addressing these topics. Students were reminded that these types of discussions were in no way easy. The students, according to Lusk and Weinberg (1994), were also strongly encouraged when they spoke up, regardless of their opinion (p. 306-307). What can be taken from these types of lessons is that teachers must show a level of empathy to their students in regards to the complicatedness of these issues (Lusk & Weinberg, 1994). To simply throw topics, such as race and racism, out to mixed group of secondary social studies students and expect them to have a spirited, but academic discussions, is asinine. However, unlimited positive possibilities can reveal themselves when students are prepared and trained to handle such lessons (Lusk & Weinberg, 1994).

The modern era of teaching race as a provocative issue is generally framed around the term *multiculturalism*, and has resulted in limited success (Burkholder, 2011). In her
book, *Color in the Classroom: How American Schools Taught Race, 1900 – 1954*, Zoë Burkholder ends by making a very convincing case for the return to the anthropological teaching of individuals like Margret Meade (2011). Burkholder points out that the pre-service teacher today is taught to view racial issues exclusively around the field of psychology, to the exclusion of other social sciences (Burkholder, 2011). The larger problem with this type of education is that white, middle class teachers are unable to see the subtle ways culture can function to constrain or motivate students of different backgrounds (Burkholder, 2011). This does not mean, according to Burkholder (2011), that we should view minority culture as different or apart from American culture; as she writes, “They *are* American culture (p. 311).” Burkholder believes that an anthropological perspective of American culture would reveal the structural inequalities that intentionally restrict access to quality education, safe housing, and rewarding jobs, according to race (2011). Racism, as a topic, should be used as a lesson in regards to human genetics to emphasize that there is no such thing as a black, white, or Asian race. Instead race is a faulty, socially constructed parameter in which cultural phenomenon is revealed (Burkholder, 2011). Burkholder (2011) believes that if race was taught through anthropological terms of *we are only different because we were raised differently*, students would become less inclined to follow racist intentions (p. 312).

The type of provocative lessons that Meade endorsed in the 1950’s, and Burkholder endorses today, are similar to one that was presented to me as an undergraduate in the College of Education at Kent State University in the early 1990’s. An education professor advocated for the teaching of race by providing students with
statistical list of all the deficits that exist in African-American culture today: first in murder rates, poverty, high school drop outs, drug addiction, crime, and so forth. The professor then advised the classroom of future teachers to have their future students investigate these statistics to determine their validity. Upon completion of that step, the teacher was to pose the hinge question: “Why is this occurring within the African-American community today?” According to the professor, there could be two conclusions. The first is that African-Americans are inferior to whites. If the students believed that answer, they were in fact, racist. The professor claimed that the majority of the students would arrive at a second conclusion, which was that some 200 years of institutionalized racism has so disadvantaged African-Americans that struggles continue to this day. The teachers, claimed the professor, should then direct the students to deliberate on possible ways in which the African-American community can be advantaged to overcome these barriers.

I, now a veteran teacher myself, have never taught this provocative, anthropological lesson because I fear there is no way for it to be done without prejudice. The process of investigation the students would have to undertake would be so riddled with negative racial undertones, that the ultimate learning stage might be overshadowed. I fear that the students would become so fixated on the racist data, that they might not be able to move towards the more deliberative, positive nature of finding solutions to the problem. Furthermore, I would imagine that such a lesson would make my African-American students very uncomfortable. Margaret Meade’s provocative lessons provide somewhat of a blue print of how a social studies teacher might go about
such a racial investigation. However, the teacher with the courage to undertake such a provocative lesson must be extremely careful to assure that the message is not lost amongst the racially charged nature of the data.

**Why Teachers Avoid Provocative Issues**

Although not directly related to my line of inquiry, I would be remiss if I did not include reasons why teachers avoid provocative issues. These avoidance concerns help me better consider my own curricular decisions. Evans, Avery, and Pederson (2000) have demonstrated that some teachers will deliberately avoid issues that personally affect their students or the school as a whole (p. 298). However, research studies have shown that teachers who rely on the vital component of purpose to create meaningful, democratic instruction see tremendous, beneficial effects (Parker, 2003). Teachers will often evade the very same provocative topics that will provide the most powerful methods of instruction (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Parker, 2003). What is meaningful is often what is most intimate. Even more disconcerting is that what many social studies teacher consider hot, taboo, or controversial in regards to appropriateness were, in fact, seen by a majority of educators, as moderate in their level of controversy (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000). In *Taboo Topics: Cultural Restraint on Teaching Social Issues* (2000); subjects like sexual assault, separatism, race and intelligence, love and intimacy, and school prayer would be avoided by student teachers because they feared that these topics would most likely “put their jobs in jeopardy” (p. 297). This study tended to focus on pre-service, student-teachers who obviously would be more likely to adopt a “play it safe” mentality in order to get a job or keep a job (Evans, Avery
& Pederson, 2000). I feel that the Evans, Avery, and Pederson’s research (2000) could have been strengthened by evaluating veteran teachers with tenure to provide a true measure of what teachers consider controversial or taboo.

Fear of indoctrination created a rationale for social studies educators avoiding controversial issues. This was revealed in early research (Hoover, 1967; Morrison, 1944; Turner 1936). In the article, *Issues for Postwar Elementary Education*, Morrison claims that the avoidance of (controversial) issues would be the surest road to the Republics downfall. Furthermore, Morrison suggests that our inherent fear of indoctrination is due primarily to teachers’ inadequate knowledge of the social and economic problems of the day (1944, p. 19). The research also points to the fear that secondary, and certainly primary school students, are susceptible to indoctrination due to their flexibility and idealism (Hoover, 1967).

In his article, *How Not to Teach Values: A Critical Look at Character Education*, Alfie Kohn demonstrates how character education within the field of social studies can have conservative indoctrinating affects on the students that are taught controversial issues (1997). Character education, according to Kohn, uses controversial issues with the intention of having students conclude conservative, Christian based ethics as the best solution to the social conflicts presented. Kohn claims that character education programs and the theorists who promote them seem to regard teaching as a matter of telling and compelling (p. 432). Kohn writes that character education abandons neutrality and no longer fosters critical analysis (p. 431). The objective of such ventures is to no longer
think, but instead, learn. When this occurs, like the work of Taylor (2000), the instruction becomes polluted with elements of indoctrination (Kohn, 1997).

Although addressed in more implicit terms, Ochoa-Becker sought to define the fear of indoctrination when dealing with controversial issues through the lens of socialization and counter socialization (2007). Ochoa-Becker advocates for the introduction of issue-centered education, but she also realizes the significance of this decision. When a teacher manages classroom behavior, they are, in fact, socializing their students to the cultural norms of an educational environment (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). However, Ochoa – Becker (2007) supports a concept of counter socialization, whereby students who are introduced to issues are capable of independent thought and social criticism that is crucial to political freedom (p. 67). Ochoa-Becker (2007) seeks not to indoctrinate through the inclusion of controversial issues into the social studies classroom, but rather to introduce students to issues that will foster the growth of their intellect, their creativity, their uniqueness, or their interdependence (p. 66). In other words, she suggests that the inclusion of controversial issues into the social studies curriculum and pedagogy fosters free thought, rather than stifles it (Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

There still exist many, less altruistic reasons for avoiding taboo topics. Evans, Avery, and Pederson’s (2000) use the rationale of “explaining the silence” for those who chose to not incorporate these issues (p. 299). Social studies teachers, who do not practice controversial discourse, do not have to fear calls from home from parents afraid that their child is being exposed to inappropriate materials. The teacher who is focused on the content alone and better test results is free from criticisms of indoctrination.
Incorporating controversial issues makes a classroom teacher targets from citizens on both ends of the political spectrum. Perhaps Walter Parker (2006) said it best in his piece, *Public Discourses in Schools: Purpose, Problems, Possibilities*, when addressing reasons for the sterile environment in our social studies classroom:

> Yet political education in U.S. schools is unremarkable. One finds it nestled in the banal presences and absences of the everyday. Textbooks curriculum plans, anti-bullying programs, service learning initiatives, language policy, clubs, pledges and anthems, parent night, student councils, curriculum tracking, courses in national history, literature, and civics – these and other mundane symbols, practices, and curricula compose citizen formation in schools. Banality, of course, has consequences. (p. 11)

> When the school day is inundated with the mechanical operations that Parker listed, students lack the critical thinking skills that are so valuable to become a productive citizen in our democracy (Parker, 2006; Thorton, 1994). Furthermore, the *banality* that Parker writes of, to some degree, justifies the inclusion of provocative issues in that schools attempt to create these artificially sanitized environments in which students lack any interaction with the sometimes ugly truths outside the walls of the school house.

**Defining Provocative /**

**Connecting the Literature to my Research Questions**

This body of literature informed my decision making in regards to what themes and lessons embodies provocative. The literature provided me with a good deal of examples of provocative teaching as it looked in its time and place historically. Even
though issues like slavery and nationalism are no longer considered controversial or provocative, I was still provided with the greatest level of enlightenment by learning how educational systems addressed these topics in their day. Since the first of my research questions sought to have my students collectively build a definition for provocative, I was comfortable with lacking a perfect and complete definition prior to the study. Such a limited ontological body of understanding around the provocative issues as it pertains to social studies teaching only serves to further demonstrate that such a line of inquiry is needed in order to address the gap in understanding (Randolph, 2009).

The following definition teased out the literature and further clarified in the Evans, Avery, and Pederson article, will serve as a common foundation of understanding to be expanded upon as I conduct my dissertation research (2000). In their article, *Taboo Topics: Cultural Restraint on Teaching Social Issues*, Ronald Evans, Patricia Avery, and Patricia Velde Pederson (2000), focused their research of provocative issues around the word *taboo*, which they describe in the following passage:

In the culture of society, many controversial topics and issues are taboo. Taboo or tabu is a Polynesian word that means a general ban on a specific object, which should not be touched. For the purposes of this study, taboos may be defined as beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged. Thus, taboo topics are those that social studies topics teachers may choose to avoid or de-emphasize because of their perceptions or beliefs regarding the sensitivity of the topic. Noa is the Polynesian word that has a meaning opposite from that taboo. The noa topics in social studies
are topics teachers generally perceive as proper for discussion in local cultures.

Those topics do not threaten the belief system of the culture. (p. 218)

The concept of provocative as taboo helped inform my thinking when it is applied to cultural context. Principal Dr. Abraham Lefkowitz’s pamphlet asking students to question the tenants of capitalism was such a taboo in Cold War America, that Congressional Hearings were called to determine whether the school was infiltrated by communists (The Abraham Lefkowitz Collection, 1934 – 1966). The taboo topics that I sought to inquire about are issues such as: genocide, rape, murder, torture, sexuality, racism, and anti-Americanism. I used these provocative topics, as I feel they have been discouraged or deemed forbidden within the cultural norms of our educational society and, therefore, taboo (Burkholder, 2011; Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; FitzGerald, 1979; Hess, 2009; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955; Moreau, 2004). I arrived at this conclusion by conducting previous research studies on the teaching of controversial issues as well as literature reviews (Burkholder et al., 2011).

**Summary**

The three research questions formulated out of the literature provide a focused inquiry so that a meaningful understanding of how my students view provocative issues and how these issues affect my curricular and pedagogical decisions. The following chapter will provide for a description of the research design, including the research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology. The subsequent chapters will allow for findings, and a discussion of how these findings might impact the academy as well as practicing social studies teachers today.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

In Chapter I, I provided a personal rationale for a line of inquiry to determine how the teaching of provocative issues affect students understanding of the world history content. This rationale also addresses the need for a self-study to determine how these same provocative issues influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students. Guided by this rationale, in Chapter II, I presented a review of the literature that was organized through the lens of the political, social, cultural, and historical trends that affected what social studies teachers and students through the last century considered provocative (Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1988). For the purpose of this chapter, I will present a detailed explanation of self-study as methodology and how self-study has been informed by the rationale and literature review previously discussed. Chapter III will also provide insight into how my research questions concerning provocative issues were answered by the data collected and interpreted through grounded theory analysis. Lastly, Chapter III will demonstrate how self-study when merged with pragmatism (Dewey, 1897, 1916, 1934; Menand, 1997, 2001; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Powell, 2010), provided a theoretical framework that worked to answer the three research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions were developed with the idea that the intimate knowledge of oneself and one’s practice (Schön, 1983) can address a gap in understanding in regards
to provocative issues. These questions are rooted in my persistent quest to continually improve and expand my understanding of my students and my abilities as a practicing teacher. Secondly, these questions sought answers that would provide an original contribution to the field of social studies that would positively impact my subject and my profession (Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Pinar, 1975). With that end in mind, my three research questions were as follows:

1. How do my world history freshman students come to understand provocative materials in regards to the historical content?
2. How does my students’ engagement with these provocative materials influence their understanding of historical events and the world around them?
3. In what ways does the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students?

Self-Study as Methodology

This dissertation research represented a concerted effort to utilize self-study as methodology in order to inform my practice in regards to teaching provocative issues. Research in the area of reflection and reflective practice has had a strong influence on self-study (Kosnik, Lassonde, & Galman, 2009). The movement towards developing reflective practitioners led to a body of research that focused on the teacher as researcher of his or her own practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Researchers found that teachers could examine and problematize their teaching by reflecting on their practice and by becoming reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983). Although grounded theory was
utilized as a data analysis tool; self-study served as my method of inquiry into the provocative issues. Self-study methodology influenced the choices I made in organizing my study, but more importantly represents how I choose to live my professional and scholarly existence.

Self-Study has provided me with a way forward in my desire to improve my teaching (Dinkelman, 1999, 2003; Kosnik, Lassond, & Galman, 2009; Loughran, 2006). Prior to my self-study training, I attempted improved instruction through experimentation in planning. I would look at a unit plan, and carve out times in which I would inject critical thinking, risk taking lessons that I thought would somehow matched my goal of meaningful instruction. I would then arbitrarily decide the lessons outcome. If these lessons worked, I would keep them. If they needed improvement, I would add or change the lesson. If they failed, I would discard them. What I never did in these early attempts at instructional improvement was take the important step of reflection on why the lessons work or did not work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Crowe, 2010; Kosnik, Lassond, & Galman, 2009). What I was lacking was, as Kosnok, Lassond, and Galman (2009), writes the intentional human action linked to human knowledge growth (p. 25). This is the idea that practitioner research driven by self-study methodology can propel the multidimensional lines of inquiry that can serve as basis to inform my instructional decisions in a meaningful way (Whitehead, 1993). By reflecting on my own intentional human actions (Berry & Crowe, 2006; Kosnik, Lassond, & Galman, 2009) through journals (Mitchell, 2006), video tapes of my instruction (O’Brien & Korth, 1991; Penick & Yager, 1988), student evaluations of my instruction (Darling-Hammond, 1997;
Gallagher, 2000), and collaborative peer critiques (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, 2004), I began to improve my knowledge of my own instruction in order to make practical improvements. Rather than relying on subjective feelings towards haphazard decisions, self-study gave me the disciplined directive that I needed for improvement. This type of adaptability of practice (Crowe & Whitlock, 1999) began to inform my teaching decisions that allowed for daily improvement in my instruction.

Self-Study methodology influenced my decisions to use my students, my instruction, and my own classroom as the setting for the research. Many practitioner studies rely on other’s teaching and students as to provide for some manner of impartiality of results (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). However, the ticklish and somewhat delicate nature of provocative issues (Keezer, 1940) forced my decision to not outsource my setting to another classroom. I was determined to investigate these sometimes unpleasant topics (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968) directly through the lens of my own thinking and practice.

**District and School Context**

Ridge High School is located in Northeast Ohio. It is a large school with ethnic and socio-economic diversity. According to the Ohio Department of Education 2010 Annual District Report Card, Ridge City Schools had a racial breakdown of 14% African American, 12.4% Asian-American, and 3.3% multi-racial with 8.3% of our students labeled as economically disadvantage (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). Although this research study will be qualitatively driven, I feel that these data sets are still very
pertinent in that these numbers roughly mirror national averages and therefore add to the validity of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The community of Ridge is a fairly affluent, upper-middle class suburb of Cleveland that had a median income of around 100,000 dollars in 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2010). Unlike the school’s racial breakdown, Ridge’s socio-economic numbers are higher than the national median income of 46,000 dollars, and are significantly higher than nearby Cleveland which has a median income of 26,500 dollars (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Therefore, the socio-economic comparison does not mirror any type of national average.

**Sampling**

Since I am committed to practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), I made the purposeful decision to draw my participants from my own classroom. I taught two collaborative world history classes during the 2012 – 2013 school year. Each class had twenty four students. I passed out, to all forty eight students, the IRB recruitment and permission sheets to be signed by the students and their parents. My thinking behind including all of my students in the selection process is that I would rather have too many students to draw from than too few (Marshall, 1996; Patton, 1990). The recruitment and permission sheets can be found in Appendix I of this paper.

The sampling technique that was utilized was purposeful (Patton, 1990) selection. I felt that purposeful sampling provided *typicality* of the setting, allowing me far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represented the typical members of the
localized population (Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 1990, 2002). A random sample would not have allowed for this assurance of diversity (Patton, 1990, 2002).

My participants were from differing abilities and race. My decision in acquiring students of differing abilities was to assure *diversity in voice* (Mason, 2010). The yes / no survey that I constructed as a sampling instrument (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) helped me create the purposeful sample (Marshall, 1996) and can be found Appendix D of this paper. The provocative issues that appear on the survey were developed from the literature review. These issues were addressed by social studies teachers, past and present, in regards to the teaching of provocative issues. The chosen provocative issues were also influenced by the existing lessons that I had created as part of my continual self-study in improving pedagogy. These issues were framed around eight central themes: murder, rape, genocide, torture, sexuality, racism, and anti-Americanism.

Through the use of the survey, I originally chose thirteen students. The five girls were labeled Allison, Betty, Karen, Emily and Anna. The eight boys were labeled John, Anthony, Ely, Jason, Jackson, Nate, Brian and Dalton. Names were assigned to assure students anonymity. I chose thirteen students because I believed that was a high enough number to assure an adequate representation of my population, yet not so large, as to create an unmanageable amount of data (Patton, 1990). As the data sources were transcribed, analyzed, and coded (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), unique rationales (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from thirteen students’ thoughts on provocative issues began to help me formulate substantive findings. Those students were Allison, Anna, Anthony, Betty, Brian, Dalton, Ely, Emily, Jackson, Jason, John, Karen, and Nate. The bulk of the data
and corresponding results came from these thirteen students as I determined their thoughts provided more complex, nuance thoughts on the topics of provocative issues. I individually interviewed all thirteen students at least once during the school year. I also conducted three different group interviews on the topic.

Figure 2 represents the schedule used for sampling. The figure also better explains my sampling process.

Data Collection

There were five distinct sources of data (group interviews, individual interviews, blog posts, survey results, and journaling) that helped me answer my three research questions. As Patton, (1990) states, “multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective … By using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document
analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings” (p. 244). So this deliberate decision to have multiple data sources (Patton, 1987, 1990) came from the belief that it will better my credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and provide me further insights into how my students and I understand provocative issues.

Rarely are data collection strategies used equally in regards to their priority and inclusion into results of line of inquiry (Marriam, 1998), and this line of inquiry was no different. I have organized the various methods of data collection in order of priority and of importance for clarity reasons. I have also included a rationale behind each of the data collection methods in order to better explain my choice for their inclusion and how these methods provided answers to my research questions.

**Group Interviews**

Group interviews served as the greatest source of data in regards to answering the research questions. The group interview concept was difficult to define and seemed to not be grounded in the literature. Instead, the concept of multiple participants being interviewed simultaneously was generally framed around focus groups (Merton & Kendall, 1946; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). However, the three group interviews I conducted did not match the true unwavering, objective based nature of focus groups as defined by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990). Furthermore, Stewart and Shamdasani’s writing centers on focus groups as part of a process to clarify meaning or to refocus a line of inquiry (1990). This definition of focus group research privileges positivism in that the intentions of the focus group is to establish a universal truth that can be applied to all
individuals outside of a group (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The positivist priority can be seen in the abundant of focus groups in advertising and mass media (Taylor, Franke, & Bang, 2006). Therefore, I feel the incomplete, but generalized label of group interviews better represented my personalized data collection methods and my own personal intentions.

The first of the group interviews were sequenced behind the survey. The group dynamic compared to the individual interview allowed for the observation of interactions and group discussions. The group setting provided direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants’ opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such a conclusion from post ad hoc analysis of separate individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). Perhaps the biggest rationale for the priority that I gave the group interviews is that the group dynamic allowed me to talk less and listen more (Seidman, 2006). My own subjective questions were not as distracting when the students were interacting with each other through discussion and debate. Furthermore, the student’s statements were more authentic and emergent without my own interference through questioning.

The group interviews convened before and after provocative lessons were introduced throughout the school year to the students. These three group interviews were conducted after school over the course of the school year and started in the month of October of 2012 and ended in May 2013. The first group interview served as a general discussion on provocative issues. The other two group interviews followed the provocative lessons, which were planned throughout the year. These lessons can be found in Appendix A, B, and C. It is important to note that these three lessons were not
the only provocative lessons that were used throughout the school year. I used other smaller, one day lessons that served to supplement my instruction and the content. I have included these three lessons because they were larger, and generally based on readings that were connected to the curriculum. In addition, these lessons served as a common point of knowledge and stimulus for the classroom blogs, which will be an additional data source. These lessons also embodied the provocative themes that were grounded in the literature review in Chapter II (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The main goal of these group interviews was to learn how the participants talk about the phenomenon of controversial as provocative (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

**Individual Interviews**

I conducted one-on-one interviews with the thirteen participants to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of how the student participants personally view the provocative nature of these controversial lessons (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I originally debated whether these individual interviews were necessary, since the students were already getting the opportunity to share their thoughts within the group setting. I was also worried that their words and thoughts might be redundant to the group interview data. However, my fear that the *groupthink* (Janis, 1971) phenomenon would prejudice the thinking of the student participants influenced my decision to include the individual interviews. I have observed this group dynamic (Janis, 1971) when classroom discussions are being conducted. I, more often than not, have unanimous consensus of opinions; meaning students tend to agree with the majority opinion or a very vocal member’s opinion (Boateng, 2012; Janis, 1971). Boateng defines *groupthink* as a phenomenon that
sometimes encourages individuals to conform to behaviors and actions that they would otherwise not engaged in (2012). The best way to avoid the negative outcomes of groupthink, according to Boateng (2012), was to have facilitators or moderators remind themselves of the potential dangers that groupthink can pose on the outcome of focus groups by ensuring fair distribution of opportunities to all participants to voice out their perspectives (p. 52). This equity of participation and perspectives is difficult in a group environment (Boateng, 2012), and thus convinced me of the necessity of the individual interview.

Another reason I used the individual interview as a data collection tool is that I believe it would allow me to make personal connections with the student participants by asking the students specific questions about their personal biographies in order to tease out the nuances in their thinking in regards to provocative issues (Seidman, 2006). My intention is provide a safe and private place in order for these personal conversations to occur. This decision proved successful later in the school year when students became more knowledgeable about provocative issues and then shared more candid descriptions of their thinking in regards to the provocative themes. The student I call John, in particular, confided his personal feelings towards provocative issues late in the year during an individual interview.

The individual interviews were sequenced after the surveys were completed, and the first group interview was concluded. I also wanted to transcribe and code (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) the first group interview, as I found that the process of writing out the students’ words forced me to think more critically in regards to the
student’s thinking on the topic in order to build effective, more focused questions (McNamara, 2009) in preparation for the individual interviews.

**Classroom Blog Posts**

Since I began my self-study five years ago, I have made great strides in incorporating, what I believe to be, critical thinking and provocative lessons into my weekly plan. I have come to see blogging as a vital tool in enhancing discussions of my provocative lessons. For the purpose of my dissertation research, I created a blog post for students to provide feedback in regards to their thinking towards the provocative issues. These blog posts were compulsory in that students were given five participation points for posting an original thought or replying on another student’s post in regards to the provocative lessons. Although my thirteen participants were not identified to the other students in these blogs, my intention were to use their responses as data that would provide more insight into their thinking in regards to these provocative lessons. I have long used post-lesson surveys (Gallagher, 2000) to get feedback from my students about their opinions on the lessons. I see the classroom blogging tool as an technological evolution in this student evaluation process in that the blog allows me to get critical, reflective feedback (Herrin, 2000) from my students to inform my pedagogy. This type of *metacognitive reflection* has allowed the students to post on what was learned across the unit as well as discuss on-line how these learning opportunities were experienced (Luehmann, 2008).

These blog posts as data helped me see my participants interact with other students in regards to their opinions of the provocative lessons and materials presented.
Although the IRB did not permit me to use non-participant students’ responses from the blog as data for my dissertation, the participants interactions in these blogs, provided me with complex data that is absent of my voice and directive. Although my voice was never really truly absent, these blogs allowed conversations away from my verbal directive. As stated earlier, I sought qualitative data that was less adversely influenced by my own subjective voice and directive (Bogden & Bilken, 1982; Maxwell, 1992, 1996; Patton, 1987). So much of my other data collection methods required personal, rather than detached engagement in the context; forcing multiple, simultaneous actions and reactions from me, the research instrument (Meloy, 1994). The blog allowed some degree of detachment, in that I was not physically present in the blog, thus allowing the students to debate and share free from my own detrimental directives (Bogden & Bilken, 1982).

My rationale to include blog posts was rooted in my experiences with blogging over the course of the last ten years. Blogging is a powerful tool that has been influential in bettering my practice (Richardson, 2010). Blogging has allowed me to create a classroom that is open and more egalitarian (Freire, 1972) between me and my students. The blogs allow the students to be able to provide me with powerful feedback about my curricular decisions and how it influences their understanding of the curriculum (Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011).

Theoretically, blogging was to create an environment where social class, race and ethnicity was relatively invisible and all students could voice their opinions and concern in a safe anonymous environment that was void of the worry of being shouted down by
the loudest voice of a traditional classroom discussion (Herring, 2013). Unfortunately, until recently, my school mandated that any online classroom discussions had to utilize the school’s blogging tool which displayed the students name and time they posted, thus destroying the student’s confidentiality. This is yet another example of institutional technological policies weakening what should be a powerful instructional tool (Richardson, 2010). However, even with the student’s words being identified, I found that my classroom blog allowed for another safe space for my students to participate in classroom discourse and discussions that they might not otherwise do in a traditional classroom setting (Luehmann, 2008). This safe space (Luehmann, 2008) idea is especially important when dealing with provocative topics in which students might not wish to voice their concerns in class, face to face in front of their peers. However, when given time to reflect on the provocative issues, these students might, at home, write their opinions in what they perceive to be a more comfortable, safe environment. In addition, the informality of the blog often brings students into the discussions who normally feel constrained by the orthodoxies of the traditional classroom (Herring, 2013). Students will sometimes use less formal student texting expressions (i.e. BRB! instead of Be Right Back!), which they are familiar with and, therefore, more comfortable with (Luehmann, 2008). Although these are not usually considered an accepted form of expression in traditional classroom exchanges (Luehmann, 2008), I have learned to accept, though not endorse, this informal means of communication as a further demonstration that of student comfortably with the blog. Also, I consider such relaxed discourse to be further indication of authenticity, and an example of my students speaking from the heart, not for
the greater purpose of a grade, but instead, to get their own ideas out there for others to view and discuss.

The Survey

The primary reason that I utilized the survey was to create a purposeful sample (Marshall, 1996; Maxwell, 1996; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). However, previous small scale research studies demonstrated to me that I should not simply discard the completed surveys once they fulfilled their main objective of diversifying (Marshall, 1996) my sample. Instead, I found the sample to be incredibly useful as a data source when utilizing the other data collection methods. During the dissertation research, I found myself bringing the surveys during the group and individual interviews and asking the participants directly about answers that they put on the survey. This was mostly done for elaboration purposes (Maxwell, 1996). This would generally sound like, “Jackson, your survey answers demonstrated that you seem to be very opposed to a teacher showing violent images to their students. Can you explain to me why you feel this way?” These elaborative moments (Maxwell, 1996) allowed for me to probe deeper (Patton, 1990) in ways that the survey or the interview alone would not allow me to do. Another important use of the survey as a data source involved further investigation of contradictions in thinking (Polkinghorne, 1988, 2005). Polkinghorne describes this contradicted data as *languaged data* (2005). Polkinghorne states that good qualitative research is derived from an intensive exploration with a participant. Such an exploration results in *languaged data*. The *languaged data* is not simply single words but interrelated words that reveal complexity and contradictions in thinking (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). The surveys
allowed me tease out this *languaged data* when the results were juxtaposed to answers the participants gave during the group and individual interviews (Polkinghorne, 2005). These contradictions in thinking conversations would sound like “Jackson, you stated earlier in your survey that you were opposed to teachers showing students violent images. However, your conversation in the group interview seemed to support such inclusion. Can you explain this contradiction to me? Did you have some type of change in thinking?” Although rare, it was these types of exchanges that allowed for very rich data (Patton, 1990) to be drawn out, but it would not be possible without the use of the surveys.

**Journaling**

Since my methodology involved self-study, and since my third question was explicitly intended to address self-study as inquiry; I wanted be sure that one of the data sets was exclusive to my self-study purpose. My past experiences with self-study have taught me that through *problematizing* the ways I make sense of my practice, I can better my pedagogy and classroom interactions with my students (Clarke & Erickson, 2004). As a self-study researcher, I have been journaling off and on for the past five years. Through the practice of daily journaling about my teaching, I have been able to flush out problems that prior to writing them down, remained vague and difficult to address within my thinking. My third research question sought to determine how provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students. Although the other four data sets to some degree addressed my teaching; a
focused daily journal required me in a disciplined way to think and then write on how provocative issues influenced my teaching decisions and interactions with my students.

It is difficult to identify and articulate what any teacher is thinking while they are actually teaching, as we are so often pre-occupied with the here and now (Berry, 2007). Journaling provides a space for critical reflection and can serve as a cathartic experience to focus one’s own thinking (LaBoskey, 2004). My initial attempts at teaching provocative issues have revealed feelings of complexity and apprehension that was extremely difficult to explain. I have noticed that my anxiety level increases when topics dealing with violence, race, sexuality, and anti-Americanism, are breeched with the students.

It was only through reflective journaling that I began to transcribe the unsaid and unexplained (Brandenburg & Davidson, 2011). Previous research sought to determine reasons for teacher avoidance with provocative issues (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955). The nature of my self-study was to frontally address how my own pedagogical engagement with provocative issues influenced teaching and interactions with students. Answers to this inquiry would not be possible without the disciplined approach of journaling as means of reflection and enlightenment. Through these daily written accounts, I sought to reach a greater level of clarification by reliving and re-questioning (Brandenburg & Davidson, 2011) the provocative lessons. These findings will be reported in Chapter IV of this paper.

The following charts represent the schedule that was used for the inclusion of the differing data sources. Unlike the sampling schedule, this data source schedule was far
more fluid than a timetable. Figure 3 and Table 1, explains how the data collection methods were anticipated and scheduled to provide information that addressed the initial research questions asked in this study. Table 1, demonstrates which data sources were utilized to answer the three research questions.

**Grounded Theory as Data Analysis**

**Introduction**

Grounded Theory provided a set of data analysis strategies for this study. The formative book in regards to grounded theory was Glaser and Strauss’s groundbreaking piece, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). However, Kathy Charmaz served as the inspiration for my choice in utilizing grounded theory as a data analysis tool. When Kathy Charmaz wrote *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006), she based much of her work on that of the founding thinkers of the topic: Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. All of these authors urge the researcher to take a more naturalistic approach to gathering the answers. Perhaps Charmaz (2006) summarizes grounded theory best when she states, “Let the world appear anew through your data (p. 14).” The message is to embrace the process and go from there (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006).

**Rationale for Data Analysis / Matching GT to my Research Questions**

I decided to use grounded theory methods of analysis because they allowed outcomes to reveal themselves in a more emergent way (Charmaz, 2006). The less formulaic nature of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) permitted the true complexities that surround the teaching of provocative issues to materialize, and then be studied in order to create significance for me and my students (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a, 2007b).
Figure 3. Data method anticipated and scheduled.
Table 1. *Data Sources for Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Interview</td>
<td>The main goal of group interviews was to learn how the participants collaboratively talk about the phenomenon of provocative (Stewart &amp; Shamdasani, p.1990).</td>
<td>I felt that the group setting provided a space for students to share their feelings about their engagement with provocative issues. These discussions lead to debate over the influences (positive and negative) of including provocative issues. This was the essential to answering question 2.</td>
<td>This data source did not answer question 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>The individual interview allowed me to make personal connections about their biographies in a private space in order to tease out the nuances in their thinking in regards to provocative issues (Seidman, 2006).</td>
<td>The one-on-one interviews with the thirteen participants were intended to gain a greater appreciation of how the student participants personally view the provocative lessons (Rubin &amp; Rubin, 2005), without having the groupthink (Janis, 1971) phenomenon prejudice the students' thinking.</td>
<td>This data source did not answer question 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Post</td>
<td>The blog posts provided a space for students to have online discussions and provide insights of what constitutes provocative.</td>
<td>The blog allowed the students to express their own feelings in regards to the provocative issues. The blog allowed less teacher-directed conversations other than my original prompt (Richardson, 2010).</td>
<td>This data source did not answer question 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>The survey allowed for students an initial opportunity to provide me with additional topics that they saw as provocative.</td>
<td>In a somewhat limited capacity, the survey allowed students to express through yes and no questions their feelings towards provocative items such as torture, murder, rape, genocide, racism, sex, violence, and anti-Americanism.</td>
<td>This data source did not answer question 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>This data source did not answer question 1.</td>
<td>This data source did not answer question 2.</td>
<td>Journaling provided me with an autobiographical account of my experiences as a learner and a teacher in regards to dealing with provocative issues (Berry, 2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I utilized the foundational thinkers, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss’s constant comparative method in order to create a meaning behind my data (1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) actually advocated multiple data sources converging on the same phenomenon labeling such occurrences as a slice of data.

In theoretical sampling, no one kind of data on a category or technique for data collection is necessarily appropriate. Different kinds of data give the analyst different views or vantage points from which to understand a category and to develop its properties; these different views we have called slices of data. While they may use one technique of data collection primarily, theoretical sampling for saturation of a category allows a multifaceted investigation, in which there are no limits to the techniques of data collection, the way they are used, or the types of data acquired. (p. 65)

My five different data sources fit well into the grounded theory model. The slices of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) created from the group interviews, individual interviews, classroom blog posts, survey results, and journaling enhanced my validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the study.

In regards to my research questions,

1. How do my world history freshman students come to understand provocative materials in regards to the historical content?

2. How does my students’ engagement with these provocative materials influence their understanding of historical events and the world around them?
3. In what ways does the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students?

GT provided me the greatest potential in addressing and developing a constructed shared understanding (Freire, 1972) between me and my students in regards to provocative issues. Grounded theory’s allowance for emerged data (Charmaz, 2005, 2006) provided my questions and my study the flexibility (Charmaz, 1995a, 1995b) necessary to directly addressing the issue of provocative. Of all the data analysis instruments, GT, when pragmatically applied, provided me with the best avenue in answering my research questions (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a).

Evolution of Grounded Theorists / My Application of GT Ideas

Grounded theory has undergone an evolution over the course of fifty years (Mills, Chapman, Bonner, & Francis, 2007). GT followed the natural maturation of qualitative research, that in its infancy, saw only one single, static reality (positivism) to be observed and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). GT was extensively utilized within the field of science and medicine (Mills, Chapman, Bonner, & Francis, 2007). Today, however, grounded theory has expanded past its simplistic beginning into many fields and is applied to many complex theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 1995a, 2000). The following demonstrates not only the evolution of grounded theory as a methodology, but more importantly, my pragmatic application of the differing grounded theorist for the purpose of data analysis.
The purpose of this application of GT towards my dissertation research was as an analysis device to help address and answer my research questions. Although these grounded theorists do not represent a complete list, they do represent the grounded researchers that are most meaningful in informing my thinking and organizing my data. I matched the GT device that I used when it came to conducting my dissertation research. The following sections also represent the practices that provided me with the best instruments to analyze my provocative data. These GT researchers end with Kathy Charmaz, the modern GT thinker, who has made the greatest impact on my understanding of the analysis device.

**Sorting Provocative Language**

Glaser and Strauss constant comparative method (1967) seeks to identify a few local concepts, principles, structural or process features of controversial issues in order to establish a greater understanding of that phenomenon (p. 35-50). I used the constant comparison device (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to develop aggregate themes in student thinking through the interviews and blog posts, as well as distinguish *languaged data* (Polkinghorne, 2005) within my own journal. This was continued until a level of saturation is established. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explains saturation as the maximization of “differences in … groups in order to maximize the varieties of data bearing on the category, and thereby developing as many diverse properties of the category as possible” (p. 62).

The initial step in GT analysis was to sort (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) the data sources. I developed a folder based system as to sort students’ thoughts concerning the
provocative issues. This folder system was utilized instead of NVivo for my dissertation as I felt the complexity of the NVivo program too difficult to learn and apply (Jones, 2007; Welsh, 2002). The folder system that I established required me to transcribe, print, and then manually sort all interviews and blog posts. The sophistication of the data however, went beyond simple sorting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and instead utilized the more Straussian Version (Birks & Mills, 2011) of coding and memoing. An example of the original sorting process involving the survey is shown in Figure 4.

**Memoing & Coding Provocative Language**

As part of the evolution of grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss, in the 1990s, began to move the methodology away from the simple identification of principles for greater understanding (1998). Strauss and Glaser later fell out with regard to GT, particularly in 1992 when Strauss, together with Julie Corbin, published *Basics of Qualitative Research*. The publication marked a departure from objectivist, scientific beginnings of GT (Bryant 2009). It is also worth noting that the two men’s differences were not theoretical alone, and there was certainly an intellectual property disagreement involved (Bryant, 2009). Corbin and Strauss believed that grounded theory should “uncover relationships among categories . . . by answering the questions of who, when, why, how, and with what consequences . . . to relate structure with process” (1998, p. 127). In addition, Corbin & Strauss (1998) separated the methodology from its positivist foundations. This is explicitly stated through their own words when they wrote that they did not believe that there was a “pre-existing reality ‘out there.’” To think otherwise is to
Provocative Issues Survey – 12 Students (absent Betty)

Provocative - beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged

1. Would you be more or less likely to take a course in which the controversial topics below were discussed?

-Murder - More or Less Likely

M – 12 Ely, Anthony, John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Brian, Dalton, Nate, Jackson, Emily
L – 0

-Rape - More or Less Likely

M – 8 Anna, Allison, Jason, Nate, Dalton, Brian, Jackson, Emily
L – 4 Karen, Ely, John, Anthony

-Genocide - More or Less Likely

M – 9 Anthony, John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Nate, Dalton, Emily
L – 3 Ely, Brian, Jackson,

-Torture - More or Less Likely

M – 8 John, Anna, Allison, Jason, John, Dalton, Nate, Emily
L – 5 Ely, Karen, Anthony, Jackson, Brian,

-Sexuality - More or Less Likely

M – 9 Anthony, John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Dalton, Emily
L – 3 Ely, John, Anthony

-Racism - More or Less Likely

M – 11 Ely, Anthony, John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Jackson, Dalton, Nate, Emily
L – 1 Brian

-Anti-Americanism – More or Less Likely

M – 10 Ely, Anthony, John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Dalton, Nate, Emily
L – 2 Jackson, Brian

1. Do you think it is appropriate that such topics are discussed at the 9th grade level? Yes / No

Yes – 12 Anthony, John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Nate, Dalton, Brian, Jackson, Emily, Ely
No - 0

2. Do certain topics make you feel anxious or uncomfortable? Yes / No

Yes – 4 Anna, Antony, Brian, Emily
No – 8 John, Karen, Allison, Jason, Nate, Jackson, Dalton, Ely

3. Should teachers try to incorporate provocative material into their curriculum and instruction in order to increase student interest? Yes / No

Yes – 11 John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Nate, Dalton, Brian, Jackson, Emily
No – 1 Anthony

4. Do you need details of horrific historical events in order to truly understand what occurred? Yes / No

Yes – 9 Anthony, John, Anna, Allison, Jason, Nate, Brian, Dalton, Emily
No – 3 Karen, Jackson, Ely

5. Should students have to learn about historical events, even if those events might be disturbing or difficult to talk about? Yes / No

Yes – 12 Anthony, John, Karen, Anna, Allison, Jason, Nate, Jackson, Dalton, Brian, Ely
No - 0

6. What issues, other than those listed above, would you consider provocative in regards to classroom discussions? Please list on the back of this page

Overall Positives
Jason
Allison
Anna
Nate
Dalton
Emily
John

Somewhat Negatives
Ely
Anthony
Jackson
Brian

Figure 4. Survey and results utilized as initial sorting device
take a positivistic position that . . . we reject . . . Our position is that truth is enacted” (p. 279). I especially like the word enacted, even more than the post-modernist view of truth as created (Derrida, 1978). Enacted has more of a pragmatic connotation of constructed or performed knowledge in regards to GT (Bryant 2009). Corbin and Strauss’s recognition of multiple truths marks a departure for Strauss’s work with Barney Glaser who died in 1994 (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Without this advancement in GT philosophy, I would not have been able to choose the analysis device to address my research questions. My localized, personal connection between my instruction and my students in regards to provocative issues would not allow me to use a data analysis device that would force me to apply my findings and results to a global population in order to construct a single reality for all educators teaching secondary social studies. Since GT was employed as the main tool for organizing and analyzing my data, there existed the need for extensive, labor intensive memoing, sorting, and codifying of the students’ writing as data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The memoing occurred during the transcription stage of data analysis. I made inferences of comments in bold below the raw data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An example of this memo technique is shown in Figure 5. The memo portion appears in bold. In these memos, I attempted to find meaning, make connections, and create notes for future questions. Since I videotaped all of my group and individual interviews, the transcription phase was utilized to extensively memo, rather than during interviews themselves. I have found field notes (Mulhall, 2003) to be too distracting and laborious while the interviews are occurring. Since the interviews were all videotaped, my field
• Jason - So like in the news, when you hear about murders and stuff; unless it was like with your family, it does not really affect you. But I think that if you saw a picture of it, maybe it would really have more of an affect. Because you always hear about murders but when you see a picture or someone kidnap’s a little kid, then it affects you more than just hearing about it.

Here, Jason continues to present how personalized connections with provocative issues help you empathize more with the topic. Jason does this with a news metaphor but I think the parallels work.

• Nate – Well it is part of history. It is not like you can change it. I do not think schools should edit out stuff like that. There are videos about the Holocaust that they (the school) will not show in schools. But they (the videos) have a lot of information. They (schools) want to protect kids from seeing something, but I do not think they should do that. I think we should learn about everything in the world.

First, it is interesting that he used the Holocaust right from the start. Nate is a student that expresses great interest in history and is well versed in history channel documentaries. It is as if he is anticipating me showing disturbing videos when we cover the Holocaust. Secondly, Nate is very big advocate for the inclusion of provocative issues within his instruction, and makes it certain that he does not appreciate when teachers self-censor provocative material within their instruction. It makes me wonder how much I personally avoid topics, without even formally considering it as censorship.

Figure 5. Exemplar of memoing technique used.
notes do not have to occur live, and I can still observe using my eyes as well as my ears (Mulhall, 2003, p. 307).

The Straussian Version (Birks & Mills, 2011) of coding which I utilized involved the evolution from an open, axial, and then finally selective coding procedure (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 1998). Open coding is described as the process by which preliminary structures (categories) are established through very broad identifications of major language configurations of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 1998; Strauss, 1987). These original open codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 1998) were broadly labeled positive and negative of provocative issues based in large part from the survey results and the first group interview. It is important to note that students moved in and out of these original open codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) until more rigorous codes could be established to match the evolving complexity of the students’ thoughts.

Axial coding stage occurred in the spring of 2013 when my data collection was completed and some preliminary sorting and open coding has been accomplished (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Axial coding is the stage of modification of the original open coded data that seeks to first identify the core categories after saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and then to make connect casual relationships between those categories. During the axial phase (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), I moved past the previous positive and negative perceptions and developed more nuanced categories that attempted to distinguish students’ thoughts into separate categories of thinking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These categories involved a preventative group which the largest group of students fell under. The other three categories were provocative for grades, provocative
for interest, and oppositional. The largest group, the preventative group believed that provocative issues were essential in preventing future horrible events like rape, genocide, racism, and murder. The final phase in the coding evolution involved selective procedure. This is where the core theme was established or generated and a final emerged theory is created (Charmaz, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). At this stage, final comparisons are made until the data sets are merged or excluded and all findings are exhausted into contextualized categories of understanding in order for a final theory to be established (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

This stage occurred late in the spring of 2013, and is when I made the decision to focus more on just six of the thirteen students. The axial coding phase (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) provided me with perception that these six students’ data responses were becoming emergent themes (Charmaz, 2005). This is not to say that I dismissed the other seven members from the study or discounted their opinions. These students continued to come to the group interviews and their ideas provided valuable contributions to the findings of this study. However, the axial process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) demonstrated that these students either provided redundant data, or moved drastically from week to week in their perceptions of provocative issues making coding impossible. It was at this time that the three distinct findings emerged from the data (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006).

It was also at this stage I chose to exclude (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) the preventative label. As I worked through the constant comparisons (Glasar & Strauss, 1967), I noticed that students advocated for provocative as preventative, only when asked directly about it from me. Looking back on the transcripts of interviews and blog posts, I
noticed that the students simply echoed my questions in their responses, rarely providing
the preventative rationale on their own in a more hermeneutic way (Charmaz, 2005;
Grondin, 1994). In addition, the students could not fully explain how this prevention
would come about. As the year progressed and more data was collected, the
preventative theme disappeared from their language leading me to exclude this code from
the findings (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Emerged, Reflexive Provocative Data

Kathy Charmaz’s work with grounded theory moves the analysis device into the
new millennium, and her research marks the final departure from grounded theories
positivist’s foundation. Charmaz, like many other grounded theorists, started in the
medical field and was rooted in more of a constructivist philosophical position.

However, her personal theoretical development, as demonstrated through her own writing
and interviews, show some advocacy of post-modernism, as she continues to be a
committed grounded theorist (Charmaz, 2005; Puddephatt, 2006). Perhaps this change in
thinking is best demonstrated in an interview (Puddephatt, 2006) she conducted for
Qualitative Sociology Review when she said:

A number of people wanted to use grounded theory, but they were very
uncomfortable with the positivistic elements. The notion of discovering
something in an external reality, the assumptions about truth, and a neutral,
unbiased observer. I think one of the things that has happened over the last
twenty years is the postmodernist movement has made some of the concerns that
many of us had in the 1960s, and articulated them somewhat differently than we
would, but nevertheless brought these concerns to the forefront. It is very hard to ignore the position of the observer, as well as the issues around truth and accuracy. (p. 9)

Although Charmaz’s words stop short of a full-throated endorsement of postmodernism, it would be hard to say that her words are not moving into a critical theorist realm. It is Kathy Charmaz’s work that advocates for the *emergence of data* that lacks the *scientificity* (Lather, 2007) of grounded theory in the middle of the 20th Century. Instead, Charmaz forces GT towards a journey from the present to the future (2006).

Charmaz’s challenge to positivism informed my decision not to use nominal data from the survey as a preliminary sorting and coding mechanism. In October of the 2013, after receiving the students’ survey results, I developed a scoring system to measure and compare students’ responses to their peers. This system would have then applied a score to the student as to rank their feelings towards provocative issues. I even went so far as to consider a post survey at the end of the year in order to determine changes in attitudes. I soon abandoned this device, as I felt it provided and artificial quantitizing (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003) mechanism that neither matched my methodology, research design, nor my theoretical framework. Such a device would have not allowed emergence (Charmaz, 2005) of the data, but would have instead boxed-in students’ thoughts before they could be expanded into a more trustworthy results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The student’s understanding of provocative has asked me to utilize linguistic interpretations (Polkinghorne, 1988). Because of this, I feel my results emerged
(Charmaz, 1995a, 2001, 2006) out of personal conversations and on-line discussions. The students’ interview responses, blog posts, survey results, and my journal were codified and arranged in a way that allowed for nuance and reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006).

I became somewhat worried when attempting to utilize the constant comparison technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) amongst multiple data sources (Urquhart, 2010). The multifarious nature of the language and student dialogue posed difficulty in codification and compartmentalization (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 1998). However, the welcomed challenge in the end paid off when the findings provided some type of impact and a high level of implication. Kathy Charmaz’s work in emergence and reflexivity (2006) as it pertains to GT, has given me many sign posts (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a) for dealing with data that would be otherwise too cumbersome and complex.

**Self-Study Analysis**

The third research question sought to discover the ways in which self-study influenced my pedagogy, curricular decisions, and my relationship with my students. This question was meant to exclusively address the self-study component of my research, thus providing enlightened pedagogy and improved instructional practices, which are embedded within my professional rationale. Grounded theory was the main device for analysis. The data source that was coded and analyzed sprung from weekly journals I wrote as a means of reflecting on my practice and research (Berry, 2007; LaBoskey, 2004). These journals were written after critical events in which a provocative lesson was given (LaBoskey, 2004). In addition, I found journaling useful following student interviews, as these conversations provided powerful insight into my instructional
practices as well as my understanding of provocative issues. Upon completion of the
data analysis of my journals, themes began to emerge that progressed into findings.
These findings were labeled; The Closed Spaces of Sexuality, The Banality of Violence,
and Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster Critical Thinking.

**Theoretical Framework: Self-Study Pragmatism**

**Self-Study Pragmatism as it Relates to GT**

Pragmatic thinking has inspired me as practitioner researcher, who has long been
frustrated with the theory and practice gap. Grounded theory has direct roots in
pragmatism (Bryant, 2009). Strauss, himself, was always keen to stress that American
Pragmatism was a central component in his intellectual formation (Bryant, 2009). In fact,
the GT historian and researcher, Bryant (2009) writes that,

Strauss was introduced to the work of Dewey and James by Floyd House, his
teacher while he was an undergraduate at Virginia University in the 1930s. Later
as he developed his interests in both psychology and sociology, Strauss used ideas
from Dewey and Mead as his own work on action, structure and process
developed. Dewey and Pierce are mentioned… with a quote from Dewey’s *Art as
Experience* (1934). In his final book, *Continual*, Strauss makes extensive
reference to Pragmatism in the introduction where he charts his own intellectual
development, but this is specifically oriented around the work of Dewey. (p.13)

The term *Pragmatism* was popularized by William James (1902) and is specifically
America’s contribution to philosophical thinking (Menand, 1997, 2007). William James
believed that the value of any truth was dependent upon its use to the person who believes it (1902, 1907).

*Deweyan Pragmatism* (1916) took a similar approach, in that Dewey rejected what he termed *the spectator theory of knowledge*, with its connotations of passive observation of an accessible and unproblematic reality; a world-in-itself awaiting discovery. Instead, Dewey proposed *the experimental theory of knowledge*, and that all knowledge should be judged on its overall usefulness in regards to its knowing subjects (1917). Grounded theorist, Kathy Charmaz, in fact, endorsed this practical approach to knowing and problem solving as it related to the methodology and wrote that *Deweyan Theory* was well suited to GT (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a).

*The Deweyan Pragmatic* approach, in addition to GT methodology, creates a good theoretical fit when applied to my line of inquiry. The Deweyan ideal of *educative value* (Dewey, 1897) has served as a source of inspiration when addressing my instruction and research. Dewey defines *educative value* as the allowance of quality student interactions with important objects and events in the immediate environment that lay the groundwork for even more expansive interactions in the future (Dewey, 1897; Prawat, 2000). Dewey outlined his pragmatic approach to educative value in 1897 in a piece entitled *My Pedagogic Creed*, when he writes:

I believe once more that history is of educative value in so far as it presents phases of social life and growth. It must be controlled by reference to social life. When taken simply as history it is thrown into the distant past and becomes dead and inert. Taken as the record of man's social life and progress it becomes full of
meaning. I believe, however, that it cannot be so taken excepting as the child is also introduced directly into social life. I believe accordingly that the primary basis of education is in the child's powers at work along the same general constructive lines as those which have brought civilization into being. I believe that the only way to make the child conscious of his social heritage is to enable him to perform those fundamental types of activity which makes civilization what it is. (p. 77)

When Dewey references social life versus dead, inert history, he is making a powerful case for application of historical events into the student’s thinking and student’s lives. This speaks volumes in how John Dewey, as curriculum theorist, might inform future conversations about teaching provocative issues in social studies education. My own educative value (Dewey, 1897) for my dissertation research into provocative issues is to have my students consider how the violent, prurient, racist, and dogmatic events of the past affect their own lives today. My lessons as a social studies teacher will remain dead and inert, unless I stimulate the student to consider the history as it is applied to the demands of the social situations in which the students find themselves (Dewey, 1897, p. 77).

Our lives must have meaning, and I feel that my scholarly existence means nothing if it does not connect to my instruction and my understanding of my students. American pragmatists argue that enacted reality comes from what is applied (Menand, 1997). The Deweyan perspective (1916) of enacted knowledge as it pertains to application speaks to me in the following words:
Applicability to the world means not applicability to what is past and gone… that is out of the question by the nature of the case; it means applicability to what is still going on, what is still unsettled, in the moving scene in which we are implicated. (p. 215)

Our thoughts, although created in the abstract, are useless, as practitioners, if they lack application or the desire to ever have them enacted upon in any way. But it is important to note, that we are all practitioners in life, and therefore we all must apply knowledge in order to generate meaning (Menand, 1997, 2001). The moving scene Dewey describes (1916) in the case of my line of inquiry is my classroom and professional existence. I feel confident that GT will provide me with the most workable tool to discover what provocative issues as a phenomenon means to my students and my classroom.

With these pragmatic principles in mind, the following are a group of self-study theorists that have inspired me, not only to expand my own thinking about my research decisions, but most importantly, to better my instruction through authentic enactment (Henderson, 2009; Henderson & Kesson, 2004; Henderson & Gornick, 2007). I feel that these thinkers are not dissimilar in their ideologies, and can work together when pragmatically applied (Dewey, 1916; Pierce, 1902, 1907) to GT, in a way that helps me and my students make sense of provocative issues as it relates to my classroom instruction (Bryant, 2009; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a).

**Self-Study as it Relates to Pragmatism**

I am very inspired by the pragmatic nature of self-study research (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). It is my belief that disciplined study and research can be a very
intrinsic, personalized journey (Charmaz, 2006). The answers we seek are not always grounded in the literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, sometimes, the answers exist within us all. Self-Study is the intentional inquiry into one’s own practice (Dinkelman, 1999, 2003, 2010; Schön, 1983). My goal upon completion of my PhD is not to enter the academy, although I am committed to living a scholarly existence. I seek growth and maturation of my own pedagogy and because of this, I clearly see how self-study is a form of reflective teaching and, therefore, can further my own understanding as a committed educator and practitioner (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran – Smith & Lytle, 2009; Crowe, 2010; Schön, 1983, 1995). I feel that this practitioner research study is infused with self-study principles and is one of the reasons that I deliberately constructed the study of provocative issues around my own classroom, my own instruction, and my own students. The intimate knowledge of oneself and one’s practice cannot be denied (Schön, 1985). Social studies teachers stand to gain ideas about improving their practice and self-study offers as much to classroom teachers as it does to university based teacher educators (Crowe, 2010). This intimate connection to my research also works with the constructivist nature of GT methodology in that the data analysis device allows for the researchers themselves to make localized connections in order to create understanding of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2005). Self-study is an equal opportunity approach to knowing and being in education (Crowe, 2010).

Beyond my research interests, self-study has provided me way with a way forward in my desire to improve my teaching (Dinkelman, 1999, 2003; Kosnick, Lassond, & Galman, 2009; Loughran, 2006). Self-Study, when applied to my own theoretical
framework of pragmatism, has adjusted my own teaching and line of inquiry in ways that allow for practicality and workable solutions.

**Ethics**

Through the course of this study, I continually worked to assure my students were not vulnerable or exploited in anyway. I completed and received formal Individual Review Board approval in the fall of 2011 for a small scale study and applied for extension for the Periodic / Annual Review and Progress Report as an addendum to my existing IRB in the summer of 2012. I then, in the spring of 2013, applied for the Annual Review as to extend the study through the writing phase. I worked very hard to provide language on the IRB forms to assure that the students would not feel exposed to the sometimes difficult conversations involving provocative issues. Copies of my IRB recruitment forms can be found in the appendix of this paper and are labeled Appendix E, F, and G. As a secondary precaution to assure the ethical treatment of my students, I started each group and individual interview with assurance that the students are not compelled to answer any question, and were free to leave the study at anytime. On the IRB assent forms sent home to the students’ parents, was language that assured students would be provided a counselor in the unlikely event that they felt somehow mentally hurt by the study.

The ethical component also emerged in my journals as a self-study researcher. My continually referenced how I felt self-conscious whenever I introduced provocative issues during my instruction. My worry was that selfishly introduced these topics as a way to further my research at the expense of other historical content. I attempted to
periodically use a member’s check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with my student participants to make sure the provocative issues was not negatively affecting their academic performance in my World History class.

**Trustworthiness**

Such intimate, reflective, self-study research, like this one, was rife with credibility issues (McWilliam, 2004). Although I see such research as more authentic in its proximity (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), many see such research as a bastardization of inquiry and lacking scientific pedigree (McWilliam, 2004). The first of these concerns dealt with contextualization involved with my coding decisions. I made the decision to choose grounded theory as my main vehicle of data collection and analysis. However, I feel that codification and sorting is problematic to any researcher who endeavors to undergo GT research (Glaser, 2004). When the researcher is given complete discretion to decide what is, or is not important, human prejudice can enter the equation. What has to be considered is that different researchers, when presented with different data, might have organized the data in very different ways, thus drawing a very different conclusion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1994). My choice to codify and include certain data over other data had enormous impact on my results. I want to be clear that this type of credibility issue is not unique to just my own study. I felt that my self-study methodology address this objective reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1994) issue. In an effort to limit my own bias in the analysis stage of my research, I conducted a member’s check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with the students in regards to their interview responses to be sure that the codification process matches the students’ intentions. This member’s check
took place in the spring of 2013, during the codification process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but prior to the writing stage of the dissertation. The members check was as simple as providing my students with highlighted transcriptions of what was said, along with my memoed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) comments and asking if my assumptions in their thinking were correct.

My second concern is, as Lincoln and Guba describes it, the truth value (1985). Lincoln and Guba write that, “on the assumption of a single, tangible reality that an investigation is intended to unearth and display, the ultimate test of internal validity for the conventional inquirer is the extent to which the findings of an inquiry display an isomorphism (a one-to one relationship) with that reality” (p. 294). In regards to my study, there existed an intimate one on one relationship with provocative issues. However, my decision to have my students and myself through self-study construct a common understanding of provocative is somewhat unnerving. This was because I as a researcher have made the decision to turn away from the previously existing literature and move towards my own constructed reality. I made the effort to personalize the understanding of provocative issues within the social studies classroom and to rely on a linguistic analysis of my students’ understanding (Polkinghorne, 1988). However, I feared that I might have cut the scholarly bridge behind me. In order for me to assure that my studies maintained truth value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) integrity, I had to be sure that the students’ new construction of provocative issues did not stray too far away from the established literature on the subject.
Another credibility concern was of more of a pragmatic nature and less of a theoretical one. I must admit that this study asked thirteen and fourteen year old world history students to delve into some incredibly complex issues. The rigor demanded of them in this study might not have fit their intellectual aptitude, and the students themselves might not have the level of scholarly sophistication that I asked of them to complete this inquiry. There is a lack of consensus of what constitutes controversial as provocative within the scholarly literature. To some degree, I asked my students to accomplish what the academy had not. My strategy to overcome this limitation involved providing the students with exemplars (themes) through the survey and allowing the students to discuss their understanding of provocative using their own language. The definition of provocative beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000) and the exemplars of violence, racism, genocide, rape, sexuality, and anti-Americanism; served as an initial foundation of understanding. Although the definition and exemplars created a fear of pre-judging the student participants’ thinking early in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I felt that these themes, grounded in the literature, could serve as a scaffold of understanding so that the students and I could move forward to a greater level of understanding in regards to provocative.

Summary

In summary, this chapter described the research questions, self-study methodology, the research design including explained data sources, grounded theory as data analysis, ethical implications, and trustworthiness. The following Chapter IV will
provide background on the six student participants as to contextualize the students thinking. In Chapter IV, I will also present three distinct findings that emerged from five data sources with exemplars to support these findings. In Chapter IV, the findings will address my research questions in regards to how my students understand provocative issues and how these provocative issues influence their understanding of historical events as well as the world around them. In addition, Chapter IV will present the findings from my self-study to determine how the teaching of provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students. Chapter V will provide a detailed discussion of the findings providing implications to my research.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In the previous chapters, I provided a personal rationale and purpose for a line of inquiry that would intimately determine, through the use of self-study, how provocative issues influence my students and my own understanding of the world history content. This purpose was then supported with a literature review that provided past and present exemplars of provocative issues. These literature and research pieces demonstrated how social and political changes have affected social studies educators and students who had pedagogical engagement with these provocative issues. Out of this literature and research emerged the provocative themes that were introduced to my students throughout the school year. Lastly, building on the personal rationale and the body of literature, I presented a detailed description and justification for the research questions, self-study methodology, research design, grounded theory as a data analysis tool, ethical implications, and trustworthiness. All of these research decisions were made as a way to answer three research questions:

1. How do my world history freshman students come to understand provocative materials in regards to the historical content?
2. How does my students’ engagement with these provocative materials influence their understanding of historical events and the world around them?
3. In what ways does the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students?
In this chapter, I provide two sets of findings that shed light on these questions based on the data generated and analyze. The first set of findings relates to the first two research questions and the second set relates to the self-study research question, number 3. With regard to students’ thinking about provocative issues (questions 1 and 2), I found that some students had clear rationales for the inclusion of provocative issues. These rationales coalesced around one of three main reasons: provocative for learning sake, provocative for interest sake, and the real world phenomenon. These rationales advocated for the inclusion of provocative issues as the students believed they either increased interest, better their academic performance, or represented a reality in the human experience. Second (Finding 2) I found that one student held a clear rationale against the use of provocative issues in the classroom/teaching of social studies. His rationale was labeled oppositional as this student opposed provocative issues; viewing these topics as unnecessary or unhelpful to his understanding of the historical content. Finally I found in Finding 3, a group of students who had a varying range of nuanced articulation, varied their opinion across time, or lacked a clear robust rationale. This finding was labeled developing rationales. Unlike the other six students who had clear rationale for or against the use of provocative issues, these other voices involved complexities, fluidity in thought, and hints of other rationales. However, these developing rationales provided a more holistic perspective of student understanding of provocative issues. These rationales were labeled other voices.

In addition to the student data, journaling was utilized to explore my own rationale for using provocative issues within my world history classroom. These journals provided
a space for reflection on my practice in regards to the teaching of provocative issues, thus
addressing my third research question. Upon completion of the data analysis of my
journals, themes began to emerge that progressed into findings. The self-study findings
were categorized as: *The Closed Space of Sexuality, The Banality of Violence*, and
*Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster Critical Thinking.*

**The Process and Context behind the Findings**

As the data was collected and analyzed, coherent student rationales began to
emerge for and against the teaching of provocative issues. The students’ *languaged data*
(Polkinghorne, 1988, 2005) began to formulate around rationales that when constantly
compared (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) evolved into findings. The first two findings are
represented by the voices of Allison, Emily, Jackson, Jason, John, and Nate. The six
students were chosen, as they represented unique, consistent rationales for or against the
usage of provocative issues (Marshall, 1996). Biographical information has been
provided for each of these six student participants. This information was gathered from
my experiences with and knowledge of the students as their world history teacher. I
chose to include only biographical information and context that I believed further
explained the students’ understanding of the provocative issues. In the same way, I
excluded biographical or contextual information that I found to be irrelevant to the line of
inquiry or unnecessary for the reader’s comprehension of the findings. In addition, I
excluded some information that I feared made identification too easy or that was
confidential to my students and my school.
The third finding involved the other seven students, Anna, Anthony, Betty, Brian, Dalton, Ely, and Karen, and was labeled developing rationales. These students’ perspectives on provocative issues were not necessarily incompatible with the other two findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These students had a varying range of nuanced articulation, varied their opinion across time, or lacked a clear robust rationale (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1994; Marshall, 1996) in regards to provocative issues.

These *other voices* were also indicative of real life, in that the complexity of human thoughts rarely matches the positive, linear assumptions of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I chose to include these voices as a way to prevent the marginalization of any of my participants (Freire, 1972). To me, they represent more than just data points. Instead, all of my student participants symbolize an egalitarian pursuit of knowledge (Freire, 1972). Although the complexity of the *other voices* was problematic in regards to discovering a coherent rationale (Charmaz, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2005), their inclusion helps paint a more holistic understanding of provocative issues. The finding was labeled developing rationales as I believe these students had a belief system in regards to provocative issues, but systemic or articulation problems prevented a coherent categorization.

The students’ rationales on provocative issues sprang from the lessons that can be found in the Appendix of this paper labeled A, B, and C, as well as other smaller provocative mini-lessons and discussions. However, some of the greatest inspirational discussions on provocative issues sprang from the current events of the 2012-2013 school year. Since one of my provocative themes dealt specifically with violence, the students
used the coverage of Newtown School Shooting as reference to the affects that violent imagery plays in tragic events. The Syrian Civil War was used by the students to demonstrate torture existence in the world today. The students used the example of the rise in gang rape in India as a way to demonstrate that sexual assault is still a persistent world problem. All of these more recent events and their affects on the students’ thinking, paralleled my literature review that demonstrated how social, cultural, and historical trends affect what a society considers provocative (Giroux, 1988; Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1972). The reader will notice these current events referenced in the students’ language as they rationalized provocative issues.

The provocative findings emerged (Charmaz, 2006) from the differing data analysis after extensive sorting and coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These findings were grounded in the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), as well as the students’ words from the individual interviews, group interviews, blogs, and the student survey results. The first finding involved students who advocated for the inclusion of provocative issues. Their rationales for this inclusion was; *Real World Phenomenon, Provocative for Grade Sake, Provocative for Interest Sake*. A second finding involved a student who opposed the inclusion of provocative issues. This student rationale was labeled *Oppositional*. I did not view *oppositional* as disconfirming (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), but rather part of the larger conclusion on provocative issues. The first two findings were partnered with the six students’ rationales. Because of the complexity of language data (Polkinghorne, 1988, 2005), the choice was made to splinter the rationale labeled *provocative for interest sake* into two sub categories. These subcategories were labeled
provocative for interest sake – love of history and provocative for interest sake – love of the macabre. This was done in order to assure that all nuanced thinking was included as part of the results. The third finding involved students had a varying range of nuanced articulation, varied their opinion across time, or lacked a clear robust rationale. These students were labeled other voices. Table 2 provides findings with the student rationales.

The Participants

Finding 1: Students with Clear Rationales For the Inclusion of Provocative Issues

Allison - real world phenomenon. Allison was a fourteen year old freshman in my world history class. Allison could best be described as an old soul. Her classroom demeanor and conversational style made her appear much older than her actual age, and she seemed much more mature than the rest of her peers. Allison dressed in alternative clothes, moving between Punk and Goth styles. I often commented on her vintage t-shirts, as they sometimes sported bands that were popular when I was her age. When I asked Allison about the t-shirts, her knowledge of the music and the band’s history was astounding. Allison provided detailed critiques of The Clash and The Cure. I mention her style of dress and her musical knowledge, as it is very telling of who Allison is as a person and shows her own philosophical understanding of the world. These musical anecdotes reveal a young woman who seemed worldly and capable of complex thought. Her judgment of provocative issues demonstrated this same nuanced thinking.

Allison routinely scored the highest grade in her class. This was achieved without her ever attending any study session before or after school. Allison seemed not to be overly burdened by her grades. It appeared to me that her academic success came very
Table 2: Summary of the Rationales For and Against the Use of Provocative Issues

**Rationales For the Inclusion of Provocative Issues**

Real World Phenomenon - Allison
Allison believed provocative issues to be important as it explained the student’s perception of reality being unpleasant, disconcerting and provocative (Evans, Avery, and Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metclaf, 1955, 1968). She found her current setting within the Ridge Community void of such provocative themes, and therefore, somehow unreal.

Provocative for Grade Sake – Jason, Emily
Jason and Emily believed provocative issues to be important, as they increased their chances for critical thinking (Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009), and; therefore, would serve to better their academic performance.

Provocative for Interest Sake – Nate, John
Provocative for Interest Sake – Love of History – Nate
Nate believed that provocative issues were part of a larger historical narrative and; therefore, needed to be included to truly understand history.

Provocative for Interest Sake – Love of the Macabre – John
John valued provocative issues because he enjoyed learning about the gruesome details of history. In addition, this student disliked when institutions hid provocative materials from the population out of fear, or in order to better their image.

**Rationale Against the Inclusion of Provocative Issues**

Oppositional – Jackson
Jackson opposed the teaching of provocative issues as he believed it to be unhelpful to his learning and that the materials could offend others.

**Developing Rationales**

Other Voices - Anna, Anthony, Betty, Brian, Dalton, Ely, and Karen
These students had a varying range of nuanced articulation, varied their opinion across time, or lacked a clear robust rationale.
easy to her. This is not to say that she was in any way uninterested in my course. Her vocal contributions were consistent. However, Allison did not participate in discussions as a way to be academically rewarded. Her contributions to discussions in the class were not motivated towards some type of grade compensation. Allison’s involvement in discussions often created uneven dialogue with her classmates do to the complexity of her opinions. Regardless, Allison never changed her style and maintained a sophisticated discourse throughout the school year.

The individual interviews and blog posts provided very telling insights into how Allison viewed the world around her. Although she had not extensively traveled, Allison seemed much worldlier than a typical freshman. In the midst of interviews and classroom discussions, Allison continually referenced world events and other cultures to explain her own perceptions of provocative issues. Allison had shared with me that her parents had worked hard to introduce her to a variety of cultural pursuits, including concerts, books, art exhibits, and movies. Her father, in particular, had pushed Allison to explore these artistic outlets. Allison also shared with me that her parents did not believe in censorship. Because of this, she had seen mature subject matter starting at a fairly young age. As early as middle school, Allison was reading books and watching movies intended for adults. This was demonstrated in an earlier interview when Allison commented, “My family is very open and they do not try to hide anything from me. They don’t try to push it on me, but my Dad always wants me to watch the news and I do not always do that. But he will talk about things that happened like the things in Newtown, Connecticut. He will talk to me about those things. He is a lawyer, so he will talk about
things that happened at work and things that happened in our own family. We are very open about it. They do not try to hide anything from me.”

Allison was one of my most passionate advocates for the teaching of provocative issues and believed that a high school freshman should be introduced to this type of content. She stated very clearly in the first interview, “As you enter high school, you become more mature, and kids can take more mature subjects. We are going to learn them anyway, and it is better to learn them in the safety of a classroom than learning it in real life. Rape, war, and drugs and things are better learned in a classroom rather than first hand.” I believe that Allison’s parents’ permissiveness influenced what she deemed appropriate for others. Since she was already exposed to the existence of provocative material at home, it only made sense that other students would see what Allison saw.

Allison was extremely altruistic towards others around her. I had observed her consoling fellow students who were upset over a disagreement with a friend. Allison was particularly generous when our class conducted a fundraiser for Heifer International. Because of Allison’s caring nature, her rationale for the inclusion of provocative issues did involve some preventative reasons; meaning provocative issues could somehow prevent future terrible events. Allison referenced twice in interviews of the course of the school year the idea of prevention through comments like: “We need to have that detail and not some random facts so that history does not repeat itself and that it can’t happen again.” Allison also referenced prevention when discussing the Holocaust in an early group interview by stating: “We need to know what people really went through and the
people that were... put into concentration camps. It helps to assure that history does not repeat itself.”

However, Allison’s conversations on provocative issues seemed to be dominated by the idea that provocative issues constituted an unpleasant reality of human existence. To Allison the horrible attributes of provocative content constituted the reality of the world, both in historical and present day terms. Although Allison saw her current upper-middle class suburban existence as lacking horrible events, the reality of their existence should not be overlooked or avoided by teachers. An example of this type of thinking by Allison can be seen in these early quotes. “I think it is unrealistic to think that the world is like perfect Ridge and that nothing ever bad happens. People cannot be ignorant and they need to be exposed to it.” “I am not saying that Ridge is perfect or a complete Utopia, but if you go to another part of Ohio, even Cleveland, people are afraid to even walk out their houses, but in Ridge you do not have to worry about that stuff that much.”

I came to term Allison’s advocacy for provocative issues as the real life phenomenon, as it appeared eight times when Allison was discussing provocative issues through blogs and interviews. This view can be seen in quotes like: “Bad things happen in the world all the time, just because we do not see them first-hand, does not mean they do not exist.” However, her advocacy goes beyond simply believing the world to be an ugly place. Her conversation continually referenced Ridge High School and the community, but it was done in a way that reflected a sanitized version of her own life, void of any real provocative issues. Allison seemed to view Ridge as a bubble or vacuum
of sorts, whereby unpleasant realities cannot reveal themselves. When discussing violence themes in a book we had just read Allison blogged: “I really liked ‘A Long Way Gone’ because it showed how drastically different life around the world is and really made me thankful for what I have.”

Allison viewed provocative events as very real, only existing in other places. Perhaps this type of thinking was best demonstrated after the Connecticut School Shooting. I interviewed Allison the week after that horrific event, and she referenced the incident as a way of explaining her views. Because Allison had strongly supported the inclusion of provocative issues, I challenged her to provide some negative aspects of me teaching provocative issues. Her response was; “I think in a way, in some extreme cases, it might give people ideas towards violence like the one in Connecticut. But I do not think that, especially when you live in Ridge, people my age in high school will be like; ‘Oh, I am going to shoot up a village.’ In some extreme cases I guess it could happen, but especially not here.” When I explained that the Newtown, Connecticut community was very similar to Ridge, she retreated only slightly by stating; “I think it is pushed on us that Ridge is a great Utopia, and as much as I wish that were true, it is not.” This type of thinking revealed itself during a blog post concerning a violent book the students were asked to read. Allison wrote that, “I really like ‘A Long Way Gone,’ because it showed how drastically different life around the world is and really made me thankful for what I have.” Again, Allison reference provocative content and events as things that are real, but happen elsewhere outside of her own existence.
Another example of how Allison believed provocative issues were something that happened elsewhere was when the subject of sexuality was discussed in a group interview. Allison referenced European culture when she said, “I do not have a problem talking about sexuality but sometimes in people’s homes, their parents are not open about that so if you were a homosexual, you are afraid to tell your parents because they might be mad at you or disappointed in you. They might not be as open with you. Violence personally does not bother me. Violence is part of our everyday life. If I see somebody got murder, it does not faze me. It does not bother me. But in European culture they are much more open about sexuality. In American culture we do not talk about sex. It is much less talked about and is not an open subject.” Allison was recognizing that it might be difficult as a teenager in American society to come out to your parents, where as it might be less difficult in European society because she believed it to be more open in regards to sexuality. Her implication was that the Europeans were more open to the provocative nature of sexuality compared to Americans, because the Europeans were more exposed to sex. Again, Allison provided consistent belief that provocative issues occur elsewhere.

In conclusion, when considering the first research question of how do my world history freshman students come to understand provocative materials in regards to the historical content; Allison viewed such topics as reality. This real world, as Allison envisioned it, involved provocative events not routinely noticed or observed in her everyday existence at Ridge. However, Allison never denied the existence of these provocative events transpiring either past or present. As Allison saw it, to understand
provocative issues was to explore a reality one normally did not see every day; nevertheless, intellectual curiosity mandated these topics be breeched.

Jason – Provocative for grade sake. Jason was a thirteen year old student in my world history class. He was from an upper middle class family. His father worked as a patent attorney, and I know this because Jason had brought me historical documents from home that his father told him might be of interest to me and the class. Jason had an older brother who had been extremely successful academically at Ridge High School. Jason’s older brother was recognized as one of only a few students in the nation to score a perfect on the AP Computer Science Exam. Jason routinely spoke in admiration of his brother’s accomplishments and seemed to idolize him. Jason had shared with me that he did not believe himself to be as smart as his brother.

Jason was extremely academically motivated, almost to an obsessive degree. He seemed to want to learn and enjoyed participating in complex discussions, but I suspected this enthusiasm for intellectual endeavors in class was only as a vehicle to further his grade. To Jason, learning for learning sake, or altruistic learning (Dewey, 1897, 1934) was something of lesser value than grade based learning. I feel strongly that Jason admired the grade more than the knowledge he had achieved in my world history class. Content knowledge and Jason’s participation with the historical discussions were always an ends to a mean. His comments about other courses and other teachers generally formed around comments like: “That class is easy” rather than “I learned a lot in that class.” This fixation on grades can be seen at the end of each quarter, when Jason would ask about future evaluations. His grade had consistently been in the high ninety percent
range. When I informed him that his A was secure for the quarter, he was not satisfied. The closer to 100% he could get, the better he would feel. He routinely had the highest grades on evaluations and was visibly disappointed when he was occasionally beaten out by another student. In a school of academically driven and competitive students, Jason was one of the most competitive I had ever taught.

This was not to say that Jason did not value complex intellectual discussions outside of what was graded. His answers to open ended, critical thinking questions tended to start with the phrase, “It all depends.” He was able to conceptualize abstract thoughts and hypothetical, historical scenarios in ways that other students sometimes struggled with. He had a good grasp on the concept of historical thinking, much better than his peers, and he could model this skill in class debates, discussions, and presentations. Yet, when pressed about how or why this type of historical thinking skills mattered, he would attempt to link it back to academic advancement or achievement. The skills were always part of a process, and to Jason, better grades was the ultimate beneficial outcome.

All of this had strongly influenced how Jason came to understand the inclusion of provocative issues within my classroom instruction. Jason was clearly an advocate for the inclusion of provocative issues. When pressed for a rationale for its importance, Jason would cite increased interest as a way to better grades. He would admit that some of the provocative issues that were presented in class were unpleasant and could bother certain students. Jason, however, never, in the course of the blog posts, individual interviews, and group interviews, moved away from the position that provocative issues
made class more interesting, allowing for greater academic achievement. The following quote is very indicative of Jason’s perspective: “Well a lot of time I think that it (provocative issues) creates interest. Sometimes class can get pretty boring when there are simple answers.” To Jason, provocative issues in the form of pictures of genocide and graphic imagery in books are all ways in which students can be more directly engaged with the content. He used the analogy of the news in the second group interview to demonstrate this type of thinking: “So like in the news, when you hear about murders and stuff; unless it was like with your family, it does not really affect you. But I think that if you saw a picture of it, which probably would never happen, but I mean, maybe it would really have more of an affect because you always hear about murders but when you see a picture or someone kidnaps a little kid, then it affects you more than just hearing about it.” In the first interview, Jason discussed the need for personalized attachment by stating, “Like the Holocaust. If you don’t see pictures; I mean you always hear bad things, but when you do not actually see it, then you don’t get the same emotion. You always hear bad things on the news, but you do not see it.” Jason believed that provocative issues allowed for personalized connections that allowed students to empathize more with the topic and content. I found his news metaphor very helpful in allowing me to understand his thinking.

Jason’s advocacy for provocative issues, however, would not stray too far from his own dedication to academic performance. Jason saw the teaching of provocative issues as yet another instructional tool to further his academic success. It seemed that Jason valued provocative issues in the same way he valued essay writing or reading
comprehension skills. He would work hard to link this type of content back to his grades. The following quote demonstrates this thinking. When asked again how provocative issues benefit his grades, Jason response was “It helps me for sure, for my own benefit. I mean it helps it (the class) go faster rather than sitting there and doing nothing, but I do know a lot of people who say that they are in world history and they go to sleep and they get As on the test so I know that there is not necessarily a correlation but it certainly cannot hurt.” This quote again reflected Jason outcome based rationale for provocative issues. His comments often involved grades, whether it was his grade or others. Another statement that linked Jason’s advocacy of provocative issues to performance came from the first interview when he said, “Well it does a lot. It helps you think. Like you just don’t think this is a fact. It helps you think about what is really going on. It makes your mind work. You learn about different decisions. It does more than just learn about a bunch of useless facts that people will just forget. With provocative issues, it will make you understand things better.” Here Jason is simply making a case for learning and comprehension and does not directly reference grade performance. However, coding revealed that he most often directly referenced grades when discussing how this content was advantageous as a world history student.

Jason’s support for the inclusion of provocative issues ended when he believed that it could not be linked back to the content and; therefore, would not be tested. This was demonstrated in the very first group interview when an interesting exchange occurred between two girls and Jason on the topic of rape and sexuality as provocative issues. Jason, when asked whether rape and sexuality were bothersome to him personally,
replied, “It does not bother me, but sexuality does not contribute as much to understanding the content. If you know about the violence of the Holocaust, I think it helps but I do not need to know about random rape because it does not contribute as much to understanding something.” Emily, another student pressed Jason on this point stating, “I disagree with Jason. There are terrible things that happen and we should not simply think rape is no big deal and we should only focus on murder. Rape is an unfortunate thing to happen to anybody, so I think that they are both equally bad.”

Jason’s response to Emily was very telling. Jason replied, “It is not that I do not think they are bad, but I do not think you need to talk about it as much to understand the concepts. I just feel that the violence just shows more and when you look at like at the Middle East, you do not see rape. You look more at the violence. Like the one where they killed the people in the embassy. Rape is horrible but it does not help you understand more of what is really going on.” Again, Jason’s advocacy for provocative issues ended when he could not make a connection to the content, and so it cannot be tested. Jason’s perceptions of rape and sexuality as unnecessary provocative issues were also demonstrated in his survey results, as he advocated for all other provocative issues except rape and sexuality. Only through the interview process did I find out why. Jason was not uncomfortable with topics such as sexuality, but instead, saw them as not particular constructive when advancing his knowledge of the content and his own grade. To Jason, these provocative issues could not be tested; therefore, their importance as provocative issues was diminished.
What Jason had failed to do, I believe, was provide me with a definite connection between provocative issues and academic performance. When I pressed, Jason in interviews about his rationale and informed him that much of the provocative content I provided was not tested, he would simply retreat back into interest. When I asked what increased interest can accomplish, he seemed to have a difficult time formulating a reason other than it might lead to increased attention on matters of more testable importance, like graded material. Jason stated in the first interview, “I do not think a lot of people pay attention. I am kind of surprised by how many people miss the clicker questions. Sometimes I do not think people even read the questions.” The clicker questions Jason was referencing were the formative questions I used to measure whether students understood the day’s learning objective. Jason used the example again to show how provocative issues might increase attention, leading to more favorable academic results.

The provocative issues that Jason deemed the most important dealt with the topic of genocide. Jason shared with me early in the year that his grandfather was a Holocaust survivor. When pressing Jason on the topic of anti-Americanism as a provocative issue, Jason twice referenced the St. Louis, which I never taught in class. This somewhat obscure incident involved the United States Government in 1939, turning a boat of Jewish refugees away from our shores. The passengers were forced to return to Europe, many becoming victims in the Holocaust. Jason explained the incident saying, “There is a lot of times there are things we (United States) did or should not have done. I think it is important to know why other countries are better and things we have done wrong. I just know specifically about the Holocaust because my grandfather and Hebrew school; that
there was a ship that carried a lot of Jewish refugees to America and it went to Cuba and then to the US but the US would not take the refugees in and they were sent back to Europe during the Holocaust. I know that in many instances that the Europeans did a much better job of getting people out. I think we should have done a better job.” Jason’s words are important in that they show how provocative issues can become personalized and; therefore, much more significant to the student. Someone Jason loved, his grandfather, lived through an extremely horrible experience; therefore, others needed to know about it. It made me consider how my students are incredibly fortunate not to directly experience these provocative events. They might become even more passionate advocates for their inclusion, had they directly been exposed to these unfortunate provocative occurrences.

In conclusion, Jason believed that provocative issues would in some way improve his academic performance. Although Jason had a difficult time articulating exactly how these provocative issues would equate to higher test scores, he was steadfast in the idea that these lessons would somehow make him a stronger student. Jason’s advocacy ended when he believed the provocative issues could not be matched with the content. This explained why he did not want provocative themes like sexuality and rape to be included in the content, as he did not think such topics were germane to the historical curriculum. Lastly, Jason’s words demonstrated how provocative issues can be personalized based on family history and life experiences. Jason’s strong belief that genocide needed to be part of a larger discussion on the Holocaust was directly linked backed to Jason’s own grandfather who himself was a Holocaust Survivor.
Emily – provocative for grades sake. Emily was a thirteen year old student in my world history class. Emily was very social and seemed to be popular amongst her peers. She was a very hard working, conscientious student who, like Jason, was committed to getting good grades. She would generally seek extra help prior to tests, although I knew she fully understood the material. Emily did very well with memorized recall questions, but seemed to have some, limited difficulty with complex thoughts. Emily would comment that certain questions or essay prompts were tricky. These tricky questions tended to be more conceptualized assessments, meaning the answer had to be inferred from the memorized content. Emily did very well on the assessments throughout the school year. When points were seldom missed, they generally involved the more complex, conceptualized questions. This is very typical for students her age. However, this observation is important because Emily, when asked to provide a reason for the inclusion of provocative issues, stated that provocative issues helped her deal with the content in complex ways. I feel that Emily saw my inclusion of provocative issues as a way of improving her own perceived deficiency when dealing with the complexity of history. To her, the teaching of provocative issues was important in that it allowed for a personalized connection with the content, thus increasing the understanding of complex materials. Emily saw this skill as valuable to understanding of historical curriculum. These comments can best be seen when Emily was asked in the first interview of benefits of provocative materials being included. Her response to the question was, “It makes you think deeper and that you know that there is different sides to all people?” I perceive this

Although my line of inquiry focused strictly on provocative issues rather than controversial as critical (Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009), I found students like Jason and Emily referencing enhanced critical thinking as part of the advocacy for provocative issues. In Emily’s case, reading and viewing unpleasant images dealing with rape, torture, and genocide allowed for intellectual growth in some way. Another time, when dealing with the same question of the possibility of understanding history without seeing the gory details, Emily responded that the provocative images proved that these events happened. Emily stated, “You would be like; ‘wow, this is what really happened’ and you will understand it better.” Later in a group interview, Emily demonstrated this type of thinking again when discussing the Holocaust. Emily said, “I think we all know that the Holocaust was a terrible event, but it (provocative materials) lets us know what really happened. It is not then just something that happened fifty years ago. It is good to know the specifics from a primary source so we can understand what actually happened.” In this way, Emily was like Jason in that she saw provocative issues as a way to further academic performance.

Emily had mentioned that the inclusion of provocative issues into the curriculum was important because topics should not be hidden from the students. These statements were similar to Allison’s real world rationale. However, even when Emily was discussing provocative as reality, she still connected this idea back to college. This demonstrates that Emily saw provocative as a means to an end. When asked why it is
important to learn about provocative issues, Emily responded, “Because it is life. It is going to happen. We cannot hide ourselves from it forever. We are going to get exposed to it eventually, so I think it is an appropriate age to introduce it. Because if you are more conservative, with that kind of stuff, then we will go off to college and we will all get exposed to it, then it will hit everyone like a ton of bricks. You would be like, ‘why was I never, exposed to this stuff before?’ We should accept this and know that sort of stuff is going to happen in life.” Emily went on to add, “I heard stories of kids living under a rock their whole lives and then they are sent off to college and then they are like, ‘Oh my god, what have I been missing?’ And not just that kind of stuff but life in general. I think it is better to be kind of well rounded at a younger age so that you can be well rounded as an adult.” Her comments compared provocative issues of the world versus the world she experiences in Ridge. In the same interview, Emily commented, “I mean you have to look at it from a bigger perspective. Like Afghanistan and Syria, that stuff is happening as we speak. Here in Ridge obviously, that stuff would never happen, but it is in the world and it is out there so we need to know it.” Her thoughts were similar as Allison’s, in that Emily saw provocative events as things that happen elsewhere. However, unlike Allison, Emily believed that to be exposed to difficult historical realities would benefit her academically in some way in the future.

Emily’s strong advocacy for provocative issues was also demonstrated when the students were discussing in the first group interview whether matters of sexuality were necessary topically in a history classroom. Jason stated that rape and sexuality did not make him feel necessarily uncomfortable, but he did wonder how these topics would be
germane to the world history curriculum. Jason claimed that because they do not fit into a historical narrative, they should be avoided. It was Emily who challenged Jason’s thinking by stating, “I disagree with Jason. There are terrible things that happen and we should not simply think it is no big deal and we should only focus on murder. Rape is an unfortunate thing to happen to anybody, so I think that they are both equally bad.”

When asked why these topics were not discussed in history classes a lot, Emily surmised that, “We are more exposed to violence in the news and in books, but sexuality and rape is not commonly talked about. On the news, you will see something about violence, but you do not see as much about sex. It does not mean that it does not happen, but you do not see it as much. So I think that because we are not exposed to it, that would make people not want to talk about it.”

In conclusion, Emily, like Jason, valued the teaching of provocative issues to further her own academic performance. However, Emily more clearly linked the learning of provocative issues to her own improvement of critical thinking. Emily reasoned, “It makes you think deeper.” Emily’s belief in provocative issues existed because she connected such issues to critical thinking (Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009). My second research question sought to determine how my students’ engagement with these provocative materials influences their understanding of historical events and the world around them. Emily and Jason’s rationales addresses this question in that they strongly believed that provocative materials bettered their understanding of the content and therefore improved their academic performance. Although these students sometime lacked a clear articulation between academic achievement and the provocative themes,
their beliefs should not be dismissed. One must consider the complex nature of these discussions and how difficult it was for these students to clearly communicate their feelings.

**Nate – provocative for interest sake / love of history.** Nate was a 13 year old student in my world history class. He was small in stature, even for a typical high school freshman. He was always happy with a smile. Nate had some medical issues that had impaired his reading comprehension and writing skills. Despite these cognitive setbacks, Nate had a boundless love of history. From the beginning of the school year, Nate established himself as a vocal leader in my class providing interesting antidotes that were connected to the content being presented. He had a particular love of WWII history, and had told me he was a devoted fan of the *History* and *Military Channels*. Nate’s contributions were most prevalent during my lectures, and it was during these where he liked to answer questions posed and provide comment on the material. However, my world history students were often in small groups and during these group activities, Nate rarely spoke and became easily distracted. I felt that his maturity level, not his learning disability, was the obstacle in his lack of participation when the students were in groups. I came to count on Nate’s contribution during my lectures. Regardless of the topic, his participation in class broke the monotony of my lectures. His contributions would start with, “*I saw on the History Channel*” or “*My Mom and Dad once lived next to a women who lived through the Battle of Britain.*” The stories match the content that was being taught and were generally interesting to me, although I do not know how Nate’s classmates viewed them. Nate had once told his tutor that he liked my course and that he
viewed himself as a historian. This information made me very happy to hear. Nate even volunteered to help other students in his tutor’s classroom if they were struggling with history. Although particularly good at recalling facts and dates, Nate would struggle with complex thoughts and ideas. When asked to consider alternative historical circumstances and scenarios, Nate would not provide detailed perspectives. He viewed history from a very positivist perspective. Wars, people, and events of the past, to Nate, were unchanging truths. This type of mind set, which I found to be is very typical for his age group, can be seen when I asked in the first interview, if any topics bothered him. Nate’s reply was, “Well, it is part of history. It is not like you can change it. I do not think schools should edit out stuff like that. There are videos about the Holocaust that they will not show in schools. But they have a lot of information. They want to protect kids from seeing something, but I do not think they should do that. I think we should learn about everything in the world.” The first sentence is very telling in how Nate understands history. He does not see history as a human construct (Thornton, 2005; Zinn, 1980). Historical events to Nate have never changed, and would be interpreted the same today as the day they actually happened. To Nate, these disturbing provocative elements occurred and; therefore, needed to be studied.

Nate’s grades had been consistently within the high C range. Nate knew the content better than many of his peers. He did above average when answering a multiple choice question, and excelled at recalling trivia like historical questions. However, his essay writing lacked the necessary explanation to get full credit. His essays would generally include the correct answer, yet had little elaboration, leaving terms undefined.
and concepts unexplained. I had tried to get Nate to improve upon this deficiency, with limited success. He seemed unbothered by his current grades, and he did not challenge or question his marks after a test. I mention Nate’s grades and academic performance, as I feel it provides a powerful insight into how he viewed provocative content within my classroom instruction. Nate’s advocacy for teaching provocative issues involved increased interest in the content. Nate saw the inclusion of provocative content as something that would peak student interest levels and make history more enjoyable to learn, even when the topics are unpleasant. However, Nate was not an outcome-based, grade-driven learner like Jason and Emily. Nate did not see increased levels of interest in the material as a way to further his grade in the class. Nate’s love of history was refreshingly genuine. His contribution was not to impress me or his fellow students. It was not to gain any type of favorability in regards to his grade. When I asked if learning provocative issues helped a student understand the content, Nate response was, “It can help you, I guess, understand what is really going on. Like Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights Movement. We need to know about the murders and their treatment. When that whole thing was going on, no one focused on people being shot and that stuff, and the people who were attacked for supporting that. They (schools) do not show a lot of stuff like that, and I think they should. They (schools) should go behind the scenes and show personal lives.” It is interesting to me that Nate referenced the Civil Rights Movement despite the fact that it was never a provocative topic or lesson I presented to his class. He cited the event without prompting from me, as a provocative topic. After coding his words, I found this comment to match both the anti-American, racism, and
violence themes. To Nate, provocative events, like racial killings during the Civil Right Movement, should be taught, simply because they happened.

When pushed to further explain how these graphic images helped you understand the material, Nate provided me with the following analogy. “Say you’re reading it (something provocative) in a book. It is just a book, and it is really not that big of a deal. But it was to them (the people in the story). You are putting yourself in their shoes. If you see the picture, you really understand what is going on.” Again, Nate advocated for the inclusion of provocative material because they provide historians with insights into the events of the past.

I particularly like how Nate referenced primary sources and personal narratives. In the group interview, Nate referenced the book, A Long Way Gone that I had the students read as part of a larger unit on imperialistic affects in the modern era. The autobiographical book was written by Ishmael Beah who was a child soldier during the Sierra Leone Civil War. The book provided violently graphic descriptions of Beah’s life as a child soldier. Nate used the book twice to reference how the violent images, although unpleasant, gave him a greater perspective of what actually occurred. Nate commented on the book by saying, “Well like, some of the things in ‘A Long Way Gone’ I really do not want to say it because it is kind of graphic and not school appropriate to say, but it is just hard to believe that someone could do such a thing.

When I asked Nate if it was enough for him to say that we should not have read the book, his comments were, “No. I think that it was good that we read the book, so no. But it was not just like another page in a book.” Nate would not go as far to say we should not
read the book, but he was clearly stating that the book was not like other books he had read in the past, and hinged on calling the book school appropriate. These comments made me consider, as a self-study researcher, the limits or thresholds of provocative issues. Although Nate at the time thought the threshold of decency was not crossed; a clear limitation was never established. These are issues that I will seek to address in Chapter V of this study that will focus on the self-study implications of this line of inquiry.

In conclusion, Nate viewed history not as a human construct (Levstik & Barton, 2011; Zinn, 1980), but rather as a set of facts, dates, and events that occurred and needed to be discovered, but not necessarily analyzed. Nate saw provocative themes as historical reality, and as a historian, one cannot turn away from these true events. Nate’s rationale addresses my first research questions in that his understanding of provocative history was that these events were factual static occurrences that must be examined. When considering the second research question, Nate strongly believed that these provocative themes needed to be included in order to have a holistic appreciation for history. Nate approached historical items like a detective in search of the facts. Any good detective would get the whole story, regardless of how unpleasant it might be.

**John – provocative for interest sake / love of the macabre.** John was a thirteen year old student in my world history class. He came from a middle class African-American family. He was a quiet student and rarely spoke in class unless called upon. However, when given a chance to speak, John provided very insightful points that furthered discussions. He was a critical thinker who was able to dissect complex issues.
John’s grades were average when compared to that of his peers, although I felt that he was capable of better work. John would sometimes admit that he did not study as hard as he should have prior to tests, and he occasionally did not turn in assignments. John’s essay writing tended to be stronger than his multiple choice performance.

I had noticed that John kept a private journal and he enjoyed writing poetry. I once asked and received permission to read some of John’s private prose. His writing gave some insight into John’s feeling towards provocative issues. John’s poems were written in poetry-slam fashion and involved some profanity and violent imagery. Although, not overtly political, the themes were directed at society and institutions that John perceived to be wicked. Both this cynicism of society and darkness of theme were very telling in explaining how John viewed the teaching of provocative issues and the world around him.

John’s cynicism of institutions had impacted his advocacy for the teaching of provocative issues. He had stated that he became angry when teachers would withhold information from students because the narrative would conflate an otherwise positive message. John shared this frustration in his first individual interview when he stated, “I been told by other teachers that, ‘there is more to the story but we do not want to discuss that.’ Like there is more to the story but they are not going to tell it to you. I feel like, ‘why can’t you tell me that?’ I mean, I know it is probably controversial or uncomfortable but I still want to know about it; because they are painting the picture of a person like they are great, but what did they do wrong?”
John’s perspective was that students deserve to hear all parts of historical events and biographies, not just the events that make people and events appear agreeable. John’s comments followed questions concerning anti-Americanism as a provocative theme. I used as an exemplar of this provocative theme the historical figure, Thomas Jefferson. When discussing the enlighten philosophers at the beginning of the school year, I asked the class to consider whether Thomas Jefferson could still be enlightened when he owned slaves and had a sexual relationship with Sally Hemings. During the individual interview, I asked John whether it was appropriate for me to ask such questions regarding beloved historical figures like Jefferson. John was adamant in his support for the inclusion of such negative antidotes about Jefferson. He was very incredulous towards any educator who would choose to not share something negative.

However, John did not see the teaching of provocative issues as a device to prevent bad things from happening in the future. Just as John was skeptical towards society, John was equally pessimistic towards a teacher’s ability to use provocative issues as a way to end future unpleasant events. He made this reference in an individual interview concerning the Holocaust when he said, “You taught us about genocide and the Holocaust. We were educated about that. But if someone were to grow up in a household or in an environment that was biased towards certain people, then it would not change it.” John believed that racist, wicked, and apathetic students will remain that way regardless of my curriculum choices and my pedagogy.

John was the only student to admit that he was drawn to the macabre. By macabre, I mean graphic pictures and literature of real violence and death in various forms. John
simply referred to such content as the “gory stuff.” This quote came during the second individual interview very late in my research gathering. I considered why John would have shared this macabre perspective so late in the year, rather than earlier when we I could have probe the topic more deeply (Patton, 1990). However, my assumption was that John, just like with his poetry, needed to feel comfortable with me as a teacher and researcher in order to share something so personal. It also made me consider how many other students shared John’s fondness of the macabre, and whether I truly made the students feel safe in order to share all of their true thoughts about provocative issues.

John explained his love of the macabre in this way: “For me, this is just my personal opinion. I tend to pay more attention to gory stuff. It catches my attention. I focus in and listen to what you have to say.” He also commented during an earlier individual interview that, “I mean it is not something that we need to know but it is interesting to learn that. Knowing that he (Jefferson) was an enlighten philosopher and there is also these dark sides to the story, makes it controversial and that is pretty interesting.” The dark side that John spoke of might draw many of us to unpleasant images. However, some of us, unlike John, might not have the courage to admit this. John seemed to be attracted to provocative issues in the same way a person would be attracted to a horror film.

Interested in this phenomenon, I asked the student participants in the second group interview whether students are drawn to macabre images in the same way people cannot turn away from a car crash on the side of the road. John was not able to attend that second interview. The only other student to speak on the topic was Allison. Allison,
although not speaking for herself, described other interests as, “I think it is human nature to want to see violence with the car crash phenomenon. Like if there is a car crash on the freeway, the other side will slow down. That is why people want to see horror movies, because they like to be afraid. You want to see horror movies because you know it can never happen, but you want to see the violence.” I feel that this macabre phenomenon, could have been something that I explored more fully had I had more time.

In conclusion, John valued provocative issues as the gory stuff did more to catch his attention. John was the student I most wished I had more time to talk to, as I believe his thinking in regards to provocative issues represents a level of complexity I still have not fully realized or understood. His words express a young man who saw provocative issues as necessary. John’s honesty in regards to the love of the macabre, to some degree complicates some of the perceived beneficial results of provocative issues. His words forces careful consideration in regards to the degree a teacher is willing to increase student interest in the content. Elements of sensationalism and glorification of atrocious events must be considered.

In addition, John cynically viewed institutions or educators who would intentionally hide information from their students. John, more than my other students, believed the anti-American theme of provocative as necessary. It showed the imperfections of historical figures that a skeptical John seemed to suspect existed all along. John abhorred censorship in all its form. Like Allison, John had been exposed to some provocative material at home. When discussing violent video clips shown in class and whether such clips were appropriate, John answered: “My mom had me watch most
of it. Even then it did not trigger an emotion with me. I need to know about it. The sooner I know the better.” It is also important to note that, like Allison, John has mentioned the way he has been raised by his parents. Both Allison and John were very permissive when it came to the inclusion of provocative issues, and parental decisions at home in regards to censorship of provocative material obviously influence student’s perceptions of these topics at school. John viewed macabre events with increased interest. Such images and descriptions seemed to influence John’s poetry and the way in which he viewed the world.

**Finding 2: Student with Clear Rationales Against the Inclusion of provocative Issues**

**Jackson – oppositional.** Jackson was a 13 year old freshman student in my world history class. He was an above average student who had demonstrated throughout the year exemplarily performance on evaluations. Jackson was a particularly gifted writer and he seemed to excel on essay evaluations. Jackson was a vocal leader in my class. He was quite capable of taking part in complex discussions by analyzing abstract, alternative historical outcomes. I had come to rely on Jackson’s participation in class as he seemed to be very engaged in the content, and was quick to provide answers to questions or comments in discussions. Jackson, like Allison, seemed to be more mature than the rest of the freshmen. Jackson was a popular student who dressed in a *hipster fashion*. His political beliefs tended to be liberal. This led me to a faulty assumption. My assumption, prior to the study, was that Jackson would whole heartedly endorse the inclusion of provocative issues. His survey results at the beginning of the school year
demonstrated differently. Jackson, right from the start of my research, opposed the inclusion of the teaching of torture and genocide. Out of my original thirteen participants, Jackson was one of only five students to mark that they would be less likely to take a course where these topics were introduced. Although surprised by Jackson’s survey results, I was pleased to see his opinions, as they represented a minority voice, thus providing me with richer, more diverse data. Using the survey results, I planned to ask Jackson during the individual interview, probing questions as to why he had apprehension towards the teaching of provocative issues.

During the individual interviews, Jackson again demonstrated apprehension against the inclusion of provocative issues through comments like, “It (provocative issues) might make some people feel uncomfortable.” Jackson’s perspective was that provocative subjects did not make him personally uncomfortable, stating in an early interview that, “I do not have a problem with violence, but I think it is unnecessary if it does not need to be taught. If it doesn’t enhance the lesson than I do not think it should be taught.” He seemed to want to protect others who might find these topics to be objectionable. I originally assumed that Jackson had some apprehension to the teaching of provocative issues for some type of moral or religious reasons, but when asked about his moral standing Jackson responded, “I am not a very religious person, but some people are so they might be sensitive to the topic.” This comment was interesting in that Jackson again believed provocative issues might be offensive to others’ religious beliefs and; therefore, should be avoided. Perhaps Jackson was such an altruistic person that his concern for other’s feelings in regards to provocative issue surpassed that of his own.
In addition to his fear of offending, I have come to believe that Jackson’s opposition to the teaching of provocative issues might exist because he believed it is unnecessary to his or others’ learning. In the first group interview, I asked a routine question about the necessity of provocative issues. The question was framed around the Holocaust and whether the students needed to see victims of the horrific event in order to understand that it happened. Jackson’s response was consistent to his later comments on provocative issues when he stated, “When I hear that millions of people died, I kind of get a vision and I realize that it wasn’t good. I mean, I know it was a bad event.” This statement clearly reflected Jackson’s belief that learning can occur without viewing the unpleasant events of history.

In conclusion, Jackson opposed provocative issues for two reasons. Both of these reasons frontally address the second research question which asks how these provocative issues influence the students’ understanding of the world history content. First, Jackson worried that other students might find provocative materials to be offensive. Although Jackson did not consider himself particularly moral or religious, he did worry that students who held religious or moral beliefs might find such content as distasteful. Secondly, he saw a teacher being intentionally provocative as unhelpful to his or others’ learning. He had recognized that provocative issues might increase interest, but he viewed such interest in provocative content as unnecessary. Both of these oppositional positions can be demonstrated in the following quotes from Jackson’s individual interview: “I personally find it more interesting, but if it doesn’t have anything to do with
it (the lesson) and people are against it, than I do not think it is the biggest deal that teachers do not teach it.”

I wonder how Jackson viewed my own research and whether he thought I was providing the students with provocative themes for my own selfish academic achievements. Did Jackson believe that I, as a teacher, was being provocative for provocative sake? Was I in danger of offending my students by providing the stimulus of my research? I asked Jackson these questions, and both times he informed me that he did not think that I was manipulating my pedagogy to include provocative issues for selfish reasons. However, such answers should not be taken as statements of truth. Jackson would probably feel uncomfortable criticizing my teaching decisions in front of me. These concerns are addressed in my self-study.

**Finding 3: Students Who Lack A Clear Rationale in Regards to Provocative Issues**

**Other voices - Anna, Anthony, Betty, Brian, Dalton, Ely, and Karen.** The following seven students’ interviews and blogs were coded and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and then labeled as developing rationales. Their voices represent students who had yet to develop clear rationales for the inclusion or exclusion of provocative issues. Their voices demonstrate a varying range of nuanced articulation, varied their opinion across time, or lacked a clear robust rationale.

I came to label this group of students as *other voices*. Some of the students’ perceptions were insightful but did not directly address the line of inquiry (Maxwell, 1996). For instance, the student who I call Anthony provided powerful discussions on issues that only vaguely dealt with provocative themes. Some of these *other voices*
shared in various nuanced ways, elements of the rationales supporting the first two findings. For example, Karen had similar *real world* language like Allison. However, unlike Allison, Karen believed that the provocative themes presented were not provocative at all. Anna and Brian too provided some nuanced elements of the rationales from the first finding. However, Anna and Brian advocacy seemed to lack the elaboration needed for a true consistent rationale to be determined. Some of these students provided varied opinion across time. Ely seemed to change his opinion on provocative issues from opposition to advocacy as the school year progressed, creating a powerful and interesting dynamic to pedagogical effects of provocative content. I want to be clear that the students’ words were not oppositional to the other two findings. Instead, these students represent an important voice within the research that demonstrates fluidity in opinion, and difficulty in articulating complex topics such as these (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Even though this self-study involved a one year commitment with these students, the research provided a snap shot of these developing rationales. Perhaps a two year longitudinal study would have revealed consistent findings from these other voices. The school year did not allow for some of my students’ rationales to fully mature. This speaks to the limitations of this study, but more importantly represents the difficulty practitioners have in fully comprehending the ways in which students view the teachers’ instruction, the content, and the world around them (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

I also included these *other voices* because I value egalitarian practitioner research, and I believe that all knowledge is constructed and shared equally by the students and
their teacher (Freire, 1972). These students’ words were assembled as data; although, they represent something much more to me. The students’ words are evidence of an important intellectual relationship, where by students work as a partner with their teacher in order to create a higher level of understanding of the world around them (Freire, 1972). Without their voice, my self-study research would become impossible. With this belief in mind, I chose to use the student voices themselves as a way to organize this section.

Anna. Anna advocated for the use of provocative issues in every interview, but did so in such a way that parroted the prompt to all my questions. Anna seemed so eager to help with my research that her answers seemed inauthentic. For example, Anna answers would generally be short and often simply restate my prompt. When I asked Anna if I should incorporate more provocative videos within my instruction, Anna answered: “I like them (the videos) and I think they are better.” In addition, Anna would agree with previous comments, but with little elaboration. For instance, when Karen shared that none of the provocative issues particularly bothered her, Anna agreed but with no explanation. Her answers were short comments of agreement like: “Well no, none of them bother me.”

Anna was a very bright girl and an extremely hard worker. However, Anna’s pleasing nature and constant conformity left me with little evidence of her true beliefs and opinions. Anna, even when blogging tended to find agreement with previous statements instead of creating her own original posts. This is not to say that Anna did not lack any reasoning for her advocacy of provocative issues. Through the course of the school year, she shared some of Nate’s opinions of increased interest with comments like:
“It is not that I cannot learn about it (provocative). It is not that it is bad. It is interesting to me.” In addition, Anna shared some of the rationale provided by Emily and Jason in that she believed provocative issues might help her critically analyze the content. When asked how provocative issues might help one better understand the content, Anna responded: “If you show me the picture, I can analyze the picture.” In the last group interview Anna commented that: “I think the really bad scenes in the documentary really helps me the best because that was when I knew that this was actually happening.” These variations of other rationales demonstrate that some students hold many rationales for their advocacy for or against the teaching of provocative issues. Perhaps Anna’s lack of elaboration and explanation of her opinion, also demonstrates the difficulty in articulating these complexity of these types of discussions.

Anthony. Anthony came to all the group and individual interviews and was very willing to contribute. However, his opinions, which were many times insightful, were also generally off topic. When the students began to discuss how the Connecticut School Shooting might have dealt with provocative, violent imagery, Anthony steered the conversation into a larger debate on gun control and its practicality. Anthony briefly discussed violence through video games by stating: “Well it depends on who the person is….A certain person might have some type of disorder... I honestly play a lot of violent video games and I don’t see me as affected at all.” However, Anthony would then move the conversation on to the role violent video games play on society. When discussing whether violence images cause students to violent, Anthony would expound upon the ineffectiveness of gun laws within our society. Perhaps Anthony was attempting to
personalize his understanding of provocative issues and find a pragmatic application for it outside his life as a student. Although I appreciated his passion for the topic, the ensuing deliberation became unhelpful to my research. Anthony’s other interviews followed a similar pattern of moving away from the topics at hand. When discussing whether sexual content was germane to world history content, Anthony, moved into a discussion of when teenagers fully mature.

Anthony showed interest in historical content and in my course. His views represented a student who seemed to be processing these provocative issues through his own lens of understanding. This might explain the sometimes convoluted explanations, Anthony provided. Perhaps more focused questions would have revealed a clearer understanding of Anthony’s perspective.

**Betty.** Early in the year, I noticed Betty had difficulty speaking in front of the class. She demonstrated noticeable anxiety when I called on her in class. That was why I was so surprised to see Betty return her signed consent form to be part of the study. She came to the first group interview, although she chose not to speak. Knowing that Betty appeared uncomfortable having to speak in front of people, and knowing the delicate nature of provocative issues, I chose not to directly ask her to participate in the study other than the survey. However, I did not want to dismiss Betty from my research group, as I hoped that such interactions might be a way to overcome her apprehension when having to speak in front of people. Towards the end of the year, I did notice some limited improvement in regards to Betty’s willingness to speak in front of others. Betty’s unwillingness to speak might demonstrate the discomfort some students have when being
presented provocative issues. Because Betty rarely spoke regardless of the topic, I am not certain the role provocative issues played in her silence.

**Brian and Dalton.** Creating time amongst the students’ busy schedules to conduct the individual and group interviews became very difficult. Many of the interviews were conducted the first half hour immediately following school. Because the students were involved in so many after school activities, I sometimes conducted interviews with two students at once. Brian and Dalton sat together in class and were friends. Because they felt comfortable around one another, and because schedules were so busy, I asked them to do their individual interviews together. This proved a mistake in that their answers to the questions in the interviews always related to the other’s earlier comments which made it difficult to see their individuality. Like Anna, Brian and Dalton, provided only surface level statements in regards to provocative issues but within this you can see developing nuance in understanding. . . . When posed with benefits of provocative issues, Dalton answers tended to be short responses like: “*It gave you sort of a better understanding of what was actually going on.*” Or, “*It sort of makes you better decisions or try to help others make better decisions.*” Although Dalton’s answers include some elements of making the world a better place or helping to understand the content, he seems to hedge a little with words like “*sort of.*” In addition, his comments lacked the elaborative descriptions as to how and why provocative issues serve to benefit his learning and society (Patton, 2002).

Brian’s position was one of consistent advocacy, but when his words were transcribed, they seemed to fit into all categories and moved topically from reason to
reason rather than evolving in a more substantive way. The following quotes represent
the many rationales Brian provided throughout the year for the teaching of provocative
issues. “It is also a fact of life. People die.” “Yeah, it is like that phrase if you do not
know history you are likely to repeat it.” “You have a better feeling about the world.”
“This stuff happens every day.” “When you see a car crash, that is not good, but it is
interesting and you want to see what is happening there.” Brian’s voice incorporates
many of the rationales provided in the first tow findings. Perhaps, these multifaceted
rationales matches the complexity of the subject in that no one answer can completely
describe his advocacy. Perhaps, further elaboration of his opinions would have allowed
for these various reasons to coalesce around one central rationale. The only time Brian
hedge away from the teaching of provocative issues was with the topic of sexuality and
rape. Although he did not believe that such topics should be avoided he did share that:
“For most kids I think it is embarrassing to hear about. It is really awkward.” It was
these types of comments that also helped me formulate my self-study findings in regards
to sexuality.

In hindsight, I should have done separate, individual interviews with clearly
focused questions from previous answers in order to achieve richer data (Seidman, 2006).
Their opinions were so fluid that coding and analyzing became very difficult (Glaser &
Strauss, 1967). More time and separate interviews might have proven a more
constructive way of discovering Brian and Dalton’s true perspectives on the teaching of
provocative issues and the influence these issues play on their understanding of the world
history content.
Ely. Ely was a student whose perspective on provocative issues provided a level of complexity that was not demonstrated by my other students. It was Ely’s opinion that seemed to evolve over the course of the school year and study. Ely during the first individual interview provided some oppositional statements. When I asked if provocative issues were necessary to understanding the topics, Ely replied, “I think it is an interesting fact but I am not sure it fits into the subject.” Later in that same interview, Ely challenged Jason’s advocacy for provocative issues in that students would eventually have to learn about such topics as adults. Ely’s response was, “I am not so sure I agree with Jason that you are going to have to face the facts like as an adult, I do not know where you would be forced to talk about such things (provocative issues).” Ely also stated that he feared provocative issues could be distracting to student learning. This was expressed in an earlier group interview when he said, “Also going back to whether it is good or not; I think that it can be a bad thing that people are attracted to the issues (provocative) because there are a lot of things that could happen that are not provocative and things that people do not pay attention to, but they still need to know.” Ely’s comments indicated that he believed the non-provocative content was what would be tested and; therefore, was most important.

However, as more students aggregated their statements into positive perceptions on provocative issues, Ely abandoned his opposition. When I pointed this out during a later individual interview Ely answered, “I think it will help us remember if we see them (provocative images).” Perhaps Ely had simply changed his mind about the usefulness of provocative issues from the group interview in October to his individual interview in
January; although this change of opinion was not very common amongst the students. This might provide some limited evidence of the practicality of provocative issues as Ely evolved from oppositional to advocacy. Many students provided various and changing rationales in regards to provocative issues, but even then, unlike Ely, their advocacy for provocative issues never changed. Another possibility for Ely’s change of heart was that he became influenced by the majority and abandoned his own opinions for that of the group (Janis, 1971). His opinions could have been so prejudiced by the majority, that he could not be truthful even in the individual interview setting. Regardless, I wish Ely would not have changed his mind. I feel his oppositional position would have contributed to a more thorough and detailed understanding of students who oppose the teaching of provocative issues.

_Karen._ Karen’s perspective included some of the real world rationale shared by Allison. For example, when asked why I should or should not teach provocative issues, Karen replied: “I think that you should explain that it is part of reality and that is how life outside.” When the students were discussing violent content and its appropriate usage in and out of the classroom, Karen responded: “...violence in this world and we see it on the news every night.” In this way, Karen proposed that provocative issues were very much embedded in our daily lives. In addition, Karen was also like Allison in her belief that Ridge Community was somehow lacking in these provocative themes. This was demonstrated with the following quote: “Not in Ridge. You do not see all of those horrible things. Other countries around has horrible things happen. We do not always see them here at Ridge.”
However, Karen’s perspective was different to the *real world* rationale in that Karen consistently demonstrated that what I was calling provocative was not provocative at all. She believed none of the provocative themes presented: differing violence, racism, sexuality, and anti-Americanism, were particularly provocative. It was as if Karen expected to learn about provocative issues, and would have been angry if they were not included. In the last group interview, when I asked which provocative themes or stories were the most disturbing, Karen’s answer was: “None of them.” She went on to say, “Well, of course, it is part of history. You need to be prepared for it. Obviously everything in the world is not happy, happy, happy.” When asked whether sexuality was an appropriate topic, Karen replied: “Personally I do not have a problem with that.” When considering the appropriate nature of violence, Karen countered: “I think that there of course is violence but we need to learn about sexuality because rape is also an act of violence.” When asked if any of the provocative topics bothered her in any way, Karen concluded: “Well no, none of them bother me. It is not that I cannot learn about it. It is not that it is bad. It is interesting to me.”

Karen’s perspective is one of advocacy, but different from the other rationales in Finding 1 in that the other students seemed to recognize the existence of some type of provocative threshold. For instance, when I asked Allison if I could go too far in providing extreme provocative images, Allison answered, “Yeah, maybe certain things like rape and drugs and certain levels of violence possibly can make certain people feel uncomfortable.” Like Jackson, these students recognized a *red line* might exist in regards to the appropriateness of certain material. Karen, however, never seemed to
recognize the existence of such a threshold. Instead, Karen seemed to view my research as absurd investigation into the obvious.

In conclusion, these other voices, although complex and nuanced in their language, provided some insight in addressing my first two research questions. These student voices demonstrate that these rationales for or against provocative issues are not binary, but instead are representative of a myriad of variances of opinion. Complexities of this sort often lack simplistic titles and answers, and I am grateful to these students for demonstrating this.

**Self-Study Findings**

Although elements of self-study methodology were embedded throughout the dissertation research, question three was created as a way to exclusively address the self-study component. Self-Study methodology has such a high level of practicality that it allowed for synthesis with my theoretical framework of pragmatism, as well as my data analysis methodology of GT. Inspired by the pragmatic nature of self-study research (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), I created a disciplined study meant to promote a more intrinsic, personalized pedagogy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The answers I sought were not always grounded in the literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, some of the answers existed within me all along. The following represented the findings that address the specific research question below.

3. In what ways does the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students?
The findings were gathered based on my own journals throughout the 2012-2013 school year. These journals tended to follow provocative lessons, and allowed me a platform to reflect on my teaching and student reactions to these issues (Berry, 2007; Crowe & Berry, 2006). In addition, I also found myself extensively journaling after individual and group interviews, as I found the students’ words to be very telling in how they viewed my teaching (Goodell, 2006).

Through the data analysis stage of my journals, it was discovered that different provocative themes elicited different personal feelings. Meaning, I felt more adverse to some provocative issues than I did others. Some provocative themes seemed to more easily match the lesson, while others felt forced and inauthentic, thus creating feelings of apprehension towards my teaching and my research. Because of this, I began to organize my feelings into these various themes which eventually emerged into findings (Charmaz, 2005). These three findings were labeled the closed space of sexuality, the banality of violence, and the anti-Americanism in time of war. Table 3 provides a description of the three self-study findings that helped me to discover the ways in which the teaching of these provocative materials inform and influence my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students.
Table 3 Self-Study Findings

Self-Study Finding 1: The Closed Space of Sexuality

Because of social and personal conflict (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968), I avoided the topic of sexuality for three reasons. The first reason was that I feared the topic was not relevant to the curriculum. Secondly, I feared that including sexuality would only serve to selfishly address my line of inquiry for my dissertation research, and did not benefit my students. Lastly, I feared that negative aspects of sexuality might too emotionally burden my students, causing stress.

Self-Study Finding 2: The Banality of Violence

This finding illustrates how graphic depictions of violence, be it torture, murder, or genocide, although disturbing to me, seemed somehow less provocative than the other provocative themes to my students. This finding was discovered through my journaling that reflected on my instruction and my student responses to interview questions.

Self-Study Finding 3: Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster Critical Thinking

This finding involved teaching the United States in a negative light through examples of racism. The teaching of these topics contradicts the positive narrative of the US as a constant source of good in the world. These lessons helped me foster discussions that students believed improved their critical thinking skills (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Soley, 1996). They also led me to conclude that critical thinking is so embedded into provocative issues as forbidden or closed (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968) that separating the two ontological understandings into separate lines of inquiry is impractical.
Self-Study Finding 1: The Closed Space of Sexuality

During the 1950s, educational theorists, Hunt & Metcalf, began to lay the groundwork for future social studies teachers by daring them to have their students examine the competing cultural traditions that have been so long closed by society to any real scrutiny (1955). Hunt and Metcalf labeled these closed areas as sex, religion, race, ethnicity, economics, and politics (Martorella, 1991). This list helped me forge my own expanded provocative themes upon completion of my literature review. However, I discovered through the journaling process, that it was the issue of sexuality that proved to be the most unsettling of the provocative issues. The journals revealed several reasons for this.

The first reason that sexuality caused me so much trepidation was its relevancy to the state and national social studies standards. Sexuality as a topic, right or wrong, is lacking within the American social studies curriculum (Rogow & Haberland, 2005). While social studies is often equated with history and geography, it is also typically the home for interdisciplinary lessons about social movements, communities, government, culture and contemporary social issues (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955; Rogow & Haberland, 2005; Thorton, 2005; Zinn, 1980). Such topics provide a valuable space in which matters like gender equality, gender roles, sexuality, and gender-based violence can be addressed (Rogow & Haberland, 2005). Yet, when I attempted to breech the subject of sexuality, noticeable anxiety emerged.

Because matters of sexuality are so void within the social studies curriculum (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955; Rogow & Haberland, 2005), I feared that my research would
overshadow my obligation to make sure the students are learning. I did not want my research to be a distraction. I did not want the provocative stimulus or themes to be forced. I had noticed that the year I was conducting this dissertation research, my instruction in regards to provocative issues seemed less authentic and more rehearsed instead of hermeneutically occurring (Grondin, 1994). I had built into my planning many provocative lessons. However, any time sexuality appeared in these lessons, angst occurred.

A good example of this type of anxiety towards sexuality involved a simple lesson about the cultural philosophers of the Industrial Revolution. I asked the students in small groups to research the philosophers and critique their primary belief. I scaffold the assignment to assure that each group only focused on one philosophy. The students had one day to research and one day to present. The students were expected to present a basic background of the philosophy as well as their own critiques. These philosophers’ (Freud, Marx, Malthus, and Darwin) beliefs were rife with provocative issues. The students did a good job with the presentations and provided the basic tenants of the philosophies along with simple critiques.

I had considered questioning the students, and having them go into greater detail with Sigmund Freud in matters of sexuality, but chose not to out of fear and self-doubt. This was unlike me, as I pride myself on never teaching scared. After reflecting on my decision through journaling, I discovered the greatest reservation was that Freud’s perspective of sexuality was neither in the content, nor would it be tested. Fear began to pop into my head; fear that I had not felt since my novice years. I began to think about
parental complaints as to why students were learning about such material. I would have to justify such a curricular decision by explaining that it increased student interest and understanding of Freud himself. However, I was not certain that student interests or understanding would increase by providing the provocative details about Freud. Out of fear, I avoided the issue all together.

My journals revealed another reason for this avoidance that involved the research itself. I had been in the midst of interviews, and the students are well aware of my research. My fear was that using Freudian beliefs about human sexuality would cause the students to think that I was only selfishly including such material for my research. Words like *phony*, *scared*, and *irrelevant* appear several times in the journals on this topic. When correlating my own fears of teaching sexuality with the existing literature and research, I discovered that many other American social studies teachers throughout the last century were similarly reluctant to use sexual topics, as they found them to be *impractical or in violation of common sense* (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, p.26-27).

Another example of my own avoidance of the theme of sexuality involved an assignment that was meant to have the students evaluate the evil actions of people during WWII. This lesson can be found in the Appendix of this paper labeled Appendix C. My objective was to have the students use historical thinking skills, so that they could understand why individuals commit evil acts, how these acts were viewed by others, and what could be done to prevent future acts. I also wanted the students to understand that evil was not exclusive to America’s enemies. I wanted to be sure the students understood that, although the German’s orchestrated the Holocaust, there were many horrific acts
committed by many different groups throughout the war. I had taught this lesson for the last three years. However, this year, as I prepared the lesson, I became overly self-conscious of sources I was going to provide the students. Two of the events dealt specifically with sexual assault; the Rape of Nanking by the Japanese and the Rape of Berlin by the Soviets. When the time came to provide primary sources of these events to inform the students’ thinking, I became reluctant to use articles that explicitly illustrated those horrible events. I was torn between the two ideas. I knew that the more graphic sources would better illustrate the awful realities, but I did not want to offend or disturb my students. In the end, I settled on a much more docile version of the primary sources that talked about rape and sexual assault, but not in graphic details. I felt that these sources were safer.

As I retrospectively looked back on this decision, and attempted to determine why I made it, the answers did not come easily. One of my biggest worries I found was that I was burdening my students with too many negative, unpleasant stories. World history is sadly lacking in the feel-good narratives that inspire and up-lift us. The unfortunate reality is that so much of the standards, content, and curriculum are filled with stories of death, violence, and destruction (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004). Struck by this notion, I wanted to get more of the students’ perspective, so prior to spring break I shared with the students my worry of providing too many dark themes throughout history. I challenged them to think of historical content that we discussed throughout the year that was positive, inspirational, and lacked any of the provocative themes that seem to dominate my instruction. The students found a few examples from the Enlightenment
and the Industrial Revolution units in a vain attempt to assure me that my class was not all doom and gloom. But for every positive story, I was able to provide for them several more negative aspects from the same lesson.

When matching my own feelings in regards to teaching sexuality to my students’ thoughts on the topic, I gained even greater insight. This was accomplished by journaling after student interviews. Allison’s views were particularly helpful in discovering why these personal conflicts (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955) existed. Allison believed that American society was somehow repressed in regards to sexuality as a topic, and that such repression; therefore, existed inside the classroom. Allison explained, “In European culture, they are much more open about sexuality. In American culture we do not talk about sex. It is much less talked about and is not an open subject.” If Allison’s assessment is true, American society is more to blame for my apprehension towards teaching sexuality than the social studies curriculum itself.

In the end, my lesson might have been made stronger had I used the more provocative sources that graphically depicted sexual violence. The students might have had understood that horrible acts are created by many people for variety of reasons, and can be viewed in a myriad of ways. This learning outcome, had it occurred, would have met my learning objective. However, the more sanitized version of the reading sources helped me sleep better at night knowing the students would not be disturbed by the stories I provided.
Self – Study Finding 2: The Banality of Violence

The literature review was surprisingly lacking in provocative lessons and research dealing with violent themes (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968). This made me consider whether violence should even be introduced into provocative lessons given to the students. I made the decision to include violence as a provocative theme through observation of my own interpretation of the historical content which is so violently inclined, although not always graphically depicted (FitzGerald, 1979; Moreau, 2004). Violence generally came in the form of sanitized statistics. This testable violence could appear on a test as a graph that asked students to determine which country had the highest loss of civilian life during WWII. The perceived gruesome statistics lose their significance when faces, personalities, images, and narratives are lacking. I mistakenly believed that my students would appreciate that violence was indeed provocative when a human face was attached to the atrocities. My journals, however, demonstrated that this perception was faulty, as my students were much less likely to be emotionally drawn to violent imagery. It is my belief that I had so few oppositional students like Jackson because torture, murder, and genocide were somehow conventional topics to my students.

There exists a myriad of studies dealing with how the American adolescent is desensitized to violence through various media sources (Anderson, 2003; Anderson & Bushman, 2001). However, it was critical incidents within my classroom instruction that, when reflected on through journaling (Goodell, 2006), provided valuable insight into how I viewed violent imagery compared to my students. The greatest example of this discovery involved my decision to show of the documentary *Bling*, to the students upon
completion of their reading the novel *A Long Way Gone*. Both the novel and the documentary depict graphic images of violence that occurred throughout the Sierra Leone Civil War during the 1990’s. However, the showing of the documentary was particularly bothersome to me for several reasons. First, the timing of the students viewing *Bling* came on the heels of the Newtown Connecticut Shooting, the day before the students left for the holiday break. My fear was that I was being insensitive to the victims of the school shooting because the documentary showed tremendous amounts of gun violence. In addition, I felt bad sending the students off for two weeks after having seen such negative, violent imagery. What bothered me most about the images within the documentary was the realness of the violent descriptions. The director used actual footage, taken by soldiers during the conflict, showing individuals being killed. These were not dramatic re-enactments, but actual scenes of executions, murder, and torture.

Students were required to have a permission sheet prior to viewing the documentary. They were warned prior to start that some of the images were very graphic. They were told that if they could leave the room if they felt uncomfortable at anytime. I also edited out some of the most egregious scenes. The decision to show the documentary was made by me and an English teacher with whom I team teach. We believed the documentary to be valuable, despite the violent content, because *Bling* illustrated the author, Ishmael Beah’s, life, providing a visual demonstration of what the students had just read. Furthermore, despite violent themes, *Bling* ended with a positive message of hope and survival.
Over the holiday break, I provided a blog post for the students to reflect on both the novel and *Bling* in order to explore their thoughts on the documentary. The prompt and responses to the blog are shown in Figure 6.

The students’ responses demonstrate that they did not share my concerns. Even my most oppositional student, Jackson, stated that he did not see the book and its graphic depictions as inappropriate, mentioning instead, that he actually *enjoyed the descriptions of war*. The students collectively rejected the notion that violence begets more violence. This was not just true for my student participants, but the general population of students who participated in the blog. Anna within her blog cited the Newtown and Chardon School Shootings, but rejected the notion that violent imagery could lead to more violent acts.

Because I, now as an adult, so abhor violence, I found myself looking away during the violent scenes of the documentary. When reading the book in preparation for class discussions, I tended to give the more violent pages a cursory skimming. Yet, I was asking my own 13 and 14 year old students to view something that I was turning away from. Although we had shown the documentary film the past five years, I informed my colleagues that I did not wish to show the film again next year, and that we needed to find another source to compliment the book *A Long Way Gone*. Perhaps, I made this decision based on the tragic events in Connecticut. I also considered that I might have been especially bothered by *Bling*, since I was conducting my research study and was worried that I was exploiting my students for my own research interests. I was worried that I might get a complaint from a student or a call from a parent, which never occurred.
Students need to write an original review or respond to another student’s post in regards to the book, *A Long Way Gone* or the documentary *Bling*. Students are encouraged to write what they liked and disliked about the book or the documentary. Students are encouraged to discuss the book’s historical accuracy. Students can also discuss whether they thought the book was appropriate in regards to content and theme for freshman to read. Does violence beget more violence? Do you believe that reading violent books, like *A Long Way Gone*, can increase violent incidents in our society? Although Beah intended the message to be peace, could the book provide mix messages? An original post or reply is due by Monday, January 7th, 8:00 AM.

**John on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 1:52:36 PM**
I do not feel that violence in the book is a so to say “trigger” for other incidents or acts of violence. I'm sure that somewhere on this planet though, someone would take the intended message the wrong way but, I think those odds are extremely slim. In the book, he doesn't actually say “Go kill people!” or “Drugs are awesome and you should try them!”. So he's definitely hasn't/isn't promoting anything negative. Reading this book made me realize that I should be thankful for what I have because I could have been in that terrible situation. He did say that the time, he and his friends thought it was fun but someone with any moral values knows that killing anyone/anything isn't acceptable in society. His sense of morality however, corroded over time from the drugs and the lack of food, sleep, and proper living conditions. I am not justifying his actions. I'm just saying most people aren't living like he was and have a better sense of right and wrong then he did.

**Allison on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 1:54:48 PM**
i really liked *A Long Way Gone*, because it showed how drastically different life around the world is and really made me thankful for what i have. and while the book had parts that were extremely violent i think that in to days culture, and especially American culture it would not bring on more violence, because we are already exposed to a great amount of violence as it is. also the book shows how violent and inhumane wars can be, and would make people dislike war and violence more. and even if a mentally ill person were to read the book they would have already had violent thoughts and if they were not introduced to a tremendous level of violence through this book then they would be exposed to it through popular culture, like certain movies and video games and either way they would most likely already be thinking violent thoughts.

**Nate on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 1:55:45 PM**
i like the book i think it really good. but really do not think exposure to violence, makes you more violent.(other than in extreme cases like in this book). actually i think it is important that we know about things like this. i think it gives people a motivation to do something about it.

**Dalton on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 2:24:19 PM**
I dont believe that violence brings on more violence because I enjoyed *A Long Way Gone*, and I had no thoughts of going to kill people. I viewed it as a story like he was at his lowest point and bounced back. Its a story of strenght not violence

**Anna on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 2:26:34 PM**
i would like to believe that violence does not lead to more violence and that when people read this book, they do not think violence is okay, but i do think that some people do commit acts of violence because of the things around them and the types of situations they are sometimes put in (violent situations). Relating this to the Connecticut school shooting and the Chardon shooting and all the other recent tragedies, i am forced to believe that people often do do these awful things for publicity and to get their name out there. While the majority of people hate these shooters, the shooters are just happy that people know of them, whether it be for a good or bad reason. I don't think people will read this book and commit acts of violence because of it and I know for a fact Ishmael Beah did not write this book for people to resort to violence but I do think there are sick people in this world that will think of it that way.

**Jason on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 2:28:37 PM**
I thought that *A Long Way Gone* was a really interesting book because you got to learn about the specific details of a soldier in a war. I think that it is appropriate for freshman to read this book because you have to learn eventually what actually happens in war. However as I read this book, I was slightly confused about how he could've remembered every fact perfectly. I do have serious doubts about the accuracy of all the facts. In regards to violence, I think that violence in video games encourages violence because they show violence in a good light, however I think that in this book violence is portrayed in a negative light.

**Jackson on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 2:29:04 PM**
I thought the book was interesting because it showed how different life is in different areas. I didn't believe some of the little details. The thought of a child being able to remember what everyone said to him while on cocaine and other drugs is ridiculous. I enjoyed the detailed discritions of the war and life at the hospital. I don't think violence causes people to be violent. People are born violent, not made.

*Figure 6. Example of blog posts*
The student responses from the blog posts and my follow up interviews demonstrated that my concern might be misguided. Violence, even in the most appalling, realistic terms, did not seem to provide the students with any apprehension. Perhaps Allison said it best when discussing *A Long Way Gone*. She stated, “... and while the book had parts that were extremely violent, I think that in today’s culture, and especially American culture, it would not bring on more violence, because we are already exposed to a great amount of violence as it is.” Karen’s comment about the history curriculum was also very telling. *It* (provocative issues) *is part of history. You need to be prepared for it. Obviously everything in the world is not happy, happy, happy.” The students seemed in some ways to expect violent imagery to be included into their understanding of the historical content. It was as if the students viewed the human experience itself as violent. To them, any history teacher would follow the same predictable pattern of inclusion.

Furthermore, with the exception of Jackson, the students expressed that the actual violent imagery provided greater insight into the content. I routinely asked the students in individual and group interviews whether they needed to see the actual footage of the horrible events. I often used the Holocaust as an example. The students were asked whether they could see a statistic like 6 – 9 million people dead and know that genocide occurred, without seeing bodies being bulldozed at death camps. The students, with the exception of Jackson, thought that the violent imagery, although unpleasant, was still necessary to their learning. A very typical response to this type of question came from Allison when she said, “I think that it like helps you actually visualize it, so that you can
see what it would actually be like.” I also think the students are more accepting of violence as a provocative theme because it is directly embedded into the testable curriculum, whereas the theme of sexuality is not. The students came into world history as high school freshman expecting to be taught the Holocaust, in the same way they were taught slavery in middle school. These expectations might have prepared them for the violent text and images that were presented to them.

In conclusion, this evidence validates the previous literature and studies that chose to exclude violence as a provocative theme (FitzGerald, 1979; Hunt & Mecalf, 1955, 1968; Moreau, 2004). I also discovered that although I find some violent descriptions to be disturbing, most of my students did not and tended to expect such provocative issues to be included. Their rationales for the inclusion of violence was turned into findings, but varied. However, through my own reflection and personal inquiry, I discovered that violence takes on a much less sinister role when it came to what constituted provocative within my world history classroom.

Self-Study Finding 3: Anti-Americanism Linked to Racism to Foster Critical Thinking

I adjusted my line of inquiry away from provocative as critical thinking (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996) to provocative as forbidden or closed (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000, Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968). The research defines critical or open-ended as issues that allow for debate and discourse amongst the students (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996). Controversy under these parameters would constitute the reflective dialogue among students, or
between students and teachers, about an issue on which there is disagreement (Harwood & Hahn, 1990). However, the literature and research demonstrated that the ontology of critical thinking, as it pertained to controversial issues, was nearly saturated (Bowen, 2008) in its understanding. The existence of such an extensive body of work (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007) led me to believe that my own original contribution to the field of understanding of controversial issues as critical, open-ended topics would somehow be diminished.

It was through my self-study that I discovered how difficult a true separation from provocative as critical thinking really was. My journals revealed that the students often referenced how some provocative issues made them think more deeply about the content. This was especially true for Jason and Emily who valued provocative issues mainly for the perceived notion that provocative investigations would provide some type of increased learning outcome. This type of journaling evidence is demonstrated in the following passages found in Figure 7.

These journal posts provided me with greater insight into my own thinking when it came to the decisions I made as a researcher (Berry, 2007). In the beginning, I considered that the students’ rationales for using provocative as improving critical thinking skills was moving my research away from the intended line of inquiry. This line of inquiry focuses on provocative as beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955). However, my journals demonstrated that by the
November 8, 2012

I am surprised at how many of the students rationalize the learning of provocative issues as a way to understand complexity. Such comments get back to controversy or critical thinking. The more I steer the questions back to provocative as closed spaces, the more the students words return back to critical thinking and matters dealing with complexity.

December 7, 2012

Emily and Jason's comments within their individual interviews both mentioned critical thinking skills as a reason for the inclusion of provocative issues. Jason even went so far as to reference the lack of a right answer sometime being helpful to delve more deeply onto the content. Perhaps I made a mistake in moving my line of inquiry too far away from the controversial as critical thinking.

Figure 7. Example of journal posts

Semester break, I began to embrace some of the critical thinking data and included it as evidence.

The theme of anti-Americanism had always been embedded with the notion of provocative as open-ended or critical thinking (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009). As I considered such devices good instruction, I had long utilized historical thinking lessons that asked students to develop alternative endings to historical scenarios (Hess, 2009; Levstik & Barton, 2011; Ochoa-Becker, 2007). The theme of anti-Americanism was developed out of my literature review. This research involved teachers who had their students consider their own country’s actions in a negative light (Hess, 2006; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Zinn, 1980). This would move the curriculum and content away from the objective of education as a nationalistic tool (Zinn, 1980), and
instead allow for critical examination of our countries history (Ochoa-Becker, 2007).
These lessons were even more provocative when the country was at a time of war
(FitzGerald, 1979; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, Moreau, 2004). I found that the
anti-Americanism theme was particularly useful in building these critical thinking skills
when partnered with the other provocative theme of racism (Burkholder, 2011;
Ochoa-Becker, 2007). As the setting of my research took place in my world history class,
one might wonder how American historical topics fit into these discussions. Research
demonstrates that students draw from their own experiences in order to personalize and
develop an in depth understanding of world history and events (Levstik & Barton, 2011).
My students studied, as eight graders, American slavery. I found that they drew from that
knowledge when relating to the racism experienced through the lens of world history.
The classroom discussions on The Rape of the Congo, The Armenian Genocide, The
Holocaust, or the ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, would often be related back by the students
to their knowledge of US history.

I began to build my lessons around this phenomenon, knowing that the students
could more readily analyze new examples of racism, when they could link it back to the
US content that they learned the previous year. One of the greatest examples of this
linkage was a lesson that I used about the Holocaust. The Nuremberg Laws were one of
the first steps taken by the Nazi regime after they gained power. The Nuremberg Laws
purpose was to impose racial barriers on their Jewish population. The students in small
groups were asked to read the Nuremberg Laws which dealt mainly with the topics of
marriage, citizenship, and race determination. I then provided the students with copies of
Jim Crow Laws from various states. The Jim Crow Laws were in place in the United States at the same time the Nuremberg Laws were established in Germany. The students were then asked to consider which laws, Jim Crow or the Nuremberg Laws, were more racist or discriminatory. What followed was a powerful discussion amongst students about institutional racism in Nazi Germany compared to American racism through the means of Jim Crow. Students pointed out that the Jim Crow laws were much more detailed (including laws forbidding members of different races from providing medical attention to one another), where as the Nuremberg Laws only forbid marriage and sex. Some students countered that although the Nuremberg Laws seemed less sinister, that the Nazi’s intended this only to be the start, leading to the extermination of millions of people. They also claimed that Jim Crow racism never involved such mass killings. In the end, I realized how the Jim Crow laws provided a more powerful platform of discourse that would not have existed by having the students read the Nuremberg Laws only.

Another lesson of partnering anti-American themes with racism occurred during the Cold War. I worked hard throughout the year to have the students consider how history is viewed differently by different people. One learning objective involved the different governmental structures of the US and the USSR during the Cold War. I told the students that a continual criticism of the USSR by the US was their repressive dictatorial government structure that did not allow for basic civil liberties like free speech and press. In order to have the students determine a Soviet perception of the United States, I had the students read translated news articles written in the 1960’s from the
Soviet newspaper *Pravda*. The students discovered that several articles written by the communist paper dealt with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The basis of the article was that the US was hypocritical in claiming that their citizens were free when Black Americans were being denied basic freedoms and were sometimes beaten or murdered when they protested. A discussion followed on the fairness of the criticisms or to what degree Americans are free today.

They were lessons like this that my student participants would reflect back on when discussing anti-Americanisms as a provocative theme. John stated that he would become angry if he knew that a teacher was withholding provocative, negative information about the country or our leaders in order to paint a pleasant picture. John seemed to suspect that many unpleasant realities were being secretly omitted from the curriculum, and he disliked such prior restraint. But it was Jason and Emily that best linked the provocative theme of anti-Americanism and racism with the development of critical thinking. As Emily put it, “*It lets you know that no one is perfect. It makes you think deeper and that you know that there is different sides to all people.*” Jason, when discussing the Holocaust, stated, “*I think a lot of people do not realize how bad it was and how the US could have done more.*” Jason again discussed the usefulness provocative issues increasing critical thinking by stating, “*It helps you think. Like you just don’t think this is a fact. It helps you think about what is really going on. It makes your mind work. You learn about different decisions. It does more than just learn about a bunch of useless facts that people will just forget. With provocative issues it will make you understand things better.*”
In conclusion, my students’ discussions on the theme of anti-Americanism linked to racism as well as the ability to reflect on my instruction through journaling has led me to believe critical or open-ended as provocative issues (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996) are to some degree embedded with provocative as forbidden or discouraged (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955). Provocative issues under these parameters might serve as an instructional tool that allows students to embrace the complexities of historical events (Ochoa-Becker, 2007) or consider alternative historical perspectives (Hess, 2009; Levstik & Barton, 2011). The self-study methodology revealed that I as a practicing teacher and researcher should embrace not exclude the critical thinking component of provocative issues.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided findings meant to address how my world history students came to understand provocative material, and how these provocative issues affected their perceptions of historical events and the world around them. In addition, my self-study findings addressed how the teaching of these provocative materials informed and influenced my curricular decisions, my pedagogy, and my relationship with my students. These findings were informed by the personal rationale and purpose that helped construct my research questions found in Chapter I. Chapter II assured that the personal rationale, purpose, research questions, and findings were all grounded in the existing literature. Chapter III provided a detail description and justification for self-study methodology and GT as a data analysis tool. In Chapter V, I present a detailed discussion on the complex nature of my findings, that when partnered
with the discoveries made through my self-study research, unveils the powerful implications of both the practicality and pitfalls of teaching provocative issues in the secondary social studies classroom.
CHAPTER V
IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

“I do not have a problem with violence, but I think it is unnecessary and it does not need to be taught. If it doesn’t enhance the lesson than I do not think it should be taught.” – Jackson

“I think it is unrealistic to think that the world is like perfect Ridge and that nothing ever bad happens. People cannot be ignorant and they need to be exposed to it. When you do grow up and do go to college, Or you even hear about it on the news; if you are not exposed to it...then people are going to freak out and will not know how to handle when they see something like that.” – Allison

“I feel like, ‘why can’t you tell me that?’ I mean I know it is probably controversial or uncomfortable but I still want to know about it. Cause they are painting the picture of a person like they are great.” – John

These quotes represent the varied interpretations of student’s understanding of provocative issues and how these issues influence their thinking of the world history curriculum. Researchers before me have advocated for the teaching of provocative issues as a means of furthering critical thinking skills (Cherrin, 2004; Hahn, 2012; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996). Furthermore, research has been done on defining the taboo nature of provocative issues and discussing why such topics are avoided in the social studies classroom (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968). The closed spaces (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968) that provocative issues create was my intended line
of inquiry; although, my self-study findings revealed that critical thinking (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009 2004) is very much embedded within the notion of provocative as forbidden or discouraged (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000). Therefore, it is difficult to completely separate the two. This chapter will provide a detailed discussion on the complex nature of my findings that when partnered with the discoveries made through my self-study research, unveils the powerful implications of both the practicality and hazards of teaching provocative issues in the secondary social studies classroom.

Discussing Finding 1 and Implications of the Real World Phenomenon

The rationale that I labeled real world phenomenon came from Allison’s view of provocative issues and how it related to the world around her. To Allison, provocative issues were not necessarily issues that were typically forbidden or taboo (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000), nor did they foster critical thinking (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Soley, 1996). Instead, to Allison, provocative issues represented a sometimes unpleasant reality that she knew existed, although she rarely saw firsthand. Allison’s perception of the Ridge Schools and the Ridge Community was a sanitized, bubbled world that was overly engineered in order to keep the objectionable, provocative elements from being experienced. Allison used words like utopia five times in the interviews and blog posts as a way of describing her life within the safe confines of Ridge. Her tone and sarcasm seemed to display some elements of resentment towards the bubble that she believed she lived in. Allison strongly advocated for the teaching of provocative issues because to her, issues like violence, racism,
genocide, rape, sexuality, and anti-Americanism, represented the real world. Allison believed it was a crime to shield students from the provocative truth. This belief came from the way Allison had been raised by her parents, who did not believe in sheltering her from the difficult realities of the world around her.

I believe that Allison’s real world phenomenon presents important implications for practicing social studies teachers to consider when dealing with provocative issues. When first considering Allison’s perspective of provocative as real world, I felt that Allison saw no altruistic end. Perhaps, Allison advocated for the teaching of provocative issues simply because they happen. If this is true, her perspective creates a tricky dichotomy of understanding for practicing teacher in regards to the inclusion of provocative issues. Teachers are forced to consider whether to include these unpleasant, closed (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955) topics simply because they happened, even if there is no altruistic outcome like prevention or understanding of the content (Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

However, Allison use of the word *exposure* might provide a rationale for teachers in that the knowledge of such issues, prepare students to deal with reality. Lastly, I will propose and discuss that Allison’s real world view might represent her attempt to empathize with historical figures and the sometimes negative events that these figures must endure. This idea too, provides implications for secondary social studies teachers to consider. The following is a discussion of these possible implications.

Allison’s view of provocative representing reality creates interesting implications for social studies teachers to consider. Allison’s rationale provides little intrinsic or altruistic end. Allison only twice advocated for the teaching of provocative issues as a
way to prevent terrible events from happening. In addition, unlike Jason and Emily, Allison never connected provocative issues to improving her grade. Instead, Allison thought that provocative issues should be taught because they happen in the world around her, although not directly where she lived. Social studies teachers must then consider if that is a good enough reason for their inclusion. Like many in my field, I value instilling a sense of efficacy and conviction into my students with the intent of making them active citizens seeking to better the world (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Parker, 2006). However, when considering students like Allison, little altruistic motivation was revealed. Allison is correct in that horrible events like racism, genocide, and rape occur daily in the world. The question for teachers to consider is what benefits are to be gained by having students in so called utopian communities view such provocative issues? If students, like Allison, did not believe horrible events can be prevented, what other practical outcome should a teacher hope to achieve? Making students grateful for what they have seems hardly worth the risk of turning the students into pessimistic observers of gruesome world events, past and present.

Allison strongly believed high school was the time for such exposure stating, “Either way people are going to see it in the news or in real life they will be exposed to it, so I think that people should be exposed to it throughout high school, in the classroom environment.” Allison’s view of her privileged existences at Ridge High School and the artificial bubble she believed she lives in represents an avenue for further discussion. Allison’s words indicate a view of the world as being unpleasant. Yet, Allison is resentful to institutions, communities, and teachers who would attempt to hide these
unpleasant realities from her. The cloak of protection that Allison perceived she lived in was artificial. However, one must consider how Allison will operate in world when that protection is removed. Perhaps Allison advocates for the teaching of provocative issues as a way to prepare herself for the real world that awaits her. Her words demonstrate that students will inevitably find the sometimes awful truth about the world. Maybe she believes that it is better to learn about these negative realities sooner, rather than later, in order to begin to develop personalized understandings or even coping mechanisms when these events occur. Allison’s advocacy for exposure might be her belief that the knowledge of the real world might provide students with tools that allow them to deal with these issues in effective ways as adults.

If her opinion is shared by other students, than their exist implications for teacher’s considerations. Social studies teacher will have a rationale for the inclusion of these issues as it will be seen as a way to get their students ready for the sometimes difficult world they will deal with as adults. Allison’s view was not unique to other students. Emily, whose advocacy was rooted in critical thinking once, commented: We cannot hide ourselves from it forever. We are going to get exposed to it eventually, so I think it is an appropriate age to introduce it. Because if you are more conservative, with that kind of stuff, then we will go off to college and we will all get exposed to it, then it will hit every one like a ton of bricks. You would be like, ‘why was I never, exposed to this stuff before?’ In this regard, Emily, like Allison, might see provocative issues as part of a larger maturation process, in that students will be getting ready for the real world.
Perhaps, social studies teachers will be preparing their students to deal with unpleasant realities by introducing them as historical curriculum.

The last implication that I was forced to grapple with is the question of whether the official curriculum itself is to blame for the real world phenomenon. Perhaps world history curriculum, as it currently exists in state and national standards, might be too overly saturated with the nastiness of past events and does not focus enough on the benevolent, uplifting stories of history. Wars and genocides are mentioned in most state and national standards, if not in graphic detail (Ohio Department of Education, 2010; National Council for the Social Studies, [NCSS], 2010). I also must consider whether I personally prejudice the provocative over more inspirational historical narratives. My self-study journals revealed my own personal angst when including some provocative sources within my instruction, as I feared that I might be negatively influencing the students towards a depressing view of the world. Maybe, I am somewhat culpable in Allison’s real world view.

However, if the learning objectives exist within the social studies curriculum that ask students to empathize with historical figures as a way to fully understand historical events in their totality; then the real world phenomenon provides a powerful rationale (Levstik & Barton, 2011; Zinn, 1980). Allison’s conceptualization of an unpleasant reality might be a way for her to increase her ability to think more like a historian. Historical empathy requires one to discern the difference between life in the present and life in a distant past while maintaining the possibility that past perspectives hold some validity (Levstik & Barton, 2011). Although Allison’s intimate surroundings seemingly
lacked provocative elements, her recognition of their existence might allow her to understand what life is and was like for others. Perhaps, Allison’s *real world* view is less of a judgment on her own existence within Ridge, and more of an attempt to create a contextual understanding of the world around her both past and present (Levstik & Barton, 2011). If Allison’s cynical perspective of the world is true, then social studies teachers have a powerful justification for the inclusion of provocative issues, as these issues might allow for better understanding of world history. Allison’s perspective of provocative issues can be linked with historical thinking (Levstik & Barton, 2011), thus providing a pragmatic justification for its inclusion.

In conclusion, Allison’s real world perspective provides three powerful implications for practicing social studies teacher’s consideration. I feel that these implications are important in that they address one of the most important questions any teacher must ask. “How do my students understand the curriculum presented?” To Allison, provocative represents reality both past and present. Social studies teachers have long attempted to reconstruct past events and make them real to their students (Levstik & Barton, 2011). It might be that Allison’s perception of these issues provides the rationale needed for their inclusion into the social studies curriculum. This question is very much embedded within my research and one of the questions used to guide this study. Allison’s perspective when illustrated as a finding provides powerful implications for contemplation within the field of social studies education.
Discussing Finding 1 and Implications of Provocative for Grade Sake

The provocative for grade sake finding created a more pragmatic rationale and implication for the inclusion of provocative issues. Yet, when personally reflecting on this finding, I was struck by how the students who advocated for provocative as a means of improving grades, Emily and Jason, were never able to clearly articulate how the provocative content would equate to skill improvement or test performance. Emily believed that experiencing provocative material, either visually or written, allowed for increased critical thinking. Emily believed it fostered alternative views, describing provocative issues as, “seeing the other side or getting the whole story.” However, Emily had a difficult time linking provocative themes to academic achievement other than anti-Americanism and racism. She was never able to provide a clear articulation between the linkage of provocative issues and her own academic achievement. When discussing the need to learn about torture or rape, Emily would fall back on statements like, “I heard stories of kids living under a rock their whole lives and then they are sent off to college and then they are like, ‘Oh my god, what have I been missing?’ I think it is better to be kind of well rounded at a younger age so that you can be well rounded as an adult.” Emily reference to college illustrates her commitment to academic performance. Yet, Emily’s outcome of being well-rounded stops short of fully explaining how students might truly improve their critical thinking skills. When matched with cannon of literature in regards to provocative issues increasing critical thinking skills, Emily did not directly mention any of the rationales provided by the existing modern researchers on the topic. Emily did not directly site civic engagement, building of tolerance, or learning through
deliberation (Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker; 2007). Emily never wavered in her advocacy of provocative issues as helpful to her understanding of the content. In addition, she never varied in her belief that such topics will help her in her post-secondary academic life. A full explained connection was lacking.

Jason displayed similar difficulty when trying to link provocative issues to improving grades. Jason viewed provocative as a movement away from, a just the facts approach to teaching history. He stated, “I think it is useful. I like debating stuff. I think it is interesting. I do not like facts as much. It is not as interesting. It is more interesting to debate issues. Where there is not always an objective answer.” He saw provocative as allowing for open discourse (Hess, 2009) around issues (Ochoa-Becker, 2007) rather than the factual data of dates and biographies. However, when discussing how these critical thinking skills might improve learning, Jason would make statements like, “It (provocative issue) is good for interest.” Or, “It helps you think. Like you just don’t think this is a fact. It helps you think about what is really going on. It makes your mind work.” Comments like these, although short of a definitive connection between provocative issues and increased academic aptitude does appear to express the perception that such a relationship does exist in some marginal way.

There exist some practical implications of Emily and Jason’s perspective of provocative issues. It was these students’ perspectives that most matched the body of evidence that proclaims provocative topics advance critical thinking skills (Hess, 2009; Ochoa – Becker, 2007). Most of the existing research dealt specifically with the concept of provocative as open-ended or lacking a correct answer (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood &
Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009), thus allowing for discourse or debate to occur within a subjective framework. These students consistently proposed that forbidden nature of provocative issues (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968) in a similar way advanced their critical thinking skills. Emily and Jason both saw practical value in this type of content as it allowed for depth, detail, and complexity to emerge in regards to their thinking about world history (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). These implications not only advance existing literature and research on the topics, but also helped to address my research questions. Emily and Jason came to see provocative as helpful to their understanding, and their perspectives in turn, afforded me greater insight into my own understanding and teaching of this type of content. Although the students somewhat lacked a clear articulation of purpose, within their language is elements of the research that critical thinking is invaluable element to these provocative topics. When Jason and Emily presented their distaste for the learning of just facts, they were justifying some of the existing elements of research that proclaims student find open-ended, provocative learning more enjoyable (Ochoa-Becker, 2007), more authentic (Hess, 2009), and more practically useful (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990), than traditional non-provocative materials. At the very least, these students see provocative issues as a way to enrich their understanding of the content.

In conclusion, Emily and Jason’s rationale for provocative issues helped me to consider that critical thinking (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007) is so embedded into the idea of provocative as forbidden (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968) that untying the two ontological
understandings into separate lines of inquiry was impractical. The goal of this research was to tease out provocative findings from the critical thinking component (Cherrin, 2004; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007). Emily, Jason, and my self-study work convinced me that such a separation is to some degree impractical. Practicing social studies teachers might consider that critical thinking and provocative issues too are intertwined. In addition, social studies educators might embrace the notion that these provocative issues can to some degree advance their students appreciation of the content, therefore furthering their understanding of the historical curriculum.

**Discussing Finding 1 and Implications of Provocative for Interest Sake**

When reflecting on the rationale provocative for interest sake, two interesting conclusions were drawn. The first appears overly simplistic in nature. Provocative issues increase student interest in the material by providing all the details in order for the student to get a holistic view of history. This idea was brought to me by Nate, who viewed himself as a student of history. Nate felt that provocative issues, although admittedly sometimes unpleasant, were necessary to understand the historical events in their totality. Unlike Jason and Emily, Nate never equated such knowledge as a means of improving test scores. Nate’s love of learning for learning sake (Dewey, 1897) was incredibly refreshing at a time when so many of my students single-mindedly question, “Is this going to be on the test?” To Nate, the fact that provocative events in the form of murder, racism, genocide, rape, sexuality, and anti-Americanism occur, necessitated their inclusion.
This provocative for interest sake finding does create some implications for teachers who seek to increase students’ interest through the use of provocative issues. Nate’s rationale might serve as evidence that these provocative themes, when added to the curriculum, might bring in otherwise, disengaged students. However, Nate’s love of history was something exceptional, making general conclusions to his case, more difficult. However, Nate’s advocacy for provocative issues as increasing his own interest in the material is grounded in the existing research. Textbooks and curriculum of the past are often over simplified, bland presentations of past events (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). Yet, when students deal directly with provocative content, interest levels, attentiveness, and active learning increase to significant degrees (Hess, 2009).

The second conclusion involves John’s advocacy of provocative issues involving his love of macabre. This finding becomes far more complex as it brings in psychological implications when looking at provocative issues. When reflecting on John’s finding, I began to consider whether provocative for provocative sake was something beneficial or hurtful to student understanding of the content. Certainly teachers could sensationalize murder, racism, genocide, rape, sexuality, and anti-Americanism to achieve increased interest. However, when dealing with sensitive content such as slavery or the Holocaust, a more delicate pedagogy needs to be undertaken (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). I would be hesitant to advocate for any teacher to increase interest by using lurid or base materials for the purpose of sexing-up a lecture or a discussion. I remain very self-conscious of my own research in this regard, as I attempted to avoid some of these topics. John’s statement that, “I tend to pay more
attention to gory stuff." should not be dismissed as immaturity or pettiness. I suspect that a number of students held a similar belief when it came to their views of provocative issues, but were uncomfortable being as candid as John. Interested in this love of the macabre, I introduced the analogy of a car crash to explore their thinking of the topic. I explained to the students that traffic around an automobile accident tends to slow as people attempt to view the scene, knowing that it might be unpleasant. The students agreed that this phenomenon does occur, and that some students might view historical provocative issues in a similar way. Allison described it as “When you see a car crash, you do not want to be in that situation. I mean no one wants to see it, but once you are there it is interesting. It is intriguing to people.”

The research and literature on provocative for provocative sake is somewhat lacking within the field of social studies education. It would be just conjecture on my part to discuss the implications of such practice. However, I am somewhat hesitant to pursue such pedagogy as a way to draw students into very serious topics. Although a teacher might draw in otherwise uninterested students, the worry is that a students might get the wrong message and begin to value provocative issues for morbid reasons, thus lacking any real educative value. The implication is that practicing teachers know the setting of their classrooms and communities, as well as the maturity of their students in regards to what they can and cannot handle. The inclusions of such issues have discussed benefits, but are not immune from risks and negative consequences.

The provocative for interest sake finding provides an implication for beginning social studies teachers who fear job security. It is important to note that veteran and
novice teachers view provocative material in different ways (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968). Many social studies teachers consider hot, taboo, or controversial in regards to appropriateness were, in fact, seen by a majority of educators, as moderate in their level of controversy (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000). In *Taboo Topics: Cultural Restraint on Teaching Social Issues* (2000); subjects like sexual assault, separatism, race and intelligence, love and intimacy, and school prayer would be avoided by student teachers because they feared that these topics would most likely “put their jobs in jeopardy” (p. 297). This study tended to focus on pre-service, student teachers who obviously would be more likely to adopt a “play it safe” mentality in order to get a job or keep a job (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000). When considering this research, many new teachers might avoid such topics despite the perceived benefit of increased interest.

In conclusion, students like John and Nate are drawn to provocative issues. Their interest in the world history curriculum was increased, implying that practicing social studies teachers might utilize this type of content to bring in otherwise disinterested students into their classroom instruction. Although my students when pressed did not see any negative consequences to the provocative issues, there is a worry that such material can be somewhat detrimental to job security (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968; Keezer, 1940). In addition, students might contextualize such material in such a way that harmful conclusions are made (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000).
Discussing Finding 2 and Implications of Oppositional

The rationale of oppositional provides powerful implications for practicing social studies teachers who are considering the inclusion of provocative issues within their social studies instruction. Jackson’s biggest criticism of including provocative issues was the worry that such material was going to be offensive to others. This type of thinking is demonstrated in the following quotes: “It might make some people feel uncomfortable.” “I am not a very religious person, but some people are, so they might be sensitive to the topic.” This statement implies that Jackson recognizes diverse religious and moral attitudes amongst his peers, and that these students might not be appreciate the provocative issues being introduced into their understanding of the world history content.

Jackson’s view of the world was very progressive. He was an altruistic young man who was not particularly religious. His opinions when shared during class discussions were anything but dogmatic. Instead, his conversations reflected a sort of postmodern view of history and the world. With that in mind, I wrongly assumed that he would then value the inclusion of provocative issues as part of a larger philosophy of tolerance. However, Jackson believed that provocative issues had the potential to offend, and; therefore, needed to be avoided. Potential is important, in that none of my students through the course of the research ever expressed or demonstrated that they were insulted, angered, or disturbed by any of the materials presented. Yet, Jackson believed the possibility of offending a student was enough to forgo the teaching of provocative issues. Perhaps Jackson was so altruistic in his thinking that he was more concerned with others’ feelings towards provocative content than that of his own.
Jackson’s perspective in this regard, although unique, is important for social studies teachers to consider. Context and setting would greatly influence the findings of this study. Had my research been conducted in more conservative communities with more religious students, different findings would have been produced. Jackson’s worry of offending others, to some degree, serves as a warning to practicing secondary social studies teachers. However, I do not believe that any teacher should sacrifice good curriculum or instruction out of fear of offending a few minority voices. In this regard, a delicate balance needs somehow to be established (Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

The second criticism Jackson shared with me in regards to the teaching of provocative issues was that Jackson found the provocative themes as either unhelpful or unnecessary to his learning. This rationale was demonstrated in the following quotes: “I still think they are unnecessary. I do not think you need to show it (provocative material) to get the idea.” “When I hear that millions of people died, I kind of get a vision and I realize that it wasn’t good. I mean, I know it was a bad event.” “I do not think you ever know who is listening and that people might take it the wrong way. It only takes one to take it the wrong way. You can teach them and leave some stuff out that is not necessary and might still get people’s attention.” Jackson was consistent in his belief that the historical events told through the bare statistics, devoid of any provocative material, was just as effective in helping him understand history. In fact, he believed that the provocative material could serve as a distraction to learning.

Jackson’s belief that provocative materials were unnecessary provides a unique implication for consideration. Jackson’s rationale challenges some of the research that
claims beneficial outcomes for the inclusion of provocative materials (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Hess, 2009). It is important to note that many of these pieces did not view provocative as forbidden or discouraged (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968), but rather as issues that sparked disagreement (Hess, 2009). Jackson did not oppose provocative issues if they were framed strictly around controversy (Hess, 2009). However, the open-ended character (Harwood & Hahn, 1990) of such topics is often rife with the possibility of offending (Hess, 2009).

In conclusion, Jackson’s rationales against the teaching of provocative issues challenge the existing research on the topic. In addition, both of Jackson’s reasons for avoiding provocative issues were helpful in enriching my data and the findings with diversity of opinion. Jackson’s perspective might serve as a way to inform the thinking of all practicing teachers considering provocative issues. Jackson’s perspective would also be viewed differently by novice versus veteran teachers (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hess, 2009; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955). His perspective provided a diverse opinion when addressing the second research questions, finding such provocative topics as unnecessary to understanding the content. In addition, Jackson worried that such content might offend others. Teachers who are new to the profession might deliberately avoid provocative topics if they knew even one student might be offended. Fear of angering parents or administrators, thus costing the novice teacher their job, would be reason enough for this avoidance (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000). Although my own line of inquiry and commitment to self-study was intended to avoid such teaching scared
paranoia, I do recognize the practical concerns of all teachers when issues like job security are involved.

**Discussing Finding 3 and Implications of the Other Voices**

The role of practitioner researcher creates a precarious balancing act, whereby the classroom teacher encourages students to investigate historical content while at the same time addressing their own line of inquiry based on student interaction with their instruction (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This difficult balance, along with time restraints, led me to conclude that there exist other rationales behind provocative issues that have yet to be fully explored and understood. These *other voices* constituted students who had a varying range of nuanced articulation, varied their opinion across time, or lacked a clear robust rationale. Together, they show a picture of a breadth of other ideas about provocative issues in teaching. These students’ thoughts significantly contributed to my understanding of provocative issues even if they lacked the linear categorization of the other two findings. These other voices demonstrated complexity that exists when students attempt to make sense of provocative issues. Although the students’ words were more difficult to categorize, their words painted a holistic perspective that addressed my research questions.

Anna’s perspective of provocative issues was that it was clearly beneficial. However, after reflecting on Anna’s advocacy for provocative issues, I began to consider elements of indoctrination and the hidden curriculum (Thornton, 2005). Perhaps Anna’s opinions were prejudiced by my instruction and my research that out of a kind heart and a pleasing nature, she adopted a stance that she believed I supported. Maybe Anna
believed provocative issues were beneficial to her understanding of the world history content simply because I as classroom teacher chose to include it. Anna, might have had a completely different view of provocative issues had another history teacher avoided such content within their classroom instruction altogether. The literature review revealed that fear of indoctrination created a rationale for social studies educators avoiding provocative issues. This was revealed in early research (Hoover, 1967; Morrison, 1944; Turner, 1936). Although, in conclusion, I believe provocative issues to be somewhat beneficial to student understanding of the content, I must consider that not all social studies teachers would feel the same. If the benefits of teaching provocative issues are truly unclear or uncertain, then this fear of indoctrination must be considered. If indeed Anna adopted my views as her own out of a sense of loyalty as a student, then her advocacy and my teaching of provocative issues have both been compromised.

Ely’s perspective of provocative issues changed over the course of the school year, as his opinions seem to evolve from a state of opposition to one of advocacy. Like Anna, I considered indoctrinating elements, but in Ely’s case, more from peer pressure rather than my instruction (Janis, 1971). I believed Ely’s change to advocacy came only after he witnessed the group interviews in which the majority of the participants shared their support of provocative issues. Perhaps Ely change of heart dealt with a natural maturation of his ideas.

Had a four year longitudinal study of Ely been possible, a more consistent perspective on provocative issues might have been revealed. I feel that Ely’s maturation as a student will greatly influence his cognitive understanding of many topics, thus
providing a more consistent view of the world. There is also the possibility that Ely’s change of opinion was sincere and after having time to experience and then reflect on provocative topics and themes, he came to see their inclusion as beneficial. The intention of this study was not to force students to advocate provocative issues. However, I cannot discount that some students had a genuine change of heart in regards to provocative issues as the year progressed. This might also support some of the existing literature that claims students will gravitate towards lessons that require thinking about these provocative issues (Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

Karen advocated for the inclusion of provocative issues as she saw these issues as part of a larger historical narrative. However, what made Karen’s opinion somewhat difficult to categorize was that she did not seem to think these topics were particularly provocative in the first place. Karen expected such topics to be included in the world history content. However, when asked what was the most provocative of the materials presented, Karen answered, “None of them.” Her opinion was that the provocative themes did not create inter-personal conflict (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955). Nor did Karen see such topics as somehow forbidden or taboo (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000). Instead, Karen viewed these unpleasant topics as historical realities that needed to be included. The implications of Karen’s perspective should force teachers to consider the diversity of students’ thoughts and opinions that exist in secondary social studies classrooms across America (Thornton, 2005). What contextually can be considered to be provocative is different with time and setting. Such diversity can even be found within the same classroom. This poses tremendous challenges for any social studies teacher who has to
consider age appropriateness of content and media sources. Students’ religious and moral codes create varied views of what is considered acceptable and what should be forbidden in regards to content (Hess, 2009; Thornton, 2005). Karen’s permissive understanding of provocative issues is one of myriad of perspectives shared by secondary social studies students. Attempting to address all of these differing world perspectives becomes very problematic for any social studies educator.

Anthony, Betty, Brian and Dalton’s perspective speak to difficulty that students face in fully articulating their views in regards to provocative issues. The complex nature of these topics makes robust explanations difficult. The complex nature of provocative issues might also account for students like Brian providing many rationales for such content. Perhaps the complexity of these issues prevents one single rationale from forming. I also fault some of my research decisions as well as recognizing the burden of time restraints. When given a chance to reflect on these students perspectives, I feel that I might have conducted the interviews differently, therefore allowing a clearer rational to emerged from these students. These procedural changes are addressed in the limitations of this study.

**Discussing the Self-Study Findings and Implications**

My self-study journals were a way to reflect on my instruction and data (Berry & Crowe, 2010; Kosnik, Lassond, & Galman, 2009) and allowed me to discover that all provocative issues are not equal. To most of my students, violence seemed to be a very appropriate topic when related to the world history curriculum. To my students, topics like torture, murder, and genocide were sad realities of human existence, but should not
be avoided. The concerns of *sensationalizing* provocative issues expressed earlier were especially true when I consider the violent imagery my students were exposed to throughout the school year. From graphic depictions of murders committed by a child soldier in *A Long Way Gone*, to the photographs and video clips of Holocaust victims; my students were exposed to some very horrific sources. Yet, my students, with the exception of Jackson, seemed to expect the inclusion of such violence as part of their learning.

There are possibly some psychological and societal reasons for this finding that I chose not to explore as they would draw me too far away from my intended line of inquiry. Perhaps, the most simplistic answer for why my students viewed violent material as unoffending was that the curriculum is so embedded with violence in the form of wars, assassinations, and genocides (National Council for the Social Studies, [NCSS], 2010; Ohio Department of Education, 2010). Because the prevalence of violent themes within the curriculum, violence even appears on my assessments. On a WWI test, students were asked to cite and explain reasons why WWI had such high casualties rates compared to wars before it. Violence is part of the human experience.

This is not saying that teachers should be reckless when dealing with graphically violent sources. Teachers have an obligation to make sure to present such material in a way as to not offend or disturb their students. As part of this obligation within my own practice, I allowed the students to read an alternative book or source if they found books like *Night* or *A Long Way Gone* to be too troubling. I would seek parental permission for more objectionable sources. In addition, I would warn students prior to showing any
violent visual clips, and inform them that they could either put their heads down or leave the room. This practice, however, might make a student feel even more uncomfortable, ostracized, or weird for being bothered by the image. Knowing the power of the group dynamic in regards to high school freshman (Janis, 1971), these types of warnings might be futile. Nevertheless, total avoidance of such topics is not practical and could jeopardize students understanding of world events (Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

Further proof when considering the inequality of provocative issues dealt with sexuality. Unlike violence, my students tended to view matters of sexuality as a truly closed or taboo topic (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968). My own journals demonstrated similar apprehension towards sexual themes on my part as teacher. I believe the greatest reason for this avoidance is the lack of sexuality within the content. There existed some vain attempts historically to include sexual content with the social studies classrooms (Bigelow, 1916; Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2000; Michner, 1938; Moran, 2000). However, the reality today is that sexuality as a topic, is markedly absent from national and state standards (Rogow & Haberland, 2005). It is with embarrassment that I admit, a fall back argument for any parent complaint about classroom content is that it is in the curriculum. When content like sexuality does not appear in the history standards, the ability to make such an argument becomes impossible. The research demonstrates that my experience is not dissimilar to other social studies teachers who avoid provocative topics that are not grounded in established curriculum (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955).
The implication is that sexuality as a theme represents a higher threshold, when considering its inclusion. Unlike violence, teachers must judge whether sexuality as a topic is truly necessary to the understanding of historical content. My prediction, although purely antidotal, is that in the future, a more generalized national curriculum will allow for historical narratives to include matters of sexuality. Issues like marriage equality, infidelity, reproductive rights, prevention of sexual diseases, and the prevention of sexual violence, will be grudgingly included into the curriculum because it is such a part of the human experience. Although I was somewhat, personally uncomfortable with these sexual issues, there exist many powerful rationales for their inclusion into a larger historical narrative (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2000; Rogow & Haberland, 2005).

The last finding revealed through my self-study was extremely important in regards to my own understanding of provocative issues. The idea that provocative issues involved improvement of critical thinking is not unique (Hess, 2009). I was surprised, however, the degree to which my students linked the learning of provocative material to their learning and academic performance. I attempted early in my research to move the students away from the critical thinking objective in order to more clearly focus my line of inquiry towards provocative as discouraged or taboo (Evans, Avery, & Pederson 2000; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955). However, around the semester break, roughly halfway through my study, I began to embrace this rationale and began to code such thinking as provocative for grade sake. I had always seen provocative themes, especially anti-Americanism and racism, as useful ways of having more in-depth, complex discourse (Hess, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007). However, Emily and Jason’s rationales convinced
me that the students also valued such inclusion, seeing it as beneficial to their learning. Although, I believe the provocative for grade sake finding fell short of revealing a definitive connection, I will not marginalize my students’ thoughts by not including their reasoning (Friere, 1972). The implication of my self-study is that there exists some support of the research that links provocative issues to improved critical thinking skills (Cherrin, 2004; Hahn, 2012; Hess, 2009; Soley, 1996). Although I did not seek and objectivist outcome or proof (Lincoln & Guba, 1994) of such a link, I believe such connections might exist and I take my students at their words even if they sometime lacked a clear articulation.

**Limitations of the Study**

Intimate, reflective, practitioner based research, like this, is not immune to credibility issues (McWilliam, 2004). Although I see such research as more authentic in its proximity in setting (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), many see such research as a bastardization of inquiry and lacks and scientific pedigree (McWilliam, 2004). The first of these credibility concerns dealt with contextualization involved with my findings. I made the decision to choose grounded theory as my main vehicle of data analysis. However, I felt that codification and sorting is problematic to any researcher who endeavors to undergo GT research (Glaser, 2004). When the researcher is given complete discretion to decide what is, or is not important, human prejudice can enter the equation. This type of prejudicial exclusion was best demonstrated when dealing with the topic of prevention as a rationale for learning provocative issues. Prevention appeared three separate times throughout the year as one of my findings, only to be
removed in the end as I believed such a finding to be invalid and only elicited through my own prompting. However, I continue to second guess my conclusion and worry that inferior coding and analysis drew me away from what might have been a powerful finding. What has to be considered is that different researchers, when presented with the same data, might have organized the data in very different ways, thus drawing different conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My choice to codify and include certain data over other data had enormous impact on my results. This type of credibility issue is not unique to just my own study. All studies have to address this objective reality issues (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an effort to limit my own bias in the analysis stage of my research, I conducted a member’s check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with the students in regards to their interview responses to be sure that the codification process matched the students’ intentions. This member’s check took place in late May of 2013, during the data analysis stage (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but prior to the writing stage of the dissertation. The members check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) involved providing my students with highlighted transcriptions of what was said, along with my memoed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) comments, asking if my assumptions of their thinking was correct.

My second concern was, as Lincoln and Guba describes it, the truth value (1985). Lincoln and Guba write that, “On the assumption of a single, tangible reality that an investigation is intended to unearth and display, the ultimate test of internal validity for the conventional inquirer is the extent to which the findings of an inquiry display an isomorphism (a one-to one relationship) with that reality” (p. 294). In regards to my study, there existed an intimate one on one relationship with provocative issues. This
naturally occurred through the construction of my self-study (Schön, 1983). However, my decision to have my students and myself construct a common understanding of provocative was somewhat unnerving. This was because I sought a personalized understanding of provocative issues within the social studies classroom and relied on a linguistic analysis of my students’ understanding (Polkinghorne, 1988). I feared that I might have cut the scholarly bridge behind me. This was overcome by making sure that the students’ new construction of provocative issues did not stray too far away from the established literature on the subject, thus maintaining truth integrity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was done by building off of the provocative themes established by Hunt & Metcalf (1955, 1968) and Evans, Avery, & Pederson, (2000) in order to make sure all findings were grounded in the existing literature (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Another credibility concern was of more of a pragmatic nature and less of a theoretical one. I admit that this study asked thirteen and fourteen year old world history students to delve into some incredibly complex issues. The rigor demanded of them in this study might not have fit their intellectual aptitude, and the students themselves might not have had the level of scholarly sophistication that I asked of them to complete this inquiry. As I earlier noted in my rationale, there seemed to be a lack of consensus of what constituted controversial as provocative within the scholarly literature. To some degree, I required my students to accomplish what the academy had not. One year, proved in some ways to be insufficient, in order to address such a rigorous line of inquiry. My strategy to overcome this limitation involved providing the students with exemplars through the survey and allowing the students to discuss their understanding of
provocative using their own language. The definition of provocative was *beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged* (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000) creating *closed spaces* in which teachers and students alike will avoid certain issues as they create intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955, 1968). The exemplars of murder, torture, racism, genocide, rape, sexuality, and anti-Americanism; served as an initial foundation of understanding. Although the definition and exemplars created a fear of pre-prejudicing the student thinking early in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I felt that these exemplars served as a scaffold of understanding so that the students and I could move forward to a greater level of clarity in regards to provocative issues.

**Conclusion**

We are living in the era of standardization and performance based education (Ravitch, 2010). I will not seek to demonize all standardized educational reform. I see some limited good in *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*, and the push for accountability. However, one of the most egregious side effects of the standards push is the product the process creates. What is often lacking in standardized curriculum is meaningful content that pushes student thinking. My instructional experience has made me yearn for such meaningful pedagogy. Meaningful, to me, embodies provocative. Curriculum content that allows students to explore alternative ends fosters intellectual growth and allows for students to make personal connections to the provocative issues and subjects that are being presented (Hess, 2009). Students comprehend what they feel (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). Within the content of social studies, students might not feel dates,
names, causes and effects. However, if given the chance to evaluate provocative issues, students might begin to make powerful, personal connections.

I propose that students can be drawn to topics that they feel are somehow forbidden when contextually considering the secondary social studies classroom. This is what I termed the *power of the provocative*. What had never been measured was how students’ engagement with these provocative materials influenced their understanding of historical events and the world around them. Nor had it been determined how teachings of these provocative materials inform and influence a teacher’s curricular decisions, their pedagogy, and their relationship with their students. This research and findings address this gap of understanding. In addition, the research represented my commitment through self-study, to break away from the inferior instructional practices of my past by utilizing the power of provocative content.

To that end, I believe this research provides some answers. This self-study might impact fellow social studies teachers in such a way as to provide them a rationale for breaking away from the standards based paradigm and moving more towards a pedagogical approach that fosters critical thinking within their students, through the inclusion of provocative materials. When presented with this evidence, practitioners might feel an obligation to include the teaching of provocative issues into their instructional strategies. I also presented a theoretical background for the importance of self-study research, as I strongly believe that it is, perhaps the greatest tool, in regards to pedagogical improvement.
APPENDIX A

LESSON 1 – PERSONAL BACKGROUND OF HISTORICAL FIGURES -- IS IT NEEDED TO BE A TRUE HISTORIAN?
Appendix A

Lesson 1 – Personal Background of Historical Figures – Is it needed to be a true historian?

Background

As part of a larger unit on the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, students will be reading excerpts of the historical fiction book, *The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette*. Although not graphic in nature, the book does contain references to sexuality through the lens of promiscuity, as well as King Louis XVI’s sexual deficiencies. These provocative issues are not part of the standards and will not in any way be formally evaluated on any test or assessment. Because of this, it would be interesting to know whether the students view these prurient items as important in informing their thinking and knowledge of the French Revolution in a constructive way, or do these scandalous items simply distract them from more traditional content concerning the French Revolution that will be evaluated.

The Lesson

Students will be given a section of the book that deals with the Queen’s affair and her alleged, promiscuous nature. Students will be given ten minutes in class to silently read their section.

After reading this section, students will divide themselves up based on their opinion of the importance of such personal details of historical figures. This will be done by me asking the class, “How many of you feel that knowing personal, sexual information about a historical figure is important to understanding history and who these people really were?” “How many of you feel that such personal information is unnecessary, and only serves as an unnecessary distraction to the content that will be tested?” I will also encourage students to use their existing knowledge of history as exemplars for or against their positions.

Students will move to the designated part of the room, based on their opinion. The groups do not have to be even, and students have complete discretion to choose their group based on their own opinion. In each group, students should compile a list of reasons for or against the inclusion of provocative, personal materials in their instruction. A rationale behind each of the reasons is important and student should be prepared to defend their answers. Each group should choose a recorder, as well as a reporter(s) who will share their answers with the class as a whole. The class will be given 15 minutes to compose their list.
The remaining 20 minutes of class will be devoted to a debate in which each group gives one of their reasons and then allows the opposing side to challenge their premise. This should be student lead and I will only interject when the groups are talking over one another.

Students will be encouraged to continue the discussion on a blog as homework that will be graded – a 5 point participation grade. Some of their posts will also serve as the basis for data for my dissertation, but only if the posts or replies were from my student participants.
APPENDIX B

LESSON 2 – ISHMAEL BEAH’S A LONG WAY

GONE -- ARE VIOLENT DESCRIPTIONS NECESSARY?
Appendix B

Lesson 2 – Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone* – Are violent descriptions necessary?

Background

As part of a larger unit on Imperialism, and in conjunction with their English classes, students were asked to read *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a boy soldier*. The book is about the Sierra Leone Civil War that occurred from 1991 to 2002. The book contains very graphic depictions of violence. Students enjoy this book more than any other we read throughout the year. I often worry that the book is too violent and that some students will get the wrong message from the book and see it as somehow glamorizing violence within its pages. In addition, there have been reports that Beah, who was only 12 years old during the time of the war, purposefully exaggerated his recollection of the events in order to create a more exciting memoir and to sell more books. The provocative nature of the book and these allegations allow for students to express their opinion on several topics.

The Lesson

Students will be given a copy of the Slate article entitled, *The Fog of Memoir: The feud over the truthfulness of Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone*,* by Gabriel Sherman and they will be given 10 minutes to read the piece silently.

After completing the reading, students will divide themselves into groups of four. In these groups, students should address whether Ishmael Beah embellished the non-fiction memoir with elements of graphic violence in order to increase the marketability of his prose. Secondly, students will be asked to consider whether such graphic, violent descriptions are necessary to the telling of the story, even if they are true. Students should use actual sections from the book to support or refute their conclusions.

Students, in groups of four, should discuss these questions and will be asked to share out any conclusions that they made in regards to the questions at hand. Students are also expected to share their passages that support the conclusions they made based on the two key points. I will give the students 15 minutes to discuss.

The remaining time will be given to the students to share their answers and provide evidence to back up their opinions. Students will be encouraged to challenge each others’ statements through questions and discourse.
Students will be encouraged to continue the discussion on a blog as homework that will be graded – a 5 point participation grade. Some of their posts will also serve as the basis for data for my dissertation, but only if the posts or replies were from my student participants.
APPENDIX C

LESSON 3 – MOST EVIL EVENTS OF WWII
Appendix C

Lesson 3 – Most Evil Events of WWII

Evil – Morally wrong or bad; harmful, injurious, or characterized by misfortune

1. Number of Victims / Casualties – Killed and wounded
2. Level of destruction – Cities and infrastructure destroyed.
3. Intent – Reasons for why the evil action was taken.
4. Type or method of violence – Military devices used.
5. Realpolitik – Did the ends justify the means or did the event show no other purpose?

Five Events

1. Allied Bombing of Dresden – Source http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWdresden.htm
2. Fire Bombing of Tokyo – http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0310-08.htm

Day 1 –

Students will first, as a class, agree upon a number rubric for the five items in order to decide what makes military action evil. This class-created rubric will be utilized by all the groups in order to determine whether their historical event constituted an evil action. In groups of 3 or 4, students will be given one of the five events. Students should read the literature source provided on that event. Students should share, with their group, the meaning of the event, including why the event happened.

Day 2 –

Using Google Docs, students should develop a short series of slides to describe their event, so that it can be presented to the entire class. Students can use a historical YouTube clip, but it should not be more than one minute long. The presentations should last between five to ten minutes. At the end of their presentation, they should provide the class with the score for their evil event and a justification of that score. Time will be allowed, after each event, for questions from classmates and teacher.
This lesson is provocative in nature because the sources contain fairly detailed descriptions of torture, sexual assault, murder, and mutilation. The Rape of Nanking source is so graphic in language that the World History team, as a precaution, had our curriculum principal read it to make sure it was school and age appropriateness.
APPENDIX D

SURVEY FOR PURPOSEFUL / SELECTIVE SAMPLE
Appendix D

Survey for Purposeful / Selective Sample

Provocative Issues Survey

Provocative - beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged

1. Would you be more or less likely to take a course in which the controversial topics below were discussed?
   - Murder - More or Less Likely
   - Rape - More or Less Likely
   - Genocide - More or Less Likely
   - Torture - More or Less Likely
   - Sexuality - More or Less Likely
   - Racism - More or Less Likely
   - Anti-Americanism – More or Less Likely

1. Do you think it is appropriate that such topics are discussed at the 9th grade level? Yes / No.
2. Do certain topics make you feel anxious or uncomfortable? Yes / No
3. Should teachers try to incorporate provocative material into their curriculum and instruction in order to increase student interest? Yes / No
4. Do you need details of horrific historical events in order to truly understand what occurred? Yes / No
5. Should students have to learn about historical events, even if those events might be disturbing or difficult to talk about? Yes / No
6. What issues, other than those listed above, would you consider provocative in regards to classroom discussions? Please list on the back of this page
APPENDIX E

RIDGE PRINCIPAL’S SIGNATURE TO CONDUCT STUDY
Appendix E

Ridge Principal’s Signature to Conduct Study

October 1, 2012

I will be conducting a qualitative research study to further inform my knowledge of how my instructional strategies and curricular decisions influence student understanding of the content. I am undertaking this practitioner based research project in conjunction with my work as a doctoral student at Kent State University. I have obtained formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to conducting the study. My own classroom and students will serve as the setting and participants for the research. I will get signatures of approval from the students who will be my participants in the study, as well as signatures from the students’ parents or guardians. I will also get signatures of approval from my students’ parents or guardians to video/audio tape instruction and student interviews.

The research study will ask students to look at historical events through a critical lens, and to form opinions on provocative issues. Through group discussions, individual interviews, and classroom blogs, I hope to gain greater insight on how my students view these types of lessons, and how these provocative issues influence their understanding of the content and the world around them.

The study will be conducted from October, 2012 through May, 2013. Student participants are free to leave the study at anytime. Students who participate in the study will receive no benefit to their grade. No more than five, half hour interviews will be conducted throughout the year.

By signing below, I give my consent to allow Bryan Ashkettle to conduct this study.

__________________________________________________________
Erin Short – Head Principal

__________________________________________________________
Terry Brownlow – Assistant Principal

Date

Date
APPENDIX F

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Appendix F

Parental Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: The Power of the Provocative: Exploring World History Content
Principal Investigator: Bryan Ashkettle

Your child is being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what your child will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your child’s participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully.

Purpose:

I will be conducting a qualitative research study in order to better my instruction and to increase my understanding of how my students learn. I am undertaking this practitioner based research project in conjunction with my work as a doctoral student at Kent State University. I have obtained formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to conducting the study. I have also received permission from Ridge High School to conduct this research. My own classroom and my students will serve as the setting and participants for the research.

The research study will ask students to look at historical content through a critical lens, and to form opinions on provocative or controversial issues. Through group discussions, individual interviews, and classroom blogs, I hope to gain greater insight on how my students view these types of lessons, and how these provocative issues influence their understanding of the content and the world around them.

Procedures

The study will be conducted from October, 2012 through May, 2013. Participation will involve interviews, blogs, and group interviews. The blogs will not be made public and can only be accessed by the teacher and the participants. The group discussion and interviews will take place at Ridge High School. Students will meet four times as a group. These meetings will last no more than 30 minutes at a time. If the research results in publication, Ridge High School and the participants’ anonymity will be ensured.

Benefits

This research will not benefit you or your child. Participation or non-participation will have no effect on your child’s grade in the classroom. However, your child’s participation in this study will help me to better recognize how my students come to understand provocative or controversial issues in order to better my instructional strategies and my curricular decisions.
Risks and Discomforts

I foresee no negative outcomes from the research. However, participants are free to leave the study at anytime.

Alternatives

If any students become distressed or upset in the course of the research for any reason, I will request the participant leave the study. In addition, I will call the parent, as well as notify their counselor, about the event.

Privacy and Confidentiality

No identifying information will be collected. This signed parental consent form will be kept separate from study data, and responses will not be linked to your child. If the research results in publication, Ridge High School and the participants’ anonymity will be ensured.

Within the group discussions, confidentiality cannot be assured. However, students will be asked not to divulge any sensitive information that may be discussed within the group interview.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Bryan Ashkettle
440-338-4126 - home
216-337-1569 - cell
bashkettle@Ridgeboe.org - e-mail

You may also contact Kent State University IRB office at 330-672-2704.

Consent Statement and Signature

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to grant permission for my child to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference. In addition, signing this document does not guarantee my students participation in this study.

_________________________   _____________________
Parental Signature               Date
Appendix G

Informed Consent for Student Participants

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: *The Power of the Provocative: Exploring World History Content*
Principal Investigator: Bryan Ashkettle

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully.

Purpose:

I will be conducting a qualitative research study in order to better my instruction and to increase my understanding of how my students learn. I am undertaking this practitioner based research project in conjunction with my work as a doctoral student at Kent State University. I have obtained formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to conducting the study. I have also received permission from Ridge High School to conduct this research. My own classroom and my students will serve as the setting and participants for the research.

The research study will ask students to look at historical content through a critical lens, and to form opinions on provocative or controversial issues. Through group discussions, individual interviews, and classroom blogs, I hope to gain greater insight on how my students view these types of lessons, and how these provocative issues influence their understanding of the content and the world around them.

Procedures

The study will be conducted from October, 2012 through May, 2013. Participation will involve interviews, blogs, and group interviews. The blogs will not be made public and can only be accessed by the teacher and the participants. The group discussion and interviews will take place at Ridge High School. Students will meet four times as a group. These meetings will last no more than 30 minutes at a time. If the research results in publication, Ridge High School and the participants’ anonymity will be ensured.

Benefits

Participation or non-participation will have no effect on your grade in the classroom. However, your participation in this study will help me to better recognize how my students come to
understand provocative or controversial issues in order to better my instructional strategies and my curricular decisions.

**Risks and Discomforts**

I foresee no negative outcomes from the research. However, participants are free to leave the study at anytime.

**Alternatives**

If any students become distressed or upset in the course of the research for any reason, I will request the participant leave the study. In addition, I will call the parent, as well as notify their counselor, about the event.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

No identifying information will be collected. This signed form will be kept separate from study data, and responses will not be linked to you. If the research results in publication, Ridge High School and the participants’ anonymity will be ensured.

Within the group discussions, confidentiality cannot be assured. However, students will be asked not to divulge any sensitive information that may be discussed within the group interview.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Bryan Ashkettle
440-338-4126 - home
216-337-1569 - cell
bashkettle@Ridgeboe.org - e-mail

You may also contact Kent State University IRB office at 330-672-2704.

**Consent Statement and Signature**

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference. In addition, I understand that signing this document does not guarantee me participation in this study.

________________________________  ___________________
Participant Signature            Date
APPENDIX H

CONSENT TO AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE
Appendix H

Consent to Audio/video tape

PARENT VIDEO CONSENT FORM

How does the teaching of provocative issues influence student learning?
Principal Investigator: Bryan Ashkettle

VIDEOTAPE CONSENT FORM

I agree to have my child videotaped in the classroom and in interviews. These interviews will be used to determine how the teaching of provocative issues influence student learning.

_________________________________________  ___________________________
Parent Signature                          Date

I agree to be videotaped in the classroom and in interviews. These interviews will be used to determine how the teaching of provocative issues influence student learning.

_________________________________________  ___________________________
Student Signature                          Date

I have been told that I have the right to see the videotapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to hear and see the tapes  _____ do not want to hear and see the tapes

Sign below now if you do not want to see the tapes. If you want to see the tapes, you will be asked to sign after seeing them.

_________________________________________
Student Signature                          Date

_________________________________________
Parent Signature                          Date

Address:
Dear Parent or Guardian –

As a way to strengthen my instructional strategies and increase my understanding of how students learn, I will be conducting a research study dealing with provocative historical lessons. I am undertaking this practitioner-based study in conjunction with Kent State University, where I am also a doctoral candidate. I have received permission from Ridge City Schools, as well as formal Individual Review Board approval from Kent State University. No more than four, half hour meetings will be required by your son or daughter if you choose to allow them to participate in this study. The interviews and the study will begin in October of 2012 and will continue through May of 2013. The interviews will occur after school. The students’ participation will neither advance nor inhibit their grade. If you chose not to have your son or daughter participate, simply ignore this letter. However, if you consent to your son or daughter’s participation, please sign all included forms. Signing does not guarantee your child’s participation in the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 440-338-4126 or 216-337-1569 or you can reach me by e-mail, bashkettle@Ridgeboe.org.

Bryan Ashkettle
Ridge High School
World History Teacher
APPENDIX J

LIST OF NON-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Appendix J

List of Non-structure Interview Questions

The following is a list of questions that will be used in the group interviews, individual interviews, and blog posts. The non-structured method of this qualitative research might force follow up questions that are not listed below. The fluid nature of this research demands follow up questions and extended responses. This list will serve as beginning point for a larger discussion on these topics to begin. Some of the questions will be drawn from the survey results.

Pre-Lessons Questions Group interview / Individual interview (Questions to be asked prior to the students’ involvement with the provocative lessons)

1. What does the word provocative mean to you?

2. Would you be more or less likely to take classes that advertise provocative topics? Why or Why Not?

3. Do you need to know disturbing details from history in order to fully understand the events?

4. Is it important to know personal stories behind historical figures biographies? For instance, how important is it to know that John F. Kennedy was unfaithful to his wife? Is it necessary to know these salacious events in order to understand who he was as a historical figure or are these types of details unnecessary?

5. Should teachers only focus on the good that historical figures have done and not negative aspects? For instance, should teachers include in their lessons about George Washington that he was also a slave holder?

6. Is world history filled with more pleasant or unpleasant events?

7. In what grade should students be introduced to unpleasant realities in history?

8. Do you think that 9th grade students should be able to learn about and then debate provocative issues like same-sex marriage, abortion, genocide, violence, death penalty, euthanasia, and war?

9. Is it important that teachers tell you all the details of historical events, including unpleasant details?
10. Should teachers introduce to students historical truths that paint The United States in a negative light?

11. Are there topics that are too provocative for high school students?

12. Do you have any questions about the survey?

13. Where there other provocative topics that should have been included in the survey?

14. Why might your history textbook avoid these provocative issues?

Post-Lesson Questions Group interview / Individual interview / Blog Prompts (Questions to be asked following students involvement with the provocative lessons)

1. Were the provocative lessons more or less helpful in understanding the content?

2. Do you feel the method of evaluation used by the teacher at the end of the provocative lessons were fair?

3. Did you learn from other students’ opinions during the provocative lessons? Why or Why Not?

4. When you were discussing these provocative issues within the lessons, did you change your original opinion, or did the discussion and debates only reaffirmed what you originally thought?

5. Were the provocative nature of these issues distracting to your learning? Why or Why Not?

6. Do you find traditional instruction where the teacher present material as facts for students to memorize and then be tested on, more or less helpful compared to these provocative lessons?

7. Describe any negative side effects on your learning these lessons?

8. Are you more easily distracted when discussing and debating provocative ideas or during teacher lectures?

9. Should teachers do more of lessons like these?

10. Should teachers omit these lessons if one or two students in the class had moral or religious objections to the provocative topics?
11. Did you find any of the elements disturbing or inappropriate for classroom inclusion?

12. How might provocative issues influence your understanding of history?

13. How might provocative issues influence your understanding of the world around you?
REFERENCES


Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.


New York State Law. (1949) Gen. Law 34. Chapter number 5, § Section number 32.


Teachers College Record. Volume 102, Number 4, 805–840


Greenwich, CT: JAI.