MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS’ CONCEPTIONS OF AUTHORSHIP IN HISTORY TEXTS

DISSertation

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By

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ABSTRACT

Middle school students are expected to use higher-level literacy strategies in order to read history texts interpretively and critically. However, history and social studies textbooks are typically written in an anonymous, authoritative style that is based on schematic narrative templates, which reflect a society’s static collective memory, rather than a history open to interpretation. In this way, textbooks serve as an impediment to the development of higher-level historical thinking. There is evidence that students’ historical understandings are shaped by the mastery or the appropriation of specific narratives of historical events. Two interrelated teacher-research studies indicated that the middle school students (both sixth graders and eighth graders) have a strong positive bias toward anonymous authoritative texts as the most valid means for writing about the past. However, the study also revealed that the students are capable, with instructional support, of recognizing the author’s role in interpreting a historical event. These results suggest that middle school students, with classroom instruction, can learn to take a more critical stance toward historical narratives as a means to developing deeper historical understandings.
Dedicated to Pete, my biggest cheerleader, and Corby, my greatest motivator
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When working historians read history, they attempt to understand the text as a re-enactment through the author’s mind. They consider it important to know who is behind the historical account. In fact, historians almost always read the primary source or read the background of the author prior to reading the historical account itself (Wineburg, 2001). These practices allow historians to see sources as people, and they perceive their readings as social exchanges between author and reader. Wineburg (2001) noted, “When texts are viewed as human creations, what is said becomes inseparable from who says it” (pp. 76-77). The kind of scholarship that expert historians typically read includes clues that reveal something about the author and help historians, as readers, make judgments about accuracy, bias, and so forth (Paxton, 1997, 1999; Wineburg, 2001).

One source of these types of clues has been referred to as the author’s voice or the author’s style. Graves (1983) referred to the unique style of an author, or the author’s voice, as the imprint of the self. The concept of voice has also been used to describe an author’s use of certain rhetorical devices (Kamberelis & McGinley, 1992). Some types of rhetorical devices have been labeled “metadiscourse”
(Crismore, 1984; Nolen, 1995; Paxton, 1997), or the use of rhetorical devices to guide readers by helping them to understand not only the structure of the text, but also an author’s perspective. These rhetorical devices make the author “visible” (Nolen, 1995; Paxton, 1997, 1999, 2002) by revealing information about the author and how he or she thinks or feels about the content of the text. According to Schneider and Gregory (2000), a visible author of history clearly conveys the sense that some parts of history may be unknown or open to interpretation or both. Although there have been many conceptualizations offered and various facets studied, the point is that authorship is an important consideration for readers.

Although authors of history texts often use metadiscourse, history and social studies textbooks authors write with significantly fewer of these rhetorical devices, rendering the author “anonymous” (Crismore, 1984; Paxton, 1997) or “absentee” (Wineburg, 2001). To put it simply, most textbook writing removes clues about the author, diminishing the reader’s ability to make decisions about the author’s biases and interpretations (Paxton, 1997, 1999, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). Wineburg (2001) has argued that the removal of author’s voice may hold consequences for reading comprehension and for critical reading. Without indications of the author’s position or stance regarding historical events, students may believe textbooks to be simply telling it the way it is, or the way it was (Gabella, 1994). Ravitch (2004) has added that, in fact, “The soul of historical research is debate, but that sense of uncertainty and contingency seldom finds its way into textbooks” (p. 134).

The notion that an anonymous author may impede a reader’s ability to interpret history texts is especially salient for middle school students. One indication
of this problem is that most adolescent students demonstrate a basic level of literacy, but fail to show achievement with higher-level literacy skills. The most recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates that although 74 percent of eighth graders performed at or above the Basic level of achievement, only 31 percent performed at or above the Proficient level (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). When compared to past NAEP assessment data, the percentage of eighth graders performing at or above the Basic level has increased slightly (from 69 percent in 1992 to 74 percent in 2005), while there was no significant change in the percentage of eight graders scoring at or above the Proficient level (Perie et al., 2005). This trend suggests that a greater number of students are acquiring only lower-level literacy, and that many of them do not develop higher-level literacy behaviors and skills.

Removing the author’s voice from a history text would likely reinforce the idea that readers are to read history and social studies textbooks simply for factual information. Given that most adolescent students rely primarily on basic literacy practices, an anonymous author further limits opportunities for interpretation and deeper understanding. In other words, in order to encourage adolescent students to read history texts interpretively and critically, rather than to read just for facts, a visible author may not only be more inviting, but necessary. On the other hand, paying attention primarily to the surface features of the text, including the rhetorical devices that make an author more visible, may prevent readers from considering deeper issues related to author’s voice. The overarching question for this study asks:
What is it that middle school students understand about authorship, and how do they use their understandings of authorship to interpret texts?

Rationale and Focus

As a middle school language arts teacher, I am committed to providing my students with the tools they need to be successful in reading the words and the world around them. In this information age, we are faced with increasingly complex literacy demands, and the need for critical literacy has never been greater. Simply tuning in to a national news broadcast on television or taking part in a presidential election underscores this need. Members of our society are relentlessly bombarded with messages that need to be comprehended, deconstructed, and interpreted.

As previously mentioned, most middle school students are literate, but at a basic level. They often fail to use higher-level literacy skills to comprehend and interpret texts. In the school district in which I teach, over time most of the sixth graders have performed well on the previously-used Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT) and the current Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) in reading, as long as the questions asked students to recall what they had read (Ohio Department of Education, 2001, 2002, 2003a, 2004, 2006). When asked to interpret a text or to extend their understanding, many of the students have struggled. Furthermore, in-district item analyses over the years have shown that sixth graders have tended to score lower on the expository passages on the OPT than on the narrative passages (Ohio Department of Education, 2001, 2002, 2003a, 2004). Based on available data, this trend seems to be continuing with the OAT (Ohio Department of Education, 2006). Could the sixth graders’ struggles with the expository passages be due, at least in part, to an inability to think
critically about them? Do the students understand that they are expected to think critically for the test?

Another issue that emerges every year among sixth-grade teachers in my school district is the perception that sixth graders cannot read and comprehend their textbooks, especially in social studies. This situation created a puzzle for me: If most adolescent students read just for facts, and if most textbooks are written in a way that just lists the facts, why then do students still struggle to construct meaning from their textbooks? My own experience and my reading of scholars such as Paxton (1997; 1999, 2002), Wineburg (1991; 2001), and Ravitch (2004) led me to several other questions: Would a visible author foster improved comprehension of social studies content? Would a visible author encourage students to read more critically? After I conducted an initial study of learning from a visible author, I realized that my questions included an underlying assumption that students simply required metadiscoursal cues. Accordingly, I conducted a second study to consider the effects of students’ prior understanding of a historical account and how author’s voice influences student perceptions of accounts of historical events from different perspectives.

Middle School Students’ Conceptions of Authorship in History Texts

Ultimately, what I learned from my research is that students’ conceptions of authorship in history texts frame the ways in which students read, write, and think about history and social studies. Furthermore, the ways in which educators teach, talk about, and write about history often inadvertently discourage students from engaging in the very act we proclaim is an important outcome for history education: historical
thinking. History teachers often rely on textbooks as their primary instructional resource in the classroom. In learning from typical textbooks, however, students may master the facts, but they most likely will not learn how to use history as a mediational tool that supports dialogue and allows for critical reading and interpretation. By employing historical narrative as a mediational tool for reading and understanding history, students have greater access to the dialogue and increase their opportunities for adding their own voices to the dialogue.

In the following sections, I will explore several factors that influence students’ conceptions of authorship in history texts: teaching and learning from informational text; reading as engagement in historical narrative; and effects of the visible author on reading history.

Teaching and Learning from Informational Text

Students experience a greater amount of exposure to narrative texts than to expository texts in school, resulting in a privileging of narrative in the classroom (Graesser, Golding, & Long, 1991; Willingham, 2004), especially in the primary grades (Irvin, 1998). According to Willingham (2004), narrative is also “psychologically privileged,” meaning that readers’ minds treat stories differently than other types of texts. Compared to other types of texts, stories are more interesting, easier to comprehend, and easier to remember for most readers (Cunningham & Gall, 1990; Willingham, 2004), probably because most narratives have a predictable structure that even very young children are able to identify to some degree (Wenner, 2004). In addition, the microworld represented in a story often has a high correspondence with what readers experience in everyday life, in terms of
characters pursuing goals, obstacles that impede progress to the goals, conflicts between characters, emotional reactions, spatial settings, and so forth (Graesser, McNamara, & Louwerse, 2003). It is important to note that the above-mentioned characteristics of narrative apply to fictional stories as well as factual stories, including historical narratives.

In contrast to narrative texts stand expository texts. Expository texts “...convey new information and explain new topics to people” (Black, 1985, p. 249). Because expository text is written to inform readers about ideas with which they are unfamiliar, there is frequently a high density of unfamiliar terms (Graesser et al., 2003). Moreover, expository texts do not offer predictability in content or in structure (Kucan & Beck, 1996). Although there are some common organizing structures used in expository writing (such as chronological order, cause/effect, and compare/contrast), expository texts frequently combine several organizing structures throughout a single text (Kucan & Beck, 1996). As Beck and McKeown (1989) stated:

The reader enters a narrative text expecting a specific structure and is able to use knowledge of that structure to organize what is read. However, in approaching an exposition, the reader’s expectations can only be based on knowledge of the topic, because no overall expository structure exists.

(p. 51)

For these reasons, students tend to have more difficulty reading, remembering, and comprehending expository texts than narratives (Kucan & Beck, 1996).

Textbooks represent a type of expository writing that is often the basis of classroom instruction. Students quickly develop the perception that they are to read
textbooks for the exclusive purpose of learning facts that are to be regurgitated on demand (McNeil, 1989). Educators tend to encourage students to adopt this stance toward learning, as our society emphasizes teaching, learning, testing, and research that can easily be assessed. Moreover, textbooks are often written in a style that becomes a listing of facts, with connected narrative and metadiscourse removed (Crismore, 1984; McNeil, 1989; Sewall & Emberling, 1998). Textbooks frequently lack linguistic markers that make texts more coherent, which is especially problematic when readers have little background knowledge about the topic (Graesser et al., 2003). Textbook writing, to which most students are frequently exposed in social studies and history classes, may not provide realistic representations of authentic history texts (meaning the type of texts that professional historians would be most likely to read and write), whether expository or narrative.

Rosenblatt (1978) maintained that an important aspect of a text is the cues it provides as to which stance the reader should take. The style in which most textbooks are written, as a listing of “pure facts,” suggests to readers that they should read simply to obtain factual information. These factors combine to inhibit a mature reading of textbooks, so that students may understand what the text is about, but not what the text means (McNeil, 1989). Thus student responses to textbook reading are often superficial, stemming from surface-level comprehension and uncritical reading of the text (Wineburg, 2001). This may be one explanation of the previously-mentioned pattern of the sixth graders in our district to achieve lower scores on expository passages on the Ohio Proficiency Test and Ohio Achievement Test:
Perhaps the sixth graders do not believe they are required (or have not learned how) to provide thoughtful answers to the textbook-like expository passages.

If students believe that the sole purpose of reading textbooks is to acquire and remember facts, they most likely approach their textbook reading from a fact-finding stance. With a focus on extracting and retaining factual information, students are not likely to be “living through” the text or to attempt to interpret the text to find significance. This over-reliance on the factual comprehension may be especially harmful in the fields of history and social studies, where mature historical understandings cannot be achieved without critical reading and interpretation of the text (Wineburg, 2001).

*Reading as Engagement in Historical Narrative*

There is some evidence that when reading history texts with a known author, successful students, in comparison to less successful students, are more likely to enter into imagined conversations with the author, (Beck & McKeown, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). By engaging in such conversations, students can talk back to the text or question the author, building and expanding historical understandings (Beck & McKeown, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). Furthermore, students engaged in a conversation with an author may approach the text more flexibly, taking into account specific historical contexts and individuals’ motivations and intentions, resulting in more empathetic historical interpretations that allow students to truly know others (Wineburg, 2001). Middle school readers who see the author of a history text as someone with whom to interact in a social manner (by agreeing or disagreeing, questioning, and co-constructing meaning) may be more likely to move beyond basic
reading and comprehension skills and to develop more critical, more mature interpretations of the text and of the world.

Reading stories, whether from history or from literature, can be a powerful and compelling experience. Stories help us to know ourselves, to understand others and their perspectives, and to envision possibilities for transforming the world. Both literature and history support what Johnston (1993) called “social imagination,” the capacity to value and explore multiple perspectives. The core of any narrative, Johnston (2007) argued, is that it allows readers to imagine how others feel, putting themselves in the place of others. In fact, Johnston (2007) asserted that this capacity for social imagination is crucial for democracy, so that individuals value differences and understand they need each other to learn, grow, and develop. Stories, whether fictional or historical, represent interpretations of the human experience, inviting readers to engage in transactions with the author to create meaning.

Unfortunately, by the time students reach middle school, they often have become disenfranchised readers who do not accept the invitation to build meaning, if they have even noticed that such an invitation exists. In general, middle school readers tend to read various types of texts for information only, regarding reading as “a passive act of receiving someone else’s meanings” (Wilhelm, 1997, p. 13). Instead of taking an active role in their reading, adolescents frequently view texts (and especially textbooks) as holding the one “true” meaning that is simply to be dictated and accepted, not questioned or challenged. An instructional emphasis on factual knowledge and standardized test results can reinforce this perspective. Thus, middle school readers often fail to attempt to make connections or to transact with texts in
order to interpret and construct meaning, which prevents students from developing deeper understanding and reading critically.

Reader response theories (e.g. Rosenblatt, 1978) emphasize the highly social, transactional nature of reading. According to these theories, the text, the author, and the reader all contribute to the meaning-making process. In order to move beyond a passive, text-bound view of reading, the reader must engage with the text. Engagement is defined as the motivated, intentional deployment and coordination of strategies for reading, comprehending, and interpreting text (Guthrie, Alao, & Rinehart, 1997; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wilhelm, 1997). To put it simply, engaged readers have a desire to learn from texts. Therefore, they intentionally choose the best strategies at their disposal to help them understand and interpret texts in order to achieve their learning goals. Engaged readers are more likely to enter the experiences and perspectives of others, providing support for understanding others and offering choices and possibilities for seeing the world, as well as how to be in the world. In other words, going beyond a surface-level reading (in which the reader’s purpose is simply to collect facts) affords possibilities for deeper understanding and transformation, both of the reader’s worldview and of the world itself.

Effects of the Visible Author on Reading History

One aspect of historical narratives that may represent an invitation into the reading transaction is the presence of a visible author. A visible author attempts to reveal himself or herself to readers by writing in first person, addressing the reader, and using attitudinal metadiscourse (Paxton, 1997). If a middle school reader is able to discern that there is a person behind the text, this may open up the possibility of a
conversation between author and reader. Rather than viewing the reading event as a human-to-object phenomenon, the reader may perceive the reading event as a human-to-human interaction, asking questions and working with the author to construct meaning (Moffett, 1983). Understanding that a text, whether literary or historical, represents some person (or persons) telling a story about the human experience may encourage a student to employ higher-level literacy strategies, with the result of living through another’s experience and interpreting meaning from that lived-through experience.

Reading history written especially for elementary and secondary schools has yet another dimension to understanding and interpreting the author’s intention. Fitzgerald (1979) suggested that history textbooks have two unique functions: (1) they contain nationalistic histories to foster patriotism, and (2) they are written to instruct rather than to explore – their agenda is to inform children what their elders want them to know. To state it another way, the historical accounts that most students read in school are intended to serve a primarily expository function with a patriotic flavor: to inform readers about people and events from the past in a way that promotes nationalism.

Wertsch (2002) asserted that a nation’s history is based on collective memory, shaped by schematic narrative templates of historical episodes. These narratives are told over and again, are sanctioned by governing bodies and most citizens, and are the bases for many history textbooks, thus becoming the official history. These narratives also represent what Bakhtin (1981) referred to as “authoritative discourse,” as these are the historical narratives that are intended to represent the “true” history of
a society, not to be questioned but simply to be remembered. Thus, over time, students’ understanding of history may be shaped by simple narratives that resist critical analysis and the possibility of multiple perspectives on history. Accordingly, the official narratives that underlie social studies and history textbook accounts (whether they are presented as exposition or narrative) may ultimately distort students’ efforts to read non-official narratives that resist simple conclusions about historical events (Wertsch, 1998).

Significance of the Study

This study, which evolved into two separate but related studies, represents a combination of teacher research and an investigation into how students’ conceptions of authorship influence their attempts to read and understand history. My initial study examines how a class of sixth graders, as a learning community, came to understand the notion of a visible author in a history text, specifically as an interpretive strategy for critical reading. My second study examines how students (sixth graders and eighth graders) used their knowledge of authorship as a mediational tool in order to read and interpret history. The study as a whole also serves as a tool for researching my own practice, focusing on what I do in my classroom to support and improve teaching and learning for my students and for myself.

One of my strongest beliefs in regard to teaching and learning is that I can always improve my practice. Teacher research is a natural part of being a teacher, and as a teacher, I am able to frame research using my significant understanding of classrooms and students. This project offered me an opportunity to examine my own teaching in order to explore the ways in which middle school students might learn
about authorship and use that knowledge as an interpretive strategy when reading history texts.

This study has significance beyond my own classroom. For students, history is often viewed as a gathering of facts. For historians, history is a process of inquiry, critical reflection, interpretation, and dialogue. According to our national history standards (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), history education should combine both views in order to help students develop historical understanding (what students should know) and historical thinking (what students should be able to do). Reading history is not only a way to learn new information, but it can also become a way to engage in new kinds of thinking (Wineburg, 2001). It is this potential for history to teach students to think and reason in sophisticated ways that is crucial. As students are bombarded daily with messages from multiple sources of media, the ability to read critically is imperative. History provides innumerable opportunities for students to develop skills and strategies for critical reading. In addition, by using history texts as thinking devices, students are afforded the opportunity to learn that multiple historical narratives, responding to one another, offer a valid way of knowing and interpreting stories of the past. This way of knowing legitimizes voices that have often been excluded from history. Furthermore, this way of knowing reaches beyond the past, as it connects to the present and the future. It offers the possibility of helping students to understand the experience of others in the world around them, which is crucial as our world becomes increasingly more diverse. Historical thinking supports students as they attempt to read the word and the world around them.
In the first study, a group of sixth graders and I worked together as a community of learners to develop an understanding of a visible author. We engaged in both whole-class and small-group discussions to help us define the concept and create a shared vocabulary. Students then worked in pairs and individually to apply what they had learned about a visible author in order to comprehend and evaluate historical texts, both with a visible author and an anonymous author. I analyzed student responses, classroom videotapes, and audiotapes of four case study students in order to help me examine my support of student learning on a daily basis and how the notion of a visible author might be understood and used as an interpretive strategy by the sixth graders.

Another important part of this project is the design of the unit of instruction in Study 1. This unit was designed to provide students with a great deal of scaffolding at the beginning of the project, with a gradual decrease in the amount of support over time. Within the field of education, scaffolding was originally defined as “a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his [or her] unassisted efforts” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976, p. 90). Scaffolding is intended to help learners bridge the gap between what they know and can do on their own, and what they know and can do with help from a more knowledgeable other (for example, a parent, a teacher, or a peer). In other words, scaffolding provides support within a learner’s zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) so that the new can be connected with the known.

Within Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development model, there is an assumption that all students can achieve. Scaffolding allows for varying degrees of
support as needed by individual students, including students with special needs, so that all students can make academic progress. The instructional design of my project also included a variety of class configurations, with whole-class discussions, small group discussions, work in dyads, and individual assignments. Because students were in a number of configurations throughout the study, there were multiple opportunities for students to take on or to relinquish the fluid, shifting roles of novice or of expert when working with their peers and me to develop higher forms of literacy. Simply stated, scaffolding is prompting of thinking (Pressley, Hogan, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta, & Ettenberger, 1996). My study was designed to prompt the thinking of all students to support the development of critical literacy.

As I came to understand more about the complexity of authorship in history texts, I realized that I would need to investigate further. I decided to do a second study in order to examine how authors’ voices’ might influence students’ interpretations of historical narratives. Because Shanahan (1998) had determined that students’ understandings of authors of literature changed over time, I decided to include one group of sixth graders (a different group from the students involved in the first study) and one group of eighth graders in the second study. The purpose of the second study was to examine how author’s voice influences middle school students’ interpretation of history texts and the development of deeper historical understanding.

Research Questions

As mentioned above, my initial study led to the development of a second study. Each study was based on a set of unique, yet related, research questions. For
the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the two studies as Study 1 and Study 2 throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

Study 1 investigates the following specific research questions:

1. What are sixth-grade students’ prior understandings of authorship as indicated by class discussion?

2. How does classroom instruction support student learning in regard to identifying visible authors in texts?

3. How do visible authors and anonymous authors affect students’ comprehension and recall of history texts?

4. What conclusions do students draw in regard to texts with visible authors versus texts with anonymous authors?

These questions were used as a guide throughout several phases of research (preparation, instruction, application, and evaluation), as well as during the case studies. They were also used to guide the analysis of the data.

After collecting student data and beginning the analysis, I realized that I had underestimated the complexity of authorship in history texts and how it influences readers. I came to understand that my original project was just scratching the surface of helping students develop strategies for reading history. In addition, the outcome measures that I had selected (retellings and answers to comprehension questions) appeared to be too limiting to illuminate the kind of historical reading and understanding I was trying to support among my students. My measures had asked for literal reading and comprehension, and my students obliged. But I was interested in students’ interpretations of history texts and how authorship affects those interpretations. It became evident that a second study was needed.
As noted above, my project evolved into a two-part investigation. Study 2 investigates the following specific research questions:

1. What narratives of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America have students appropriated from their backgrounds and experiences? What are students’ perceptions of their sources for their narratives? What challenges do they report in writing the narratives?

2. How do two different narratives about Christopher Columbus shape students’ retellings?

3. What do students report as differences between the two texts, especially in terms of accuracy, complexity, and pedagogical appropriateness?

4. How do the authors’ voices influence students’ images of the authors? How does gender shape students’ image of the author?

5. What are the case study students’ perceptions of the two authors’ motives?

Theoretical Framework

**Social-Constructivist Theories of Literacy Learning**

As their name implies, social-constructivist theories of literacy learning are built on the premise that all knowledge is consensually constructed through the social interactions among a community of peers (Bruffee, 1986; McCarthey & Raphael, 1992). As individuals engage in social interactions, knowledge is constructed. When this knowledge is then internalized within an individual, learning has taken place (Vygotsky, 1978). Because all knowledge is socially and communally constructed, knowledge is viewed not as a static concept, but as capable of changing and evolving over time (McCarthey & Raphael, 1992). All thought, including higher mental functions such as reading and writing, is considered to be social and cultural in nature.
From this perspective, social participation supports learning.

The acquisition of these functions begins with interactions between individuals, usually in which one of the individuals is more knowledgeable, while the other is more of a novice (McCarthey & Raphael, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). If the novice cannot complete a task alone, but can do it with the help of a more expert person, then the task lies within the novice’s zone of proximal development, or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD is a cognitive zone in which the learner requires the support and direction of a knowledgeable other who can move him or her beyond current understanding. This type of assisted learning, often referred to as “scaffolding” (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Wood et al., 1976), occurs between dyads such as parent/child, older sibling/younger sibling, or teacher/student. Learning occurs first with the social interaction between the more knowledgeable individual and the learner, and then this social interaction is internalized within the learner (McCarthey & Raphael, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). Through the internalization of the social interaction and the talk that surrounds the task, the learner acquires new knowledge and abilities. External speech eventually becomes the inner speech of self-regulation of one’s own thinking (Karpov & Haywood, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). This process highlights the important role of language and dialogue in social-constructivist theory, as more knowledgeable members of the community help others learn through social interaction. To illustrate, a reader could engage in a conversation with a visible author who would be considered the expert on the subject of the text. In this way, the more knowledgeable visible author could help the reader learn about
the subject through the social interaction of the imagined conversation. Thus visible authors may influence readers’ potential learning.

An important dimension of reading comprehension requires that students learn how to make sense of print by engaging in social interactions with experts or more capable peers. In this case, these social interactions center on understanding text. Through reading aloud and thinking aloud, the teacher (who could be an expert, parent, or more knowledgeable peer) makes reading strategies explicit by modeling and demonstrating the strategies. Over time, students are provided opportunities for scaffolded practice with feedback and for discussing the meaning of the text with others. Eventually, students learn to internalize and independently apply these strategies in order to facilitate reading comprehension.

Within a social-constructivist classroom, one would expect to find children engaged in scaffolded learning activities and literacy experiences that are based on social interaction (McCarthey & Raphael, 1992). For example, the teacher may be in the expert role, while the children are considered the novices; or students may serve as more knowledgeable peers for other students. Emphasis is placed on reading and writing for authentic communicative purposes, and opportunities for peer interaction (working in pairs or cooperative learning groups) are abundant. Embedding the processes of reading, writing, discussing, and thinking within a context of social interaction is essential to social-constructivist theories of literacy learning.
Theoretical Learning in a Community of Learners

Karpov and Haywood (1998) assert that an important point of Vygotsky’s theory is often overlooked. Before a child can regulate his or her own behavior, he or she must first use semiotic tools to regulate the behavior of another. In the words of Vygotsky (1930/1981): “A sign is always originally a means used for social purposes, a means of influencing others, and only later becomes a means of influencing oneself” (p. 157, as cited in Karpov & Haywood, 1998, p. 28). From this perspective, children’s development of self-regulation follows a sequence, in which an expert first regulates the child, the child then regulates another, and finally the child regulates his or her own behavior. This self-regulation first occurs with egocentric speech, which is later internalized to become inner speech. In this view, expert teaching is necessary, and so is the opportunity to regulate others’ behaviors. This is why instructional scaffolding is crucial to support learning. Students must receive some explicit teaching in order to obtain accurate conceptual and procedural knowledge. But they also need to participate in collaborative problem-solving activities. Karpov and Haywood (1998) refer to this learning approach as “theoretical learning in a community of learners” (p. 33-34). This approach to learning underscores the importance of social interaction during learning, as students receive support from the teacher and their peers, yet they also have opportunities to direct others in their learning endeavors. As students take turns solving problems (planning, monitoring, checking, and evaluating the problem-solving process), they also work to acquire the tools for self-regulation.
Social-Constructivist and Sociocultural Theories of Learning and Adolescents

Social-constructivist theories of literacy learning mesh well with the emphasis on social interaction in adolescence. For instance, research shows differences between students’ literacy in school situations and in real-world situations (Allington, 2001; Ivey, 1999a, 1999b). Specifically, some students seem to struggle with school-assigned literacy tasks, but flourish with literacy tasks that have personal and social significance for them. These differences demonstrate that some middle school students can create meaning within a community of peers, yet fail to do so within a classroom in which they perceive no social support for their efforts.

Given the significance that adolescents place on social interactions, a visible author may be an important consideration for middle school readers. A visible author refers to the person behind the text, who writes in first person, addresses the reader, and offers glimpses into his or her thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Once the reader perceives that a real person is behind the text, social interaction is a possibility. By reading a text with a visible author, readers are invited to participate in a discussion with an expert or more knowledgeable member of the learning community. Thus, through a social-constructivist lens, a reader and a visible author can work together to build meaning. Again, it is participation in a social interaction that supports learning.

Sociocultural theory is also important to the instructional design of this study. The unit of instruction in Study 1 was based on a model of apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990). In the beginning of the unit, student learning was heavily scaffolded by the teacher. Teacher support was decreased as students worked together to construct
knowledge and often served as the more knowledgeable experts for one another. The ultimate goal of the instructional unit was for students to appropriate and internalize the class-constructed knowledge.

More broadly, sociocultural theory informed my research by providing a framework upon which to build an understanding of how social interaction and cultural influences impact students’ conceptions of authorship and the use of historical narrative as a mediational tool. To this end, I drew heavily on the thinking of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Wertsch.

Vygotsky

Vygotsky (1930/1981, 1934/1986, 1978, 1987) believed that at each stage of a child’s development, natural factors (determined by genetic and maturational mechanisms) come into interaction with the sociocultural factors of what was defined by Vygotsky as a social situation of development. From the very beginning of a child’s development, the interaction of the child with the environment is mediated by the sociocultural world. Vygotskian theory acknowledges the importance of so-called “sensitive periods” which reflect the interaction between the “inner” development of cognitive functions and external sociocultural factors (Kozulin, 2002). For example, reading readiness, typically between the ages of 5 and 7 years old, is a result of a sensitive period in which the cognitive functions essential for reading are usually in a state of formation. In addition, developmental process according to Vygotsky involves periods of relative stability interspersed with “crises” – the periods of dramatic change that lead to the emergence of new quasi-stable structures. Vygotskian crises are anchored in changes prompted by the interaction between
maturational and sociocultural forces. These crises are related to the emergence of a new psychological formation that assumes a leading role for a given developmental period. For example, Vygotsky suggested that conceptual thinking is a dominant formation for adolescence.

According to Vygotsky, higher mental functioning is rooted in social life. In Vygotsky’s (1930/1981) view, social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships: “…humans’ psychological nature represents the aggregate of internalized social relations that have become functions for the individual and form the individual’s structure” (p. 164). Any function that appears in a child’s development actually appears twice: once within interaction with another person (intermental functioning), then within the child (intramental functioning) (Wertsch, 1991).

Vygotsky’s claim that higher mental functions originate within social interaction leads to his notion of a “zone of proximal development,” or ZPD, which is defined as the distance between a child’s “actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving” and the higher level of “potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p. 86). Based on the ZPD, Vygotsky argued that instruction should be tied more closely to the level of potential development than to the level of actual development.

Sociocultural theory makes an important distinction between experiences produced by the immediate contact of the individual with environmental stimuli and experiences shaped by interactions mediated by symbolic tools (Kozulin, 2002).
Vygotsky claimed that higher mental functioning and human action in general are mediated by tools and signs (Wertsch, 1991). Cognitive development and learning, according to Vygotsky, essentially depends on the child’s mastery of symbolic mediators, their appropriation and internalization in the form of inner psychological tools (Kozulin, 2002). In terms of language and other sign systems, the importance for Vygotsky was how they are a part of and how they mediate human action (Wertsch, 1991).

Because of the value he attached to the development of metacognitive functions and critical reasoning, Vygotsky was unequivocal in his conviction that cognitive functioning based on higher order symbolic tools associated with literacy (and numeracy) is superior to that based on everyday experience and the oral transmission of culture (Kozulin, 2002). The development of higher-order cognitive functioning, in Vygotsky’s opinion, is intimately related to the mastery of one’s own psychological functions achieved with the help of higher order symbolic mediation. A defining property of higher mental functioning, one that is unique to humans, is the fact that it is mediated by tools and by sign systems such as natural language (Wertsch, 1991).

Symbols may remain useless unless their meaning as cognitive tools is properly mediated to the child. The mere availability of signs or texts does not imply that they will be used by students as psychological tools (Kozulin, 2002). As Wertsch (1991) stated: “In [Vygotsky’s] view, it is meaningless to assert that individuals ‘have’ a sign, or have mastered it, without addressing the ways in which they do or do not use it to mediate their own actions or those of others” (p. 29). The appropriation
of symbolic mediators is dependent on the goal that a teacher or parent sets for the tool-mediator offered to the child. Not every type of literacy leads to the cognitive changes described by Vygotsky (Kozulin, 2002). Vygotsky (1987) emphasized that different forms of speaking are related to different forms of thinking: “…the study of thought and language is one of the areas of psychology in which a clear understanding of interfunctional relations is particularly important” (p. 1). Moreover, even literacy acquired in a formal educational setting does not necessarily lead to the cognitive changes unless this literacy is mediated to a student as a cognitive tool. In fact, symbolic systems may remain unappropriated by children unless they are properly mediated to them (Kozulin, 2002).

The acquisition of content material and the acquisition of symbolic tools are intertwined, but the process of appropriation of psychological tools differs from the process of content learning (Kozulin, 2002). For this reason, the acquisition of psychological tools requires a different learning paradigm than the acquisition of content knowledge. According to Kozulin (2002), the teaching of psychological tools must have the character of a deliberate action. If there is no intentionality on the part of the teacher-mediator, psychological tools will not be appropriated by the students, or will be perceived as another content item, rather than a tool. The symbolic tool fulfills its role only if it is appropriated and internalized as a generalized instrument. If this purpose is poorly mediated to learners, the proper understanding of the tools’ instrumental function can be missing (Kozulin, 2002).

Sociocultural theory suggests that the style of human mediation cannot be properly comprehended unless the role of available symbolic mediators is
acknowledged. Although symbolic tools do not have an independent existence, they are always appropriated depending on the goals of the given community (Kozulin, 2002).

According to Wertsch (1991), mediational means have a predisposition to be used more easily for certain purposes than for others, as certain patterns of speaking and thinking are easier, or come to be viewed as more appropriate, in a specific setting than others. For example, a speaker uses narrative form when relating an event to a friend.

In Vygotsky’s view, the cognitive development of a child appears as a process strongly dependent on the human and symbolic mediation provided by the community through parents, peers, teachers, and other mediators. The interaction between symbolic and human aspects of mediation is important.

Bakhtin

Bakhtin (1981, 1986) delved further into the ways in which textual form and use are inextricably linked. For Bakhtin (1986), the real unit of speech communication is the utterance: “Speech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist” (p. 71). The notion of utterance is inherently linked with that of voice, or “the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 434). An utterance can exist only by being produced by a voice. An utterance, spoken or written, is always expressed from a point of view (Wertsch, 1991).

In the Bakhtinian notion of text, text involves a structured system of signs such as a sentence or narrative, on the one hand, and the use made of this system on
the other. This structure represents an irreducible tension, resulting in repeatable elements in the system of the language along with unrepeatable elements that involve the special dialogue relations, which is revealed only in a particular situation (Bakhtin, 1986). For example, if a student were to say to me “I love homework,” the repeatable elements of this utterance are the words themselves. The unrepeatable element is the specific context in which the utterance is stated, such as the people involved in the dialogue and the tacit meaning with which the utterance is delivered).

For Bakhtin, the analysis of any text, written or spoken, comes down to the question: Who is doing the speaking? The answer is always at least two voices: the speaker’s (which derives from the repeatable) and the textual means being employed (which derives from the unrepeatable). Understanding any text involves the response of one voice to another. This is what Bakhtin referred to as “dialogicality” (1981).

In Bakhtin’s view, a speaker always invokes a social language in producing an utterance, and this social language shapes what the speaker’s individual voice can say. One voice speaks through another voice in a social language:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes one’s own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-294).

Bakhtin (1981) referred to the process of making another’s words “one’s own” as “appropriation.”
Speakers may take many different stances toward textual resources provided to them. They may accept the text wholeheartedly and try to reproduce it without change, they may reject it, they may parody it, and so forth (Wertsch, 2002). This stance depends on whether or not speakers approach a text as authoritative. Bakhtin (1981) argued that text performs as either authoritative discourse or internally persuasive discourse. With authoritative discourse, “one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it” (p. 343). Its semantic structure is static and dead, and it has a single meaning. It demands unconditional allegiance. “Authoritative discourse cannot be represented – it is only transmitted” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 344). Textbook writing is typically an example of authoritative discourse, as it is intended to transmit factual information. There is no issue of interpretation.

In contrast, internally persuasive discourse invites individuals to engage in a kind of dialogue with what others say because “…as it is affirmed through assimilation, [it is] tightly interwoven with one’s own word” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). The internally persuasive text is half ours and half someone else’s (Bakhtin, 1981). One is invited to take the internally persuasive word as a thinking device, as a starting point for a response that may incorporate and change what was originally said (Wertsch, 2002). This type of discourse “is able to reveal ever new ways to mean” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345-346). Whereas authoritative discourse tends to discourage dialogic contact, internally persuasive discourse encourages it (Wertsch, 1991). For example, a narrative that provides a certain perspective on an event is open to various interpretations.
Related to Bakhtin’s notions of text is the functional dualism of texts outlined by Lotman (1988). According to Lotman (1988), two functions of text are to convey meaning and to generate new meaning. The transmission-like function of text can be seen as univocal, while the second function is dialogic and is characterized by multivoicedness. Both functions of text can be found in any sociocultural setting, but one or the other dominates in certain areas of activity or in general during certain periods of history (Wertsch, 1991). Additionally, texts may simultaneously serve different functions (Wertsch, 1991).

Bakhtin (1981) claimed that voice represents “the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness” (p. 434), whether the voice is expressed by spoken or written language. An individual’s personality or consciousness, however, is developed through contact with and appropriation of various social influences. Thus an author’s voice is actually a mix of many other voices, chosen to accomplish certain communicative purposes. As such, an author’s voice always has a will or desire behind it, and the author and the message are always situated in a particular time and place in society and in history. In creating the text, the author has a particular audience in mind for specific communicative purpose.

Furthermore, the author cannot be removed from the social discourse that surrounds him or her and the production of the text. This social discourse includes a number of social voices that create the context within which the author’s own voice is heard. In other words, the author’s message is constrained by the social background that has already been established. This notion rejects the idea of an author as an isolated individual, and casts the author as a link in a chain of communication that is
continuously influenced by social, cultural, and political forces. Utterances, whether spoken or written, are made within the power of a particular context, as they represent two actual people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a particular time and in a particular place. Bakhtin (1981) continually raised the questions: Who is doing the talking? Who is being addressed? The idea that all communication originates from one person and is addressed to another is what Bakhtin (1981) referred to as “addressivity.” In order to have meaning, language (in any form) is somebody talking to somebody else, even when an individual is engaged in an inner dialogue with the self. Bakhtin (1981) maintained that the dialogic nature of discourse is a property of any discourse, and meaning can occur only when at least two voices can be heard. In a novel, for example, many voices are heard, from the voice of the author, to the voice of the narrator(s), to the voices of the characters, all within social contexts. This multivoicedness, or heteroglossia, emphasizes the importance of the context over the text itself.

Wertsch

In his sociocultural exploration of mediated action, Wertsch (1991) appropriated many of Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) ideas and combined them with Vygotsky (1930/1981, 1934/1986, 1978, 1987). Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin believed that human communication is connected to mental functioning. Social, communicative processes allow for interaction between individuals and intermental functioning, which is later transformed into intramental functioning within an individual. For Wertsch (1991), the concept of voice underscores the necessity of social and communicative interaction for the development of social functioning, as
well as the necessity of communicative processes for individual psychological functioning. Based on Vygotsky’s belief that higher mental function is mediated by tools appropriated through social interaction, along with Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic nature of all discourse, Wertsch (1991) argued that voice is a critical component of mediated action.

Wertsch (2002) draws a distinction between mastery of textual means and appropriation of textual means. The mastery of textual resources concerns knowing how to use them, while the appropriation of textual resources concerns the process of making something one’s own. This process involves the text’s having personal sense for its user, as opposed to abstract, distanced “meaning” (Wertsch, 2002). The opposite of appropriating a cultural tool is resisting it (Wertsch, 1998). Wertsch (2002) emphasized that cognitive mastery does not guarantee appropriation.

Wertsch (1991) asserted that one particular mediational means is often viewed as being more appropriate or efficacious than others in a particular sociocultural setting. This is what Wertsch (1991) called “privileging.” Privileging occurs when “certain mediational means strike their users as being appropriate or even as the only possible alternative, when others are, in principle, imaginable” (p. 124). According to Wertsch (1991), patterns of privileging are accessible to conscious reflection and hence, to challenge. One of the most common responses to a pattern of privileging that is different from one’s own is often incredulity, as when one encounters texts from different cultures or historical periods (Wertsch, 1991). Institutions have a vested interest in seeing one mediational means used rather than another.

Mediational means are often used with little or no conscious reflection, but conscious
awareness is one of the most powerful tools available for recognizing and changing forms of mediation that have unintended and often untoward consequences (Wertsch, 1991). However, the process of recognizing, let alone changing, a pattern of privileging is no simple task.

Collective Memory

In talking about the past, memory is, of course, essential. According to Wertsch (2002), memory serves two functions: to provide an accurate account of the past (accuracy criterion) and to provide an account of the past that can be harnessed for some purpose in the present (usable past). These two functions operate in tandem, vying for position, and resulting in a “functional dualism” (Lotman, 1988). We judge memory by its accuracy and rely on it to provide a usable past for the creation of coherent individual and group identities (Wertsch, 2002). Wertsch asserted that contemporary studies of memory in cognitive psychology tend to focus on accuracy as the basic function, which serves to privilege the accuracy criterion. The functional dualism of memory reflects the tension in history education: Is history the study of facts, or is history a means to understanding the past so that we can more accurately and acutely perceive and understand the experience of others in the world?

Wertsch (2002) draws a distinction between history and collective memory. In Wertsch’s perspective, history is a record of changes that is willing to acknowledge the complexity and multiple perspectives inherent in human experience. History is objective, differentiating the past from the present in a critical, reflective stance that reflects no particular social framework. History represents the historical voice, which
welcomes disagreement, change, and controversy as part of ongoing historical interpretation.

Collective memory, in contrast, attempts to simplify the past and hinges on the stability of seeing events from a single committed perspective, refusing to acknowledge ambiguities. Collective memory is subjective, linking the past with the present in an ahistorical, anithistorical stance that is unself-conscious and focuses on a stable, unchanging version of the past that reflects a particular group’s framework. Collective memory represents the commemorative voice of the past, in which heroic narratives are not to be questioned.

According to Wertsch (2002), a great deal of thinking is shaped by narrative: “We are especially ‘story-telling animals’ when it comes to recounting and interpreting our own and other’s actions – the motives that lie behind them, the settings in which they occur, the outcomes they produce, and so forth” (p. 56). Furthermore, “…the narrative tools we employ…are provided by the particular cultural, historical, and institutional settings in which we live” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 57). Narrative can operate in a referential function or in a dialogic function. The referential function of narratives concerns their potential to refer to setting, characters, and events. In contrast, the dialogic function concerns the relationships that narratives may have to each other. These two tendencies exist in tension and operate in tandem, although one or the other may predominate in any particular instance.

The referential function of narratives tends to provide the foundation for discussions about accuracy in memory, and the dialogic function of narratives is
associated with the contestation and negotiation involved in creating a usable past.

Again, this difference is embodied in the ongoing debate over what history education should be the study of: Is the goal of history instruction to promote critical thought and dialogue through study of the past, or is the goal of history to inculcate collective memory grounded in state-approved civic truth?

From a collective memory perspective, historical narrative simply recounts the past. However, as stories are repeated throughout history, they are unchallenged and unchanged until they become heroic narratives that commemorate the past. Through collective memory, events of the past are transformed into myth. These are the stories of the past that are commonly recounted in history and social studies textbooks, and these are the versions of historical events that are often adopted as official historical narratives. As Wertsch (2002) explained:

“…all states are committed to promulgating an official account of the past. Such accounts typically look more like collective memory than analytical history, and efforts to control collective remembering through the production of textual resources are almost invariably coupled with the tendency to discount or suppress alternative accounts. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for the official accounts to be presented as immutable, even when they are not” (p. 87).

This is why the same narratives appear in many social studies and history textbooks, even if the stories are historically inaccurate (Loewen, 1995). For example, upon his analysis of twelve different high school history textbooks, Loewen (1995) found that the books were virtual clones of one another, repeating the same traditional narratives that were “unaffected by recent research” (p. 16), yet were considered to be the “true” stories of the past. Loewen (1995) blamed this phenomenon in part on nationalism and the intent of textbook publishers to indoctrinate in students blind patriotism.
Narrative form can be used as a tool for grasping together a set of events into a coherent whole (Wertsch, 2002). However, Wertsch argued that a generalized narrative form may provide a foundation for a range of narratives within a cultural tradition. He referred to this generalized narrative form as a “schematic narrative template.” Collective memory is grounded in a generalized narrative tradition defined in terms of schematic narrative templates. A particular set of these narrative templates form a textual heritage with its uniquely national modes of explanation. This suggests that rather than learning a long list of specific narratives about the past as separate items, there may be a tendency to construct the means used in textual mediation out of a few basic building blocks. These narrative templates are not readily available to consciousness and are used in an unreflective, unanalytical and unwitting manner and are rarely discussed (Wertsch, 2002).

As Wertsch (2002) pointed out, accounts of the past are not devised through independent research by individuals or groups. Instead, these accounts come into existence through being exposed to the textual resources provided by others. Cultural groups often share a representation of the past because they share textual resources. When a group shares textual resources that lead to a collective representation of the past, they become a textual community. Thus a textual community is a collective whose thought and action are grounded in written texts, including members for whom this grounding may be indirect. Within textual communities, cultural tools (such as language) have specific roles and functions.

According to Wertsch (2002), communities may be implicit or imagined. An imagined community is one in which an emphasis is given to recognizing or
imagining the collectivity and to creating or reproducing it. At least part of the function of the cultural tools within an imagined community is to produce, reproduce, and mark the community. The cultural tools that lie behind imagined communities are typically employed in order to create a collective that can be clearly recognized. An effective way to socialize members of a collective into having a particular view of the past is to provide them with the appropriate textual resources. Collective memory tends to be intolerant of ambiguity and to represent itself as representing an unchanging reality, so it provides a particular textual resource for creating a particular kind of community.

Wertsch (2002) distinguished between mastery and appropriation. The mastery of textual resources concerns knowing how to use them, while appropriation of textual resources involves making them one’s own. Cognitive mastery does not guarantee appropriation, nor does ensuring that students have mastered officially produced history texts through gate-keeping procedures such as examinations guarantee that they have appropriated these texts.

When appropriation does occur, it may take different forms and exist at different levels. Appropriation is often not a function solely of the psychology of the individual. Instead, it is typically also a function of the sociocultural context in which individuals are situated. For example, from a history perspective, historical narratives are viewed as responding to one another, each defined by its teller and the sociocultural situation in which it was constructed. These are the narratives that are typically written by historians and for historians. For Wertsch (2002), “...the key to
understanding the meaning and form of one narrative is how it provides a dialogic response to previous narratives or anticipates subsequent ones” (p. 60).

The narratives used in collective memory appear to be objective in that they obscure or eliminate the presence of the narrator. Events are presented by an anonymous authority as a record of fact that is to be accepted without question.

Teacher Research

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) define teacher research as “systematic, intentional inquiry by a teacher” (p. 5). I believe that research should be an integral part of teaching. Within a classroom setting, there are endless chances to ask and answer research questions. Some of these questions come from “tensions” or gaps between our expectations and what really happens in our classrooms (Hubbard & Power, 1999). For me, one constant source of tension is the gap between the teacher I am, and the teacher I want to be. There are always opportunities to improve my practice and to learn more about the nature of teaching and learning. This study is one step toward improving my practice. But the potential impact of my project is not limited to the confines of my classroom. As I come to know more about supporting student development of critical literacy in the classroom, I will be better equipped to support students’ readings of the world.

My study is also a means for investigating middle school students’ understanding of authorship, and how students might learn to use their knowledge of authorship in order to read and understand history. Students need support as they strive to develop higher-level literacy, and instructional scaffolding offers some of the support needed. However, effective scaffolding requires that teachers know a great
deal about their students individually (Pressley et al., 1996). Teacher research is especially relevant to teaching students how to use their knowledge of authorship to read and understand history texts because I know my students as learners and readers in ways that outsiders cannot know. As a teacher-researcher, I “inhabit the research site as observant participant with immediate and deliberate commitments to the task at hand” (Lytle, 2000, pp. 695-696). Conducting research in my own classroom offers me the potential to interrogate and transform my practice, my classroom, and my school from within.

For the duration of Study 1, I focused on my third-period language arts class. In this class, a special education teacher was scheduled throughout the school year to team teach with me in order to support learning for all students and to accommodate students’ individual needs. During the course of Study 1, the special education teacher worked with small groups and individual students to provide student support as needed. As evidenced by the classroom videotape transcripts and the transcripts of the case study interviews, which will be discussed in detail later, this supportive, inclusive setting benefited the two students with disabilities in both their academic and social growth. Notably, the social interaction between and among the students with and without disabilities provided multiple opportunities for this growth to occur.

For Study 2, I chose to focus on a new group of sixth-grade students and a group of eighth-grade students. Both groups represented intact classes. The two selected classes were comprised of roughly the same number of students and included students with a relatively wide range of abilities and needs. The sixth graders represented a language arts class, while the eighth graders represented a social studies
class. I selected students at two different grade levels in order to study the possible differences between sixth graders and eighth graders.

Theoretical Assumptions

This study is predicated on the following assumptions:

- Learning is situated in particular social and cultural contexts. Social and cultural factors influence how and what students learn.
- Social interactions support learning through apprenticeship. Classrooms offer opportunities for students and teachers to take on roles as novices and experts and to interact with one another in order to teach and learn together.
- Social relationships are especially important to adolescents.
- The author/reader relationship is dialogic in nature. Any text contains at least two voices, the author and the reader. Understanding comes from one voice’s response to another.
- Historical thinking requires strategies in interpretation and critical reading. As a way of knowing, historical thinking allows students to reflect on multiple perspectives of the past and to add their voices to the ongoing dialogue.
- Teacher research provides an emic perspective that leads to a unique way of knowing relative to teaching and learning. Teacher research allows me to examine my own teaching with a critical lens. It also affords me the opportunity to examine teaching and learning as a member of an authentic learning community.
Summary of Findings

In Study 1, I was interested in investigating the prior understandings that my sixth graders had regarding the concept of author’s voice (which I assumed would be somewhat familiar to them from previous classroom learning in elementary school) and how I could use these understandings to introduce the unfamiliar concept of visible author. I was also curious to know how visible authors in history texts influenced the students’ comprehension and recall. Finally, I wanted to know what kinds of conclusions the sixth graders would draw in regard to texts with visible and anonymous authors.

What I found in Study 1 was that the sixth graders had a range of understandings in regard to author’s voice. Generally speaking, most of the sixth graders were successful in demonstrating their understanding of a visible author and identifying in texts the rhetorical devices that made an author more visible. When students were asked to write retellings and answer open-ended comprehension questions after reading texts with visible and anonymous authors, I found no significant differences between the two types of texts based on these measures of recall and comprehension. I also found that the sixth graders developed a sense of skepticism about the accuracy and credibility of a visible author, while appearing to accept the anonymous author as unquestionably factually accurate and credible.

In Study 2, my goal was to further investigate students’ (one group of sixth graders and one group of eighth graders) perceptions of authors of history texts written from different perspectives. I wanted to know how the different authors’
voices in history texts would influence students’ interpretations of those texts. I also wanted to find out what perceptions of the authors the students would develop based on the authors’ voices. Furthermore, I was curious to know how authorship might impact students’ development of deeper historical understandings.

Based on the students’ own historical narratives about the discovery of America, it appears that most of the students relied on schematic narrative templates that they had mastered in order to construct their own narratives. In other words, they simply retold the official version of the story that is presented in most social studies and history textbooks, not adding their own voice to the narrative. Nevertheless, some of the students did provide their own interpretations in their narratives, resisting the official narrative. When the students were asked to write retellings of two accounts (told from two different perspectives) of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the West Indies, the students (both sixth and eights graders) were more likely to treat their retellings as an opportunity to add their own voices and perspectives when the narrative they read was outside of the schematic narrative template with which they were familiar. Furthermore, the eighth graders were more likely than the sixth graders to insert their own voices into their retellings. While the sixth graders were divided regarding the accuracy of the two texts, the eighth graders tended to believe one narrative, told from a Native American perspective, was more accurate than the other. The students in both groups (sixth grade and eighth grade) tended to perceive the authors of both texts primarily as men. However, when they perceived the authors as women, they frequently discounted them as unreliable sources of historical information. Finally, interviews with case study students revealed how difficult it
may be for some students to resist the official narrative of a historical episode, a
narrative that has been repeated and inculcated within a collective memory.

Importance of Findings

The findings from Study 1 are important because they indicate that the sixth
graders believe history, or at least the official narratives typically represented in
textbooks, should be regarded as stagnant reports of facts that are authoritative and
not to be questioned. The sixth graders respected and accepted the authority of the
textbook, and they indicated that this is the way in which history should be thought
about and written. They also seemed to believe that a text written in a way that
reveals an author’s attitudes and opinions can not be trusted to be accurate. The sixth
graders appeared to believe that there is one right way to think about and write about
history, and that way is to conceal any bias or uncertainty. These findings underscore
the need to support students in their efforts to read texts more critically, including
those in which biases may not be overt, and to approach history as a field open to
interpretation.

The importance of the findings from Study 2 hinges primarily on the way in
which the students (both sixth graders and eighth graders) found opportunities to
insert their own voices and to offer their own interpretations of historical narratives.
Although some of the students infused their own voices into their retellings and their
narratives, many of the students did not. This tendency to repeat the official narrative
and to discount unfamiliar perspectives indicates how firmly official history, built on
schematic narrative templates, is engrained into students’ understandings of the past.
If we expect students to move beyond history as a means for simply remembering to
history as a means to critical thinking, then we need to consider what it is we are asking students to know and to do in the field of history. History is not to be regarded as an account of one narrative to be memorized, but rather the compilation over time of many narratives that speak to one another. These narratives include multiple perspectives and a range of voices in order to accurately represent the past, to insightfully perceive the experience of others in the present, and to thoughtfully shape our future.

Summary of Chapters

The second chapter of this document provides an extensive (but not exhaustive) review of the literature related to understanding authorship, classroom instruction, historical thinking, and teacher research. The third chapter details Study 1. This includes the choice of settings and participants, the design of the unit of instruction, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the research findings. In the fourth chapter, I present a similar account of Study 2. Finally, the fifth chapter contains discussion and conclusions for both Study 1 and Study 2. This final chapter closes with implications for teaching and for future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into four sections: understanding authorship, classroom instruction, history as a way of thinking, and teacher research. This review is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather it is intended to outline select studies that are germane to my research project. Each section provides an overview of the empirical support that built the foundation for this study.

Understanding Authorship: Author’s Voice, Metadiscourse, and Visible Author

Literary theorists have long debated the importance of the construct of author in reading (Shanahan, 1998). At some times throughout the history of literary studies, acknowledgment of the person behind the text has taken on great significance, while at other times, the author has been believed to be of little, if any, significance to understanding the text. Recently, authorship has once again been considered an important part of literary theory, with a renewed emphasis on concepts such as voice, invention, and purpose, and a new interest in discourse communities (Shanahan, 1998).
Author’s voice has been defined in a number of ways, from the point of view of both reader and writer. Within some perspectives, the author uses a particular voice for a specific outcome or type of writing, such as an expressive voice or a poetic voice (Kamberelis & McGinley, 1992). In this view, an author’s voice is a variable function of the purpose or the genre of the writing. Other perspectives conceptualize author’s voice as the author’s imprint of his or her unique identity (Graves, 1983). For example, the voice of John Steinbeck is unique to his writing.

Knowledge of authorship has been shown to have a positive impact on reading and learning to read (Shanahan, 1992; 1998). Upon interviewing third-grade students and seventh-grade students, Shanahan (1998) concluded that children develop perceptions of authors, and these perceptions change over time. This conclusion supports Shanahan’s (1992) earlier assertion that although “text can be understood and interpreted without consideration of authors…author awareness can be used strategically during reading through active consideration of author purposes and author relationships to text. Author awareness was also found to have a positive influence on the metacognitive activity inherent in critical reading and in motivation” (1992, p. 145).

Not only can author awareness help readers to read strategically in order to identify the author’s biases, intentions, and attitudes, but it can also influence critical reading and reader motivation (Shanahan, 1992; Tierney, Raphael, LaZansky, & Cohen, 1987). Tierney and his colleagues (1987) concluded that readers’ perceptions of authors do, in fact, influence recall and critical reading. When fifth-grade readers succeeded in perceiving authorship, they were more likely to recall
information, read critically, and to develop interpretations of the text (Tierney et al., 1987). In addition, different types of texts influenced the types of assumptions the readers made about authorship, which in turn affected the ways in which the readers attempted to interpret the messages in the texts and the outcomes of their interpretive efforts (Tierney et al., 1987). Shanahan (1998) concluded that “awareness of author is a facet of sophisticated reading by people who have experience in the kind of reading they are doing, who are knowledgeable about the discourse practices in which they are engaging” (1998, p. 108). In other words, different types of texts or genres offer affordances for readers to make interpretations, yet they also present constraints to the interpretations readers might make, especially if a reader is inexperienced in the type of text or genre he or she is attempting to read and interpret.

For example, two related studies found that when expository texts were well written and included features of author’s voice, fourth-grade and fifth-grade students demonstrated greater comprehension and recall (Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1991; Beck, McKeown, & Worthy, 1995). Conversely, students struggled with comprehension and recall when they were presented with expository texts that had relatively low levels of coherence and did not include features of author’s voice.

Beck and her colleagues (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996; McKeown, Beck, & Sandora, 1996) expanded on their earlier studies in order to attempt to determine if instructional intervention would influence students’ active reading and understanding of social studies texts. By teaching two fourth-grade social studies teachers to use an instructional intervention called “Questioning the
Author,” the researchers were able to show that encouraging students to question the author in order to grapple with text ideas has a positive impact on students’ active engagement with texts, their ability to construct meaning from text, and their own self-monitoring of their understanding. By learning to question the author, students learned to view the author as a person who simply put his or her ideas down on paper. They also learned to ask questions that opened social studies texts up to discussion and debate.

Upon examining the rhetorical devices that an author uses to assist the reader in negotiating the text, Crismore (1984) referred to these rhetorical devices as “metadiscourse,” or “the author’s discoursing about the discourse; it is the author’s intrusion into the discourse, either explicitly or non-explicitly, to direct rather than inform the readers” (p. 280). Metadiscourse serves as signals to guide readers by helping them to understand the text, as well as the author’s perspective. Crismore (1984) categorized metadiscourse into two general types: informational metadiscourse and attitudinal discourse.

Informational metadiscourse is used to give readers information about the primary discourse of the text so that comprehension might be enhanced. By using informational metadiscourse, an author can alert the reader to textual elements, such as goals, subject matter, main ideas, and topic shifts. Crismore (1984) identified three subtypes of informational metadiscourse, including global goal statements (goals), global preliminary statements (pre-plans), and global review statements about content and structure (post-plans).
Whereas informational metadiscourse signals the reader about information in the text itself, attitudinal metadiscourse gives the reader clues about the author’s attitude toward the content or the structure of the text, and toward the reader. Attitudinal metadiscourse can reveal what the author thinks is important in the text or how the author feels about the content of the text. Crismore (1984) identified four subtypes of attitudinal metadiscourse, including importance of idea (saliency), degree of certainty of assertions (emphatics), degree of uncertainty of assertions (hedges), and attitude toward a fact or idea (evaluative).

Informational metadiscourse gives the reader clues as to how to navigate the primary discourse of the text. In contrast, attitudinal metadiscourse gives the reader insights into the author’s perspectives. Through metadiscourse, an author establishes a human-to-human relationship with the reader (Crismore, 1984). It is the attitudinal metadiscourse, specifically, that reveals evidence of the author’s voice. By employing attitudinal metadiscourse, the author discloses attitudes, beliefs, values, and intentions. Attitudinal metadiscourse gives the reader clues about who the author is and about where the author stands on the topic. These clues also help the reader make decisions about the author’s perspective on the topic, as well as the author’s credibility.

Upon analyzing history textbooks and historical texts written for adult audiences, Crismore (1984) found that the textbooks used significantly less metadiscourse (both informational and attitudinal) than the historical texts. The relative absence of metadiscourse in textbooks prevents the reader from understanding the author’s point of view. This creates more social distance between
the author and the reader, diminishing the opportunity for a meaningful reading transaction. Graesser and his colleagues (2003) added that the lack of discourse markers in expository texts, and especially in textbooks, results in a lack of textual coherence that often make these types of texts difficult for most students to read and “…results in the common situation of frustrated learners faced with nearly incomprehensible textbooks” (p. 87).

Metadiscourse, broadly conceptualized, is an author’s attempt to engage a reader in communication in order to aid comprehension. During the reading transaction, successful communication between two human beings (the writer and the reader) is essential in order to reach understanding.

Based, in part, on Crismore’s (1984) work, Nolen (1995) investigated the concept of a visible author and how it affects college students’ reading experiences with expository texts. According to Nolen (1995), an author is more or less visible in a text depending on the type and number of rhetorical devices, or metadiscourse, utilized throughout the text. In general terms, the strategies an author uses to become more visible to readers include introducing oneself in the text, appearing as a major actor, addressing the reader directly, using attitudinal metadiscourse, and making assumptions about readers. Specifically, in Nolen’s (1995) study, rhetorical strategies were categorized into self-disclosure, agency in clauses with an action, means of addressing the reader, and attitudinal metadiscourse. These rhetorical strategies are means for engaging the reader in a dialogue, and thus can be seen as ways in which the author makes his or her voice clear to the reader.
In Nolen’s (1995) study, when college-age women read a statistics text with a visible author, they reported the perception of the author as someone who wanted them to understand the text, and someone with whom they could develop an interpersonal relationship. In fact, some women even reported holding mental conversations with the author. The participants also reported greater feelings of understanding and self-efficacy in regard to learning statistics. In contrast, when the participants read the anonymous statistics text, they reported lowered comprehension and self-efficacy, and they felt less socially connected to the author.

Paxton (1997) replicated Nolen’s (1995) research, but looked at the effects of a visible author on high school students reading history texts. Paxton (1997) used most of the same categories of rhetorical strategies that Nolen (1995) had used (agency in clauses with an action, means of addressing the reader, and attitudinal metadiscourse), but he embedded the category of self-disclosure within the agency category. Again, these strategies were identified as enhancing author visibility. After reading a history text with a visible author, the high school students in Paxton’s (1997) study interacted more frequently with the text, engaged in mental conversations with the author, and reported feeling a close social relationship with the author, in contrast to their responses to an anonymous history text. Paxton (1997) suggested that the students’ engagement with the text at a higher cognitive level would lead to deeper, more complex understandings of not only the specific text in question, but also of the field of history in general.

Paxton (1997) interviewed high school students after they read two history texts (one with a visible author and one with an anonymous author) and completed
think-aloud protocols. During the interviews, Paxton asked each student to describe the author of each text, including details about the author’s age, gender, type of dress, and type of teacher the author would be, as perceived by the student. Paxton’s (1997) goal was to uncover differences in students’ perceptions between the visible author and the anonymous author. He found that the students generally perceived the visible author to be younger and more concerned about them personally, as well as to be the type of teacher who would support student-centered inquiry. Some students perceived the visible author to be female, while others perceived the visible author as male. In contrast, every student reported that the anonymous author was perceived to be male. Most students perceived the anonymous author to be older and more socially distant, and to rely on a transmission model of teaching.

In a later study, high school sophomores and juniors who read history texts with visible authors not only tended to hold mental conversations with the authors, but they also made judgments about the authors (Paxton, 2002). Furthermore, readers’ interactions with the authors influenced the students’ writing, as they demonstrated greater personal agency and awareness of their audience in a related writing task. In other words, students who read texts with visible authors used what they had learned about the author’s presence to make their own presence visible in their own writing.

Shanahan (1998) interviewed third-grade and seventh-grade students in order to investigate their awareness of author in a literary text. He then asked students to write about the author, including a description of the author, identification of gender, and an indication of whether or not the student would like to spend time with the
author. Although there was an indication that students’ awareness of author changes over time, Shanahan (1998) notes, “…none of these students questioned the validity of my questions. No child seemed to find the task to be unreasonable or even especially difficult…” (p. 103).

Wineburg (2001) asked fifth-grade and eighth-grade students to draw pictures of historical figures. Specifically, students were given prompts to draw a Pilgrim, a Settler, or a Hippie. Wineburg (2001) found that most of the students in this study, whether boys or girls, tended to portray the historical figures in their drawings as male stereotypes. For example, when students responded to the prompt “draw a Pilgrim,” most students drew a single male figure wearing a tall black hat with a buckle, a black shirt and knee pants, and black shoes with buckles. Wineburg (2001) concluded that elementary and middle school students tend to see the players in our nation’s history primarily as men, while women are often omitted from the stories of our past.

According to Bakhtin (1981), any human utterance, whether spoken or written, must include at least two voices. This is because language does not exist in a vacuum; rather, language exists “in other people’s mouths” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). We appropriate language, and make it our own, by adding our own intentions for meaning and expression. Heteroglossia refers to this notion that any single utterance has at least two speakers or authors. The evidence of heteroglossia in Wertsch and O’Connor’s (1994) students’ writing came through in the telling of the story of the origins of the United States, and the stance that the students took toward the story they had appropriated. In other words, students wrote their own unique historical
narratives by appropriating the dominant official narrative, yet making it their own by incorporating their stance (whether they accepted it, resisted it, or rejected it) toward the official narrative within their own historical account.

Another form of multivoicedness, means conflict, refers to instances where “two or more conflicting or contradictory stories (i.e., serving as mediational means) are appropriated in producing a single text” (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994, p. 299). In other words, Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) examined the college students’ narratives to determine what strategies the students used in order to weave conflicting or contradictory stories into one cohesive narrative.

In writing their own historical narratives, students must borrow an existing narrative from a stock of stories, and then rewrite it to make it their own. Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) concluded that as students write historical narratives about particular historical events, they use the dominant “official” accounts (those accounts most often taught in schools, included in textbooks, and generally accepted as the “true” stories) of these events as mediational tools in order to write their stories. In other words, the dominant, official historical accounts shape and constrain what students ultimately produce as their own historical narratives, even when some students may resist the official narrative.

As mentioned above, author’s voice represents an author’s attempt to speak to a reader. An author’s voice comes through a text by means of self-revealing rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse. The degree to which an author uses these rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse results in how visible the author is to the reader. An author who includes relatively more attitudinal metadiscourse
reveals more of his or her attitudes, beliefs, values, and intentions. By becoming more visible to a reader, an author discloses himself or herself to the reader, letting the reader come to know the person behind the text.

Research on authorship has been conducted primarily with elementary-age students, high school students, and college students. One of the obvious gaps in the research base is that middle school students appear in only a few of the studies. In addition, the current body of research relating to how adolescents read and understand history is relatively limited in the U.S. (Seixas, 1994).

Classroom Instruction

*Instructional Scaffolding*

Instructional scaffolding has its roots in Vygotsky’s (1978) ideas about learning. Vygotsky believed that we must consider at least two developmental levels in children, the actual development level and the level of potential development. In other words, in trying to understand children’s development, we must look at what they have already learned and what they can do with the help of more capable others. The distance between the child’s actual development level and the level of potential development is what Vygotsky called the “zone of proximal development.” It is within this zone that learning takes place.

For Vygotsky, all knowledge is social in nature. As a child attempts to move from the level of potential development to the actual development level, he or she is supported in a social interaction with an adult or a more capable peer. This support is what is termed “scaffolding” (Bruner, 1975). Scaffolding builds bridges for the learning, helping to connect the new to the known. As the learner become more
comfortable with new concepts, the adult or more capable peer is able to gradually remove the scaffolding until the learner is able to internalize the learning.

One of the earliest studies to use the metaphor of scaffolding was conducted in the mid-1970s. In a study by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), a tutor taught preschool-age children how to build a three-dimensional structure, although this task was not yet something that the children could do on their own. In other words, the building task was not yet part of their actual developmental level. However, the tutor was able to successfully scaffold the children in their attempts to build a pyramid of blocks until the children were able to build the structure on their own. The authors attempted to define scaffolding in terms of six functions that the more capable other may use, including gaining the student’s interest in the task, simplifying the task, keeping the learner focused on the goal, interpreting discrepancies between progress and the goal, controlling frustration, and modeling.

In a more recent study, Roehler and Cantlon (1997), through their three-year research project with two multi-age elementary classrooms, identified five types of scaffolding: offering explanations, inviting participation, verifying and clarifying student understandings, modeling of desired behaviors, and inviting students to contribute clues.

Within that same year, Hogan and Pressley (1997) provided a review in which they identified eight essential elements for scaffolded instruction. These elements include pre-engagement with the learner and the curriculum, establishing a shared goal, actively diagnosing the understandings and needs of the learners, providing tailored assistance, maintaining pursuit of a goal, giving feedback, controlling
frustration and risk, and assisting internalization, independence, and generalization to other contexts.

In her case study, Larkin (2001) investigated the ways in which a special education teacher effectively applied Hogan and Pressley’s (1997) eight essential elements for scaffolding. The teacher in Larkin’s study was successful in using scaffolding because she thoughtfully and skillfully used these essential elements. For example, she worked to understand the students and what they knew prior to beginning the lesson and throughout the lesson (pre-engagement with the learner and the curriculum; actively diagnosing the needs of the learners). She also knew when to stop challenging students (controlling frustration and risk) and when to reduce or remove the scaffolding (assisting internalization, independence, and generalization to other contexts).

A study that focused on literacy learning in an inclusion setting (Silliman, Bahr, & Beasman, 2000) emphasized the need for instructional scaffolding in the classroom to be differentiated according to individual student needs. Two emergent reading groups were studied, and the instruction for the students was essentially undifferentiated within either group, resulting in frustration for the students and the teachers. The researchers pointed out that one facet of expertise in scaffolding is knowing when, what kind, and how much instructional scaffolding is appropriate for particular instructional goals and for individual students.

Based on their work with preschoolers, Henderson, Many, Wellborn, and Ward (2002) concluded that literacy scaffolding for young children must include an academic focus, an intellectual focus, and an emotional focus. Scaffolding for this
age group can take different forms and requires a variety of bridges from the new to the known. The researchers came to understand that literacy must be defined broadly, as learning to make meaning of the world. As young children grow into literacy, they need to be scaffolded in a variety of ways.

Many researchers have demonstrated that elementary and middle school or junior high students, from first grade through eighth grade, can be taught to use reading strategies (for example, Brown & Palincsar, 1986; Duffy, Roehler, Sivan, Rackliffe, Book, Meloth, Vavrus, Wesselman, Putnam, & Bassiri, 1987; Paris, Cross, & Lipson, 1984; Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, & Brown, 1992). Based on empirical evidence, and given the wide range of literacy behaviors and competencies among adolescents, it is my contention that middle school students greatly benefit from this type of strategy instruction. In other words, explicit instruction of reading strategies is advantageous to middle school students, many of whom are still developing various facets of multiple literacies.

In general, there are some common threads among approaches to successful strategy instruction: providing expert scaffolding as needed, explicitly labeling the strategies, discussing their purposes, teaching them to students, and having students practice applying them (Brown & Palinscar, 1986; McKeown, Beck, & Worthy, 1993; Wilhelm, 2001). Karpov and Haywood (1998) would add there is a need for students to direct each other during their practice in applying the strategies. And, of course, the ultimate goals are internalization and independent application of the strategy to a variety of new and more complex texts. Brown and Palinscar (1986)
referred to this type of instruction as “proleptic teaching,” in which competence is an anticipated outcome. In proleptic teaching,

“…the integrity of the target task is maintained; components are handled in the context of the entire task; skills are practiced in context….the novice’s role is made easier by the provision of procedural supports, expert scaffolding, or a supportive social context that does a great deal of the cognitive work until the novice can take over more and more of the responsibility.” (p. 47)

By designing the instructional activities to include all of these components (procedural supports, expert scaffolding, and a supportive social context), students were able to learn about and to practice applying the strategy of identifying visible authors prior to achieving independent competence.

*Instructional Discourse/Classroom Language*

Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995) investigated classroom discussions about literature. Looking at a number of high school English classes spanning three academic tracks (high, middle, and low), the researchers examined classroom discussion in three contexts: teacher-led large groups, teacher-facilitated small groups, and student talk about literature outside the classroom setting. The very broad patterns that emerged from this study are those that typically appear in most classrooms, as teacher talk dominates the classroom discussion. Specifically, the researchers found that teachers dominated most of the large-group discussions. Additionally, while teachers tended to use their turns for a variety of purposes, students usually made only one remark per turn, and that remark was most often used for an informative purpose. Furthermore, students’ informative remarks very often mirrored the kinds of questions asked by their teachers. Finally, students’ participation in the classroom discourse was frequently used by the teacher to weave
the classroom discussion into a coherent conversation. In other words, although the students participated in the classroom discourse, their remarks were often guided by the teacher, allowing the teacher to maintain control over the focus and the pace of the discussion. Marshall and his colleagues (Marshall et al., 1995) concluded that the conventions of classroom discussions are deeply ingrained in teachers and students and may be difficult to change, even when a desire to do so exists.

Nystrand (1997) attempted to illustrate the effects of discourse on student learning. He identified features of dialogically organized instruction, including time devoted to discussion, authentic questions, uptake, and high-level teacher evaluation. By studying hundreds of eighth and ninth grade English and social studies classrooms over a two-year period, Nystrand was able to tease out differences in discourse (dialogic versus monologic), instructional format (recitation, discussion, and small-group work), and school characteristics (urban, suburban, or rural; middle school versus high school; low track versus high track; etc.) in order to determine the impact of classroom discourse on student achievement and learning. He concluded that dialogic instruction had a strong, positive effect on students’ achievement.

Upon closer inspection via the employment of event history analysis, Nystrand and his colleagues (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2001) were able to determine how effective classroom discourse unfolded in the above-mentioned classrooms. Although authentic questions and uptake had occurred with a similar degree of low frequency in both high- and low-track classes, it became clear that the pattern of dialogism (including authentic questions and uptake) was less likely to occur as a sequence in low-track classes. In addition, student questions, which help
precipitate sequences of dialogue, occurred less frequently in low-track classes. In these low-track classes, teachers were less likely to ask questions that invited students to participate in high-level discussion, while at the same time, students were less likely to ask questions. As a result, neither the teachers nor the students in low-track classes tended to offer the “dialogic bids” that characterize effective classroom discussion and that foster learning (Nystrand et al., 2001).

A more recent study examined the relationship between student performance and discussion-based instructional approaches in 64 middle school and high school English classes (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003). In this study, the researchers first analyzed classroom discussions for evidence of dialogic instruction. Later, they took measures of student literacy performance, finding that discussion-based instruction was significantly related to students’ spring performance on a writing task. This finding held true for both low-achieving and high-achieving students. The researchers concluded that discussion-based instructional approaches, along with high expectations for student success, support students in internalizing the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete independent, high-level literacy tasks.

There are several barriers to dialogic instruction. As previously mentioned, the conventions of classroom discourse are powerful, and both teachers and students may fall into traditional patterns of discussion. Nystrand and his colleagues (Nystrand et al., 2001) contended that monologic discourse is prevalent, even dominant, across American classrooms, as evidenced by repeated empirical findings. In fact, the force of monologic discourse within the classroom may be considered to
exert “inertia,” tending to continue along established patterns (Nystrand et al., 2001). One such pattern is known as IRE, where the teacher initiates an interaction, the student responds, and the teacher offers an evaluative comment. The teacher then moves on to another interaction, often with another student. These type of patterns tend to continue unless someone (almost always the teacher) does something (either intentionally or accidentally) that allows a shift to occur (Nystrand et al., 2001).

Furthermore, strict state-mandated curricular expectations may cause some teachers to avoid opening up classroom discussion for fear that the conversation will stray too far. Another barrier to dialogic instruction is the teacher’s fear of what students might say and the potential for conflict if a dialogue is opened up. Supporting a dialogic classroom does entail a degree of risk. Students are also required to take risks, and it takes time for them to learn how to think about, respond to, and initiate dialogue. In addition, developing dialogic instruction is difficult, and some teachers may be unwilling to try a new and challenging way of teaching.

Although there are barriers to developing and supporting dialogism, teachers can learn to support dialogically-organized classroom discussions. A case study of a teacher in a ninth grade English class illustrated how she was able to make the transition from monologic to dialogic instruction (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). In order to support dialogue in the classroom, the teacher developed an ethos of involvement and respect with her students; she used scaffolding to encourage discussion; and she acknowledged and capitalized on students’ interpersonal relationships in order to help them establish links between their own concerns and academic objectives. Nystrand and his colleagues (Nystrand et al., 2001) maintained
that teachers rarely pay attention to how they structure classroom discourse, but they argued that an approach that takes into account the evolving nature of classroom instructional setting is beneficial. This approach allows for monologic discourse that is useful for establishing topics and conveying information, while supporting transitions to dialogic discourse that opens the floor to discussion and the negotiation of ideas and new understandings (Nystrand et al., 2001). According to Nystrand and his colleagues (2001), it is important for teachers to examine the roles they and their students play in developing effective classroom discussion:

Understanding how classroom discourse unfolds and their constitutive role in the process, thus [through authentic questions, uptake, and high-quality evaluation], may help teachers gain informed control over how they interact with students and how they might create instruction settings that both engage students and foster learning (p. 47).

**Strategy Instruction**

According to Carrell (1998), reading strategies are “actions selected deliberately to achieve particular goals” (p. 1). Good readers actively select and use particular strategies as needed to help them comprehend text. Strategies that skilled readers use include processes such as establishing a purpose for reading, previewing text, predicting, skimming and scanning, connecting to text, monitoring for meaning, determining the meaning of unfamiliar words, coding text, summarizing, questioning, interpreting, responding to text, evaluating text, reviewing, and setting goals. Over the years, research has shown that students benefit from direct strategy instruction (Pressley, 2000).
During the 1980s, a great deal of reading research focused on comprehension strategies. This focus was a response to the growing concern that students were able to decode, but had difficulty comprehending the texts they read (Adams, Treiman, & Pressley, 1998). In addition, evidence indicated that classroom teachers rarely provided explicit instruction to students on how to use comprehension strategies while reading (Durkin, 1978-1979).

One of the most influential studies on comprehension strategies instruction was a report on reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). One of the unique features of this study was that it combined a number of strategies instead of focusing on one isolated strategy. With reciprocal teaching, students are taught to use predicting, questioning, seeking clarification, and summarizing as they take turns being the student leader for the group. The teacher provides scaffolded support as needed. The seventh-grade students who participated in the reciprocal teaching group during this study performed better on measures of comprehension than students in the other condition, demonstrating increased summarization skills, question-generation competencies, and monitoring of meaning (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). An important outcome of the reciprocal teaching research was students’ performance on a standardized comprehension measure, the Gates-MacGinitie. Four of the six students in the reciprocal teaching group showed impressive gains, leading to the perception that reciprocal teaching did in fact improve performance on standardized tests. The work of Palincsar and Brown (1984) also had a significant impact on classroom practice, as publishers of basal readers began to include strategies instruction in their
teacher guides, with questioning, predicting, seeking clarification, and summarizing as a primary part of comprehension instruction (Adams et al., 1998).

Another group of researchers combined a number of strategies into one comprehension strategies instructional program, which they titled Informed Strategies for Learning, or ISL (Paris et al., 1984). In this program, students in grades 3 and 5 were taught throughout the year to use specific strategies, such as elaboration, inference, activation of prior knowledge, summarization, rereading, self-questioning, and paraphrasing. Using this program, teachers explained and modeled the use of specific strategies and led class discussions about how, when, and why to use a specific strategy. Instruction was scaffolded so that teacher modeling was gradually replaced by student self-direction, with student independence increasingly expected as lessons proceeded. ISL appeared to improve students’ strategic awareness, as measured by a multiple-choice assessment devised by the researchers. Students in this program also outperformed students in the control group on a cloze task and an error-detection task. However, ISL did not appear to affect students’ performance on a standardized measure of comprehension, the Gates-McGinitie, when compared to the perceived outcome of reciprocal teaching.

Bereiter and Bird (1985) collected verbal protocols from adult readers so that they could obtain insights about comprehension strategies that adult readers use and that should be taught to students. The adult readers reported using a variety of strategies, including restating or rephrasing difficult text, rereading to seek clarification, making inferences and prediction, and visualizing. The researchers then used those strategies in a training experiment with middle school students. Students
in grade 7 and 8 were assigned to one of four experimental conditions: modeling plus explanation, modeling and practice of strategies, exercise condition (no modeling or explanation), and control. The students in the modeling plus explanation condition showed the greatest gains on a standardized comprehension test. Modeling and explanation was a prominent component of the instruction, comprising 40 percent of the intervention and providing compelling evidence that modeling plus direct explanation is a worthwhile approach to comprehension strategies instruction.

In a year-long study with third graders, Duffy and his colleagues taught teachers to directly explain strategies that are related to competent reading at the students’ level, then to mentally model, or to think aloud, the use of those strategies (Duffy et al., 1987). Students then practiced using the strategies with teacher guidance, which was reduced over time as students became more proficient. Teacher support and scaffolding were continued as needed until students autonomously applied the strategies they learned. By the end of the year, the students in the direct explanation condition performed better than the control group on a standardized measure of word study (the word study subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test, or SAT), but they failed to show much of a gain on a standardized measure of comprehension (the comprehension subtest of the SAT). However, these results had a profound impact on the reading education community, as many teachers began to use this model of direct explanation as a basis for implementing comprehension strategies instruction in their own schools (Adams et al., 1998).

In the 1990s, researchers began to look at strategies instruction from a transactional perspective (Adams et al., 1998). In reader response theory, a
transaction occurs between the reader and the text, as the reader actively uses the text to construct meaning, while the text influences the interpretations that are open to the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978). Transactional strategies instruction has as its goal the development of active, strategic readers (Pressley et al., 1992). In terms of strategies instruction, there are three types of transactions that occur. First, readers get meaning from text by actively applying strategies and transacting with the text. Second, students transact with other readers in their class to apply strategies and to interpret text. Third, teacher and students transact with each other during interpretations of text. Transactional strategies instruction is intended to be long-term, continuing across school years. It involves direct explanation and teacher modeling of strategies, which is followed by guided student practice. The teacher scaffolds student learning, providing support as needed, and diminishing over time. Strategies taught include traditional comprehension strategies, such as activating background knowledge, summarizing, and making inferences. But transactional strategies instruction also included decoding and word attack strategies, as needed, as well as interpretive strategies (Pressley et al., 1992). The constructivist nature of strategies instruction is evident, as students and the teacher engage in interpretive discussions of text (Pressley et al., 1992).

In his review of comprehension instruction, Pressley (2000) continued to promote the idea that comprehension instruction must be more comprehensive. He asserted that comprehension instruction should include efforts to improve word-level competencies, to build background knowledge, and to promote the use of comprehension strategies. Thus word decoding, sight vocabulary, and using context
clues should be the focus of comprehension instruction in the primary grades. Comprehension instruction throughout elementary school and into middle school should include vocabulary study, extensive reading, and self-regulation of a variety of comprehension strategies. Pressley’s (2000) conclusion suggests that strategy instruction, especially in regard to transactional strategies that focus on interpretations of text and higher-level thinking, is developmentally appropriate at the middle school level.

History as a Way of Thinking

*Historical Thinking*

According to Wineburg (2001), the study of history is “crucial to our present day and age, when issues of diversity dominate the national agenda” (p. 23). However, the teaching of history must go beyond the rote learning of people, events, and dates of the past. Wineburg (2001) argued that teachers must work to foster historical thinking in students: “…historical thinking, in its deepest forms, is neither a natural process nor something that springs automatically from psychological development. Its achievement…actually goes against the grain of how we ordinarily think, one of the reasons why it is much easier to learn names, dates, and stories than it is to change the basic mental structures we use to grasp the meaning of the past” (p. 7). Historical thinking allows us to look beyond ourselves and our own lives and to truly perceive the experience of others, both in the past and the present (Wineburg, 2001). It is this humanizing capacity of history that allows us to broaden our understanding of what it means to be human that renders the study of history and the development of historical thinking imperative.
Within the field of history education, however, there continues a debate regarding what the study of history should include. Professional historians are often seen as the keepers of the content, while history teachers are considered the experts in pedagogy (Seixas, 1999). In classroom practice, this often translates to a transmission model where the teacher is the delivery system for a discreet set of facts outlined in a curriculum guide or textbook. Instead, Seixas (1999) argued, teachers of history should view their role as providing a model of historical inquiry for students, in which teachers show students how they read, select, and edit texts in order to construct their own accounts of the past. This model casts teachers as experts in “pedagogical content knowledge” (Wineburg & Wilson, 1991), allowing them to teach students how to look at the past and to construct the history that it represents. Within this paradigm, teachers can make choices about topics that have potential historical significance to students, while keeping in mind knowledge of students’ capacity for understanding, and selecting primary and secondary source documents that are appropriate for students’ levels of interest and understanding (Seixas, 1999). This approach helps students understand the constructed nature of history as well as its potentially deep personal relevance, which gives students knowledge of “how to know history” (Seixas, 1999, p. 332). In other words, this approach supports the development of historical thinking among students.

The tension in the field of history education can be seen in the National Standards for History (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Although the National Standards attempt to integrate historical understanding (what students should know about history) and historical thinking (what students should be able to
do with historical knowledge), there remain a set of standards related to historical understandings and a separate set of standards related to historical thinking. Furthermore, historians’ contributions to the National Standards project largely involved the topical content to be included (Seixas, 1994). On the surface, these contributions seem to reinforce the notion that professional historians are the keepers of historical knowledge. Upon further inspection, however, what emerges is the historians’ assumption of audience for their writing: historians write for other historians, with the assumption “of a larger critical community engaged in ongoing discourse” (Seixas, 1994, p. 108). For professional historians, “doing history” represents the integration of historical understanding and historical thinking. For historians, there can be no true understanding of historical facts without analysis, evaluation, judgment, and especially ambiguity. By suggesting the content that should be included in the National Standards for History, and with a sense of audience of other historians who would read with a critical lens, historians who contributed to the National Standards for History may have assumed that historical thinking is inherent to reading and understanding history, and thus is embedded in the discipline, ergo the content.

In contrast, most students perceive a different audience when they write about history: an authoritative teacher (Seixas, 1994). This may explain why students often see the task of writing about history as listing facts and including accurate details such as names, dates, and places. The focus of student writing is frequently more on getting the facts correct than offering analysis or a critical response to a text. Moreover, students are often assessed on their historical understanding, rather than
their historical thinking. This type of assessment reinforces the notion that history is simply about remembering facts. These tendencies suggest that history standards that explicitly foster historical thinking are, in fact, necessary. Standards that provide opportunities for students to engage in critical reading and analytical writing might allow students to develop a broader view of what “doing history” means. Standards that emphasize historical thinking may help students move beyond the view of history as rote memorization and into a view of history as an ongoing discourse within their own community of inquiry. Furthermore, standards related to historical thinking may offer opportunities for students to make their own voices heard in the discourse.

Whereas professional historians see history as provisional, tentative arguments that are under constant scrutiny by their peers, students see history as truth (Seixas, 1993). For historians, history is alive and full of interpretations to be challenged and revised in ongoing discussion. For students, history is nothing more than dried up facts to be memorized and regurgitated. One of the primary tools of history education perpetuates and reinforces this notion of dead facts about the past: the history or social studies textbook. Crismore (1984) showed that textbooks exhibit none of the metadiscourse that is included in the writing of historians in academic journals. This gives textbooks an authoritative voice that excludes students from participating in an ongoing discourse. The authoritative voice of the textbook does not invite students to join a community of inquiry. Through textbooks, students often receive a “transformed version of historical products” (Seixas, 1993, p. 314) that does not leave much room for further thought or discussion. In essence, students who rely on textbooks, which avoid the uncertainty of historical thinking, are not reading
“real” history. Students see themselves as passive recipients of knowledge handed down by their teachers and textbooks. Historians, on the other hand, see themselves as active constructors of knowledge. Typical social studies and history textbooks, which shut down opportunities for historical thinking, reinforce this difference.

Historical Narrative

The history that historians write often takes the form of narrative. The narrative tradition of historians acknowledges the constructive nature of writing about the past, while at the same time recognizes that history is made in conversation with others within the contexts of community, broader politics, and social dynamics (Wertsch, 2002).

In a narrative, there is a story, which “is a microworld with characters who perform actions in pursuit of goals, events that present obstacles to goals, conflicts between characters, emotional reactions, spatial settings, objects and object properties, traits of characters, and mental states of characters” (Graesser et al., 2003, p. 8). Most children are experienced with narrative and demonstrate a high capacity for understanding narrative (Graesser et al., 2003).

In contrast, the history that students frequently read in school is from textbooks, which present the information in an expository text format. Many young readers typically have much less world knowledge about the ideas included in expository text. Furthermore, expository text tends to have a high density of unfamiliar terms, as well as inferences that rely heavily on the reader’s ability to draw on background knowledge. In the case of history, this is often background knowledge that students do not possess. To illustrate, Sinatra, Beck and McKeown
(1992) surveyed fifth and sixth graders in order to provide a sketch of the historical background knowledge a typical student brings to fifth grade history instruction. The researchers found that shaky understanding characterized many of the students’ responses, even after a year of instruction. Without adequate background knowledge, students are unable to make the necessary connections and inferences required by their social studies and history textbooks, which frequently lack the necessary linguistic and discourse markers and resulting coherence that is needed for most students to successfully comprehend them (Graesser et al., 2003). Studies have indicated that increasing explicit coherence relations in expository texts improves readers’ memory and comprehension (Beck et al., 1991; Britton & Gulgoz, 1991; McNamara, 2001). However, the situation remains that learners are commonly faced with nearly incomprehensible textbooks (Graesser et al., 2003).

Johnston (2007) asserted that the core of narrative text is that it allows readers to imagine how others feel or to put themselves in the place of others. This is an especially important potential for historical narrative, which intersects with Wineburg’s (2001) perspective that the stories of history offer the promise of humanizing the past.

In his review of studies related to the differences between narrative and expository text, Willingham (2004) indicated that psychologists have referred to narrative as “psychologically privileged” because readers’ minds treat stories differently than other types of texts. Based on his review of 30 years of research, Willingham (2004) concluded that this psychological privilege is a result of several factors: stories are more interesting to readers; stories are easier to comprehend;
stories are easier to remember; and readers’ minds seek causal connections, which are evident in narrative structures. Willingham (2004) argued that readers tend to find material presented in a story format more engaging than if it is presented in expository text no matter what the topic. This suggestion has significance for history education, where expository texts found in textbooks are frequently the primary resource texts for instruction.

Schematic Narrative Templates and Collective Memory

The fact that certain historical narratives are frequently accepted and repeated, especially in history textbooks, may indicate a reliance on a schematic narrative template (Wertsch, 2002). With a schematic narrative template, episodes in a culture’s history are based on a generalized story template in which only the specific characters, settings, and events are changed.

In American history, for example, there might be a schematic narrative template that could be titled “Quest for a New World.” This template could represent the underlying schema for a number of episodes in American history, including Christopher Columbus’s voyage and the Pilgrims’ voyage. In this case, the schematic narrative template would include elements such as the desire to leave one’s home country, a dangerous sea voyage, arrival in the New World, and the acquaintance of Native peoples. This template fits both the stories of Columbus and the Pilgrims, accounting for changes in characters, settings, and events.

Because these stories are built upon “a few basic building blocks” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 62), they are relatively easy to understand and to remember. Wertsch (2002) suggests that social studies and history textbooks may represent collections of
schematic narrative templates, in which the same stories are told over and again, reinforcing the stories as the official versions of the past. More broadly, a nation’s collective memory of the past, which is usually singular and static in its perspective, is typically built on schematic narrative templates (Wertsch, 2002). This way of thinking about the past may present an impediment to the development of deeper historical understanding.

For example, Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) asked American college students to write narratives about the origins of the United States. Very few of the college students resisted or rejected the official narrative. Instead, they based their own narratives on the traditional story, or schematic narrative template, that they had read or heard many times throughout their school years. It appears that after students have mastered an official narrative, it is often very difficult for students to amend it or to appropriate it, even in light of learning new information about the topic (Loewen, 1995; Paxton, 1999; Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994; Wineburg, 2001). Most of the college students in Wertsch and O’Connor’s (1994) study simply rewrote the official narrative, without any evidence of interpretation or attempts to make the story their own.

Teacher Research

According to Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1990), teacher research is the “systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers [that] makes accessible some of the expertise of teachers and provides both university and school communities with unique perspectives on teaching and learning” (p. 83). Likewise, teacher research has been defined as “inquiry that is intentional, systematic, public, voluntary, ethical,
and contextual” (Mohr, Rogers, Sanford, Nocerino, MacLean, & Clawson, 2004, p. 23). Teacher research is strongly based on teachers’ practice and classroom learning, focused on the everyday events of classroom life (Lytle, 2000). In contrast to other types of researchers, who may be in the classroom for only a short time and may be considered to be participant observers, teacher researchers “inhabit the research site as observant participants” (Lytle, 2000, p. 695). Their research questions evolve from their practice, changing in light of the daily events of the classroom and the ongoing work of teaching and learning. Thus teacher research is a significant way of knowing about teaching and learning (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992).

One of the defining characteristics of teacher research is the immediacy of the decisions and actions that it demands, as the research is frequently directly related to classroom pedagogy (Lytle, 2000). Teachers often embark on teacher research in order to improve their practice and to enhance student learning. As Lytle (2000) stated, “The purpose is not to ‘do research,’ but to observe, document, and analyze the daily work of… teaching and learning as it occurs in and out of classroom and school contexts” (p. 702). Teacher researchers hold unique positions to become “expert knowers” about their own students and classrooms, and about teaching and learning in a broader sense (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Through teacher research, teachers can contribute significantly to the academic research community and the school community by investigating their own schools and classroom work (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990). For example, as a body of literature, teacher research represents work that contributes to an expanded notion of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). But teacher research has often been
discounted as a valid form of research, and teachers’ voices are often unheard (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). Furthermore, what is considered to count as the literature of teacher research has also been a topic of debate. In her review article, Lytle (2000) noted that much of the writing about teacher research has been written by university-based researchers. Writing done by teacher researchers has often gone unpublished or published only locally as “fugitive” texts.

Fecho (1993) argued that teachers must assert themselves as a distinct interpretive community that is unique and has value. This means that if teachers are to have an impact as researchers, they must believe that they have unique perspectives on teaching and learning that differ from those of university researchers and school administrators. Moreover, teachers must believe in the strength and potential of these perspectives to transform pedagogy and to contribute to the body of literature of teacher research. As Fecho (1993) stated, “…only teachers can, day in and day out, interpret theory for praxis” (p. 270).

This is not to say, however, that teacher research should be held in contention with academic research. What is needed, according to Lytle (2000), is a “third space” where university researchers and classroom teachers come together to acknowledge and understand the richness afforded by differing perspectives that work together to support research into teaching and learning. By opening up the domain of research to include new forms and genres afforded by teacher research, the possibilities for transforming theory and practice are expanded. And by engaging in teacher research and sharing their findings, teachers can take advantage of the opportunity to have their voices heard.
CHAPTER 3

STUDY 1: THE EFFECTS OF VISIBLE AUTHOR ON READING HISTORY

The overview of previous studies of teaching and learning about historical narratives reviewed in Chapter 2 suggests the need to develop an adequate research base for the arguments that (1) visible author is a key component in students’ understanding history texts, (2) students bring with them preconceived notions of historical narrative, and (3) that middle school students in particular may benefit from instruction that teaches them to deal directly with reading and understanding historical narratives. Few studies have dealt directly with these issues and the related literature suggests that rather than simply recognizing visible authors, students must be taught to read more deeply in order to understand such historical narratives (Paxton, 2002; Wineburg, 2001).

Although students’ earliest experience with history is reading textbooks, one of the chief criticisms of most history and social studies textbooks is that they are written in a way that renders the author anonymous (Crismore, 1984). Since textbooks are often written by committees largely for content coverage, clues about the author’s views and interpretations tend to be removed, diminishing the reader’s
ability to make decisions about the author’s biases and perspectives on historical
events (Paxton, 1997, 1999, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). Without these clues middle
school readers, many of whom are still developing their literacy skills, may believe
that textbooks are troves of unquestionable truths, and that history is to be memorized
rather than interpreted. Ravitch (2004) has pointed out that “Authors and editors
cultivated an omniscient tone, radiating objectivity and authority. Unfortunately, the
very format of the history textbook compels distortions” (p. 134). Therefore many
middle school students may fail to read history texts critically, which may prevent
them from attempting to interpret the texts and the events they describe, and
ultimately prevent them from developing deeper historical understanding. As
Wineburg (2001) argued, historical thinking is important for reading history, and it is
crucial for reading the world.

Accordingly, Study 1 examines some of these issues within the context of my
own classroom. As a teacher researcher, I was afforded the benefit of working
together with my students toward several goals. First, I wanted to know what
understandings of authorship my sixth-grade students already possessed. Second, I
was curious to learn how my classroom instruction supported students in learning the
previously unfamiliar concept of visible author (Paxton, 1997). Third, after
instruction, I hoped to determine how visible and anonymous authors affected my
students’ comprehension and recall of history texts. Finally, I wanted to know what
conclusions the students drew following our collaborative investigation of visible and
anonymous authors.
When I began Study 1, the purpose was to examine how sixth graders come to understand authorship in history texts and learn to use this knowledge to read and understand history texts. I also set out to examine my own teaching and learning. My initial focus was on comprehension of history texts with visible and anonymous authors, as evaluated by a recall measure and answers to open-ended comprehension questions. Later, in a second study, I took a broader and deeper view of my students’ understanding of history texts. Specifically I took into account their experiences with Columbus’s discovery of America, that is, their interpretations of a particular historical narrative. My initial effort and then a second more in-depth study became two separate but related studies. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, these studies will be referred to as Study 1 and Study 2. The focus of this chapter is Study 1, in which I describe my research methods and present findings in an effort to explore the question: How do sixth graders learn from history texts written with a visible author versus an anonymous author? The focus of Chapter 4 is Study 2, in which I present methods and findings concerning how differing authors’ voices influence students’ interpretations of historical narratives about a particular historical event.

In Study 1, I used a discussion-based approach to explore teaching sixth-grade readers about authorship, that is, how the presence of a visible author versus an anonymous author shaped my students’ understanding of history texts. The aim of the study was to investigate how direct teaching of strategies supported their ability to recognize and analyze metadiscourse in history texts in order to consider the author’s visibility. In addition, this study employed teacher inquiry methods to explore how
and why high-level discussion is central to the developing understandings of history texts, whether they are identified as general education students or as special education students (Alvermann, Young, Weaver, Hinchman, Moore, & Phelps, 1996; Eeds & Wells, 1989). Although I worked with all of my sixth-grade students toward this end, I focused my analyses on one class, and specifically, on four case study students from that same class.

Study 1 was organized into four phases that occurred over several weeks and employed a range of instruments and procedures. The preparation phase (Phase 1) started with the beginning of the school year and continued until instruction specifically related to Study 1 began. During this phase, the students completed surveys, literacy questionnaires, classroom-based assessments, and the Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003). The purpose of the preparation phase was to allow me to develop a profile of each student as a reader and a writer and to ascertain reading abilities and interests for each student.

The instruction phase (Phase 2) consisted of 12 class sessions, during which students were asked to consider what they knew about the concept of author’s voice in narrative fiction. We read aloud narrative picture books and discussed, as a class, issues related to author’s voice. We then considered author’s voice in history texts. Subsequently, we used the knowledge we had constructed in order to develop a definition of visible author. Based on our definition, the students then practiced (with teacher support) identifying the rhetorical devices that increase an author’s visibility, and describing the function of the rhetorical devices within the text.
The application phase (Phase 3) took place during two class sessions, spaced exactly one week apart. In this phase of the study, the students participated in small-group discussions that focused on issues related to metadiscourse (Crismore, 1984). Small groups then shared their thinking with the whole class. During this phase, the students also worked in pairs to read a history text with a visible author, to identify evidence (rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse) of the visible author, and to describe the function of the rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse. This work was also shared and discussed with the whole class. Finally, the students were asked to consider how their thinking about the concept of visible author had changed and to record these reflections in writing.

During the evaluation phase (Phase 4), the students worked independently during two 66-minute class periods. The students read two topically-related history texts, one with a visible author and one with an anonymous author. After reading each text, each student constructed a written retelling and answered open-ended comprehension questions. The students were then asked to evaluate the two texts, considering factors such as comprehensibility, accuracy, and author credibility.

Four case study students completed think-aloud protocols and were interviewed during the last two weeks of the study, overlapping with the second day of the application phase (Phase 3) and continuing through the evaluation phase (Phase 4). The purpose of the interviews was to gain insights into the case study students’ thinking during the reading of history texts, both with a visible author and an anonymous author.
Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1990) identified a “…four-part working typology of teacher research: journals, essays, oral inquiry processes, and classroom studies” (p. 83). As indicated by this typology, teacher research takes a variety of forms. Each of these forms offers a distinctive perspective on teaching and learning. Within Study 1, three of these four forms of research are present. My teaching journal, the transcripts of classroom discussions, and the classroom data each provide a different lens with which to view the teaching and learning in my classroom. When taken together, these different types of teacher research offered me a more comprehensive way of knowing my students, my teaching, and myself.

As I do annually in order to get to know my students, I developed a profile of each student as a reader and a writer, beginning with the first day of school. Student surveys, questionnaires, and classroom-based assessments contributed to the profiles. Examples of these items are included in Appendix A. Ultimately, these profiles are intended to provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of individual students as readers and writers. Class observation notes and my teaching journal also contributed to my understanding of individual students, as well as the class as a whole, as we worked together to build a community of learners. In addition, this combined information contributed to my selection of case study students.

As a non-traditional, part-time doctoral student, one of the challenges I have faced throughout this project is the lack of a cohort. It was very rare that I attended university classes with students for more than one academic quarter. This made it difficult to find other doctoral students with whom I could establish long-term relationships and discuss my ongoing research process. Furthermore, as a teacher-
researcher, another difficulty was finding support for my research within my building and even within my school district. The hectic pace of a typical middle school does not leave teachers with the luxury of time to engage in thoughtful discussions about theory and practice. In addition, the district emphasis on testing outcomes and the state’s ratings of schools tends to focus teachers’ attention on their practice, almost to the exclusion of theory. Fecho (1993) advocated for teacher researchers to see themselves as part of a distinctive interpretive community. Unfortunately, I struggled to find this type of community, and my life as a part-time, non-traditional doctoral student and teacher researcher seemed very isolated at times.

Lytle (2000) describes the need in teacher research for a “third space” in which university researchers and classroom teachers are afforded opportunities to come together to explore and reflect on issues of teaching and learning. A “third space” acknowledges the differing perspectives of university research and daily classroom life and brings them together in order to share the work and ultimately the understandings that both perspectives contribute to the field of teaching and learning. Fortunately, I was provided a “third space” (Lytle, 2000) in which to reflect upon my project by one of my co-advisors. Through frequent phone conversations, e-mail messages, and meetings (at one point during the analysis phase, we were meeting weekly), my co-advisor provided me with invaluable support as I worked to examine my own classroom and practice. This third space offered exactly what Lytle (2000) asserted is the strength of teacher research: opportunities for a university researcher and a classroom teacher to work together toward research into teaching and learning, resulting in the rich understanding that differing perspectives can afford.
The power of teacher research is embodied in the fruition of my research project. I am immensely thankful that my co-advisor provided me with a third space in which I could become an “expert knower” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) about my students and my teaching in particular, as well as teaching and learning in general.

Participants and Setting

During the 2004-2005 school year, I taught sixth grade language arts in a suburban public middle school in a midwestern state. Although all four of my classes received the same instruction, my research focused on the results for only one class. Accordingly, I selected for my study one class of my sixth grade language arts students that represented a wide range of student abilities and that had a team-teaching configuration. This was my third period language arts class. The wide range of abilities offered the opportunity to see how students of various levels of ability came to develop their understandings of authorship in history texts. The team-teaching arrangement allowed for greater flexibility in working with students one-on-one. This research was conducted within the context of what I considered typical classroom instruction for sixth graders in the school where I teach.

The class of sixth graders who I taught during the school’s third period included 17 students. Of these 17 students, five were females and twelve were males. Most of the students (13 out of 17) were Caucasian and of European descent. Of the males in the class, one was Chinese, one was Korean, and one was Indian. One of the female students was from Kurdistan. All of the students were 11 to 12 years old.

The students in my third period language arts class represented a number of special considerations for literacy and language learning (see Table 3.1). This class
was labeled by the school as an “inclusion” class, meaning that the class was comprised of students with a wide range of abilities and needs, including those who qualified for general education services (eight students), those who qualified for special education services (three students), and those who qualified for gifted services (six students). All six of the students in this class who qualified for gifted services were males. In addition, four students in my third period class spoke English as a second language. Their native languages included Chinese, Hindi, Korean, and Kurdish. All of the students who were non-native speakers of English indicated that their families predominantly used their native languages in their homes. Because of their high levels of English proficiency on the Maculaitis Assessment of Competencies, or MAC II (Maculaitis, 2001), however, none of these students qualified for English as a Second Language (ESL) instructional programming. This test of English language proficiency assesses students in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special considerations</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General education</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native speakers of English</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Special considerations for literacy and language learning in target classroom.
This class also demonstrated a wide range of abilities as measured by two different reading assessments, the Terra Nova (2001) and the Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003). Table 3.2 summarizes the range of reading scores of the students in my third period class, as measured by the Terra Nova (2001) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver & Carter, 2003).

| Terra Nova  | DRA                        |
|------------|---------------|----------------|
| national percentile ranking | reading stage |
| Lowest score | 37th percentile | Below transitional (grade 2) |
| Highest score | 98th percentile | Extending middle school (grade 7) |

Table 3.2: Range of reading scores of sixth graders in target classroom.

During the 2003-2004 school year, all fifth graders in the district had taken the Terra Nova (2001), a standardized test of reading and math achievement. On the Terra Nova (2001), five of six of my third period language arts students scored in the 94th percentile or above during the spring of their fifth-grade year. All of these students were The highest Terra Nova (2001) score in this class was in the 98th percentile, with two students achieving that score. In contrast, four students in this class scored in the 51st percentile or below, with the lowest Terra Nova (2001) score in the 37th percentile. There were no Terra Nova (2001) scores reported for one of the students who received special education services.
The Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003), was administered to all of the sixth grade students during the first three weeks of the school year. Twice yearly (fall and spring), all students in grades K-8 in our district are required to complete this assessment. The DRA is administered to students one-on-one and is intended to provide measures of reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension skills and strategies. Because I had planned to examine the students’ reading of nonfiction texts for this study, all students were asked to read nonfiction texts for their DRA sessions. The DRA yields an assessment score and a developmental reading stage. Reading stages for this class ranged from below “transitional” (approximately equivalent to grade 2) to “extending middle school” (approximately equivalent to grade 7). In other words, the student in my third period class with the lowest DRA score was considered to be reading at a second-grade level, while the student with the highest DRA score was considered to be reading at a seventh-grade level.

Due to the design of the DRA, sixth-grade students cannot achieve a score that places them in a stage higher than “extending middle school,” or an equivalent of a grade 7 reading level. However, I believe there were some students who read at a higher level, based on their Terra Nova (2001) scores and their work samples.

The special education services were delivered within the context of the inclusion class. In this class of 17 students, three students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The students’ current IEPs were developed during their fifth-grade year. This means that the students’ fifth-grade teachers established goals and objectives during school year 2003-2004 for students to work toward during school
year 2004-2005, with support from their general education teachers, their special education teachers, and their parents. All three students with IEPs had literacy and language development goals and objectives on their IEPs. There was a special education teacher, Ms. E, assigned to this class in order to support the students with special needs; however, she provided support to all learners. Ideally, we would have developed a team teaching approach for working with this class. Unfortunately, true team teaching fell victim to one of the harsh realities of teaching in a middle school: the lack of common planning time. Ms. E and I took turns serving as the “lead” teacher, delivering the instruction, and the “support” teacher, assisting students and individualizing instruction as needed. Throughout the duration of this study, I was the “lead” teacher.

I selected my third period class as the focus for my research because it offered the widest range of abilities within a single class compared to my other classes. I felt this was important so that I could explore how students with various levels of ability came to understand authorship in history texts. Another reason I selected this class was because of the team-teaching configuration, which allowed me to spend more time working individually with the case study students. These factors supported the collection of rich data.

Case Study Students

Four students from the same sixth-grade classroom were selected as case study students. Two of the selected students were female and two were male. One of the females and one of the males were identified as more successful readers, while the other female and male were identified as less successful readers. The case study
students’ levels of success were based on their performance on the reading section of a standardized test (Terra Nova, 2001) and their performance on a classroom-based assessment, the Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003). Table 3.3 summarizes my selection criteria for the four case study students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Terra Nova national percentile rank</th>
<th>DRA reading stage</th>
<th>Student qualifies for special education services (currently has IEP)</th>
<th>Success as a reader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70th percentile or above</td>
<td>“Advancing intermediate” or above</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>More successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70th percentile or above</td>
<td>“Advancing intermediate” or above</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>More successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40th percentile or below</td>
<td>“Extending” or below</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Less successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40th percentile or below</td>
<td>“Extending” or below</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Less successful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Selection criteria for case study students.

The more successful readers were identified as those who scored in the 70th percentile or higher on the Terra Nova and who were categorized as “on grade level” or above by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). This means that the DRA score fell within the “advancing intermediate” stage or above.

The less successful readers were identified as those who scored in the 40th percentile or below on the Terra Nova and who were categorized as “below grade level” on the DRA, meaning they were reading at least two years below their grade level DRA stage. In other words, the DRA score fell within the “extending stage” or
below. In addition, less successful readers were those who had documented challenges in literacy and language learning as evidenced by the development of language and literacy goals and objectives on their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

In short, the four case study students (two females and two males) were selected on the basis of their levels of reading success, as indicated by their reading scores on the Terra Nova and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). In addition, two of the four case study students selected had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), indicating that they had qualified for special education services, and they were working toward identified specific literacy and language goals.

Instructional Materials

Because this study was grounded in the principles of teacher research, many of the instructional materials were a combination of self-developed, teacher-created materials and published materials (see Table 3.4). All materials were employed in order to study student knowledge of author’s voice, visible author, and metadiscourse in texts of various genres and in history texts in particular. I also adapted several published texts for the instruction phase (Phase 2) and the application phase (Phase 3) of Study 1.
To begin the study (on Days 1 and 2), I read aloud two fictional narratives in picture book format in order to introduce the topic and to foster whole-class discussion about author’s voice. Picture books are defined as books in which pictures and text work together to tell a story, whether that story is fiction or nonfiction (Bishop & Hickman, 1992). Using picture books with middle school readers has been shown to provide many benefits to students, including fostering reading engagement, supporting vocabulary development, building content knowledge, and stimulating critical thinking and discussion (Albright, 2002; Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss, & Brant, 2001; Miller, 1998). Picture books also offer access to text for less confident readers, and they allow us to read several different texts during a single
class period or lesson without worrying too much about time constraints. Since most students are typically very experienced with narrative texts (Graesser et al., 1991; Willingham, 2004), the fictional narratives were intended to provide texts with familiar structures so that the students could concentrate their efforts on understanding and analyzing facets of authorship. The picture books that I read aloud to the students included *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Scieszka, 1989) and *Encounter* (Yolen, 1992). After each reading, the whole class discussed issues of authorship in each text.

*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Scieszka, 1989) is a retelling of the classic tale “The Three Little Pigs” from the Wolf’s perspective. In this version, the Big Bad Wolf explains how he had innocently tried to borrow some sugar from each of the three Little Pigs, but a terrible cold caused him to sneeze, resulting in the first two Little Pigs’ houses being blown down and the two Little Pigs being killed. Because the Little Pigs were already dead, the Wolf feels it is a shame to let “perfectly good” ham dinners go to waste, so he eats them. By the time the Wolf gets to the third Little Pig’s house, he claims that he was framed and made out to be a criminal, resulting in the third Little Pig having the Big Bad Wolf arrested and put in jail, from where the Wolf tells his story. I selected this book because most of the students were familiar with the text and because the voice of the Wolf (the narrator) is clearly identifiable. This book also provided us with an opportunity to discuss differences between authors and narrators.

*Encounter* (Yolen, 1992) is a fictionalized account of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the West Indies, through the eyes of a native Taino, looking back on events
that occurred when he was a boy. In this story, the Taino boy describes the strange ship and men who come to his village, as well as the nightmares that begin to haunt him upon the strangers’ arrival. Although the boy suspects that the men have evil intentions, the adults in his tribe will not listen to him, and they befriend the strangers. Soon the strangers begin to take advantage of the Taino, ultimately taking some of them as slaves. The Taino boy is one of those captured, but he escapes in order to warn his people. Unfortunately, by the time the boy makes it back to his home island, many of the Taino have been killed. The story ends with the aged Taino mourning the loss of his people. I selected this book because it allowed us to move from a fictional narrative (The True Story of the Three Little Pigs) to historical fiction, taking us one step closer to history texts. This book also had a strong voice. As with The True Story of the Three Little Pigs, the voice was that of the narrator, but again, this gave us the opportunity to refine our understanding of the differences between authors and narrators.

On Day 3 of the instruction phase (Phase 2), the instruction focused on three history texts that were topically related. All three texts were about Ruby Bridges, one of the little girls who were escorted to school by federal marshals when segregation was declared unconstitutional. This topic was selected as an extension of a thematic unit about civil rights that the students had recently finished. One of the Ruby Bridges texts came from a narrative picture book, The Story of Ruby Bridges (Coles, 1995), which is told with an omniscient third-person voice. This book is about the life of young Ruby, whose family moved to New Orleans after court-ordered desegregation in 1960. Ruby was the only African-American child to attend her
elementary school, prompting white parents to heatedly protest outside the school building, while federal marshals escort Ruby to and from her school. The white parents then refuse to send their children to school at all. The book tells of Ruby’s time alone with her teacher until parents slowly begin to send their children back to school. The excerpt used in my class focuses on Ruby’s experience of having to walk past the angry mob of protesting white parents every day on her way to and from school, while being escorted by the federal marshals.

Two other texts came from an expository picture book, *Through My Eyes* (Bridges, 1999), that includes a variety of textual styles. From this book, one text is an excerpt from a newspaper article, and one text is Ruby Bridges’s own account of her first day of school, told in first person, as an adult looking back on her childhood.

The excerpt from the newspaper article details the arrival of Ruby, in her pigtails and starched dress, on her first day of school and the crowd’s irate response. In this excerpt, a white man is quoted as shouting, “Kill the niggers!” as police work to contain the crowd, and the federal marshals rush Ruby inside the building.

In Ruby Bridges’s account of her first day of school, she looks back as an adult. In this excerpt, Ruby recalls driving down the street and approaching the school, with “barricades and people shouting and policemen everywhere” (Bridges, 1999, p. 16). She remembers being surrounded by marshals, walking through the crowd while people yelled and threw things. As a child, she thought the school building looked bigger and nicer than her old school, and that it must be an important place to have all those policemen at the door and a huge crowd all around.
The three Ruby Bridges texts were selected because they focus on the same historical event: Ruby’s arrival at her new, all-white elementary school in New Orleans, as told from three different perspectives. We started with *The Ruby Bridges Story* (Coles, 1995) since the sixth graders had just discussed issues of author’s voice with two previous narrative texts (*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* and *Encounter*). Next, we read and discussed the newspaper excerpt, drawing connections with *The Ruby Bridges Story*, since both texts are told from a third-person perspective. We then transitioned to Ruby’s own first-person account of her first day of school in *Through My Eyes*.

This approach was intended to help students build their new knowledge upon previous learning. In other words, this progression of texts (from narrative to newspaper article excerpt to first-person account) was an attempt to scaffold (Bruner, 1975) students’ learning and to help students connect the new with the known. The students had previously demonstrated their understanding of authorship in narrative texts, so we used that knowledge to discuss and build understanding of authorship in other kinds of texts, including one with an author who was anonymous to the students (an unidentified newspaper article excerpt) and one with a visible author (Ruby Bridges). Empirical evidence shows that elementary and middle school students benefit from strategy instruction, and a key component to successful strategy instruction is teacher scaffolding as needed (Brown & Palinscar, 1986; Duffy et al., 1987; Paris et al., 1984; Pressley et al., 1992). Providing a scaffold that allowed students to apply their knowledge of authorship to a variety of history texts was my
attempt to teach students to use their knowledge of authorship as a strategy for reading and understanding these texts.

Teacher-Rewritten Texts

In order to investigate how sixth graders learn from history texts written with a visible author versus an anonymous author, I wanted to include texts that the sixth graders may actually encounter within the context of their social studies or history classes. For this reason, I decided to use excerpts from the sixth-grade social studies textbook that had been adopted by our district for classroom use. I determined that the excerpts were written in an anonymous, authoritative style (Crismore, 1984). This means that most of the rhetorical devices that may give readers clues as to the author’s thoughts, opinions, and biases (for example hedges, such as “may be,” and evaluative terms, such as “more interesting”) were not included in the text. I wanted students to read same textual content written by a concealed author and by a visible author so that I could examine how issues of authorship influenced the students’ attempts to read and understand each type of text. For this reason, I rewrote the anonymous textbook excerpts in order to include the linguistic devices that would make the author more visible.

I decided to revise some of the published texts for Study 1 myself because I wanted to make sure that various author-revealing rhetorical devices (Nolen, 1995; Paxton, 1997) and attitudinal metadiscourse (Crismore, 1984) were included in each visible author text. The texts for the instruction on Days 7-8, “The Path to Democracy,” and the texts for the application phase (Phase 3), “Beginning of White Rule,” were based on published texts from the students’ sixth-grade social studies
textbook, *World Studies: Africa* (Prentice Hall, 2005), but I rewrote all of them in order to make the author more visible. Specifically, I wanted each text to contain self-disclosures, direct appeals to the reader, and four types of attitudinal metadiscourse: emphatics, saliency, evaluative, and hedges (Crismore, 1984; Paxton, 1997). I followed Paxton’s (1997) procedure for rewriting the texts in order to add metadiscourse without changing the content of the texts. Although Paxton changed the order of presentation for some of the information in the texts he rewrote, I did not. As Paxton (1997) noted, rewriting the texts so as to make the author visible does make the rewritten texts longer than the original anonymous author texts. However, it is only the inclusion of author-revealing rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse that slightly lengthens the visible author texts that I created, as no additional content statements were added. These texts are included in Appendix B.

As a whole class, we read “The Path to Democracy,” a history text with a visible author, on Days 7-8 of the instruction phase (Phase 2). This text is an adaptation of an excerpt from the sixth graders’ social studies textbook, *World Studies: Africa* (Prentice Hall, 2005). The excerpt focuses on Nigeria’s efforts to become a democratic country. I selected this excerpt because it is a part of the regular sixth-grade social studies course of study in our district. I rewrote it to make the author visible by modifying the procedure developed by Paxton (1997), that is, I rewrote the excerpt in the first person, addressed the reader, and intermittently used attitudinal metadiscourse. I tried to present an attitude in which the author revealed an understanding of why there might be conflict and civil war in Nigeria because it was my intent to encourage the students to reflect thoughtfully on issues of diversity.
The rewritten, visible author text contains 203 total words in 14 total statements. One of my colleagues, a 10-year veteran social studies teacher with National Board Certification, verified that my rewriting maintained the gist of the excerpt and kept the statements in their original sequential order. I added 15 rhetorical devices throughout the excerpt. I used self-disclosure two times, I addressed the reader three times, and I used attitudinal metadiscourse 10 times, including emphatics, saliency, evaluative, and hedges. Three statements remained unchanged. The original excerpt and the rewritten text with the visible author can be found in Appendix B.

The text that was used for the partner reading on Days 10-11 (Phase 3: application phase), “Beginning of White Rule,” was also an adaptation of an excerpt from the sixth graders’ social studies textbook, *World Studies: Africa* (Prentice Hall, 2005). The excerpt focuses on the beginnings of white rule in South Africa. I selected this excerpt because it, too, is a part of the regular sixth-grade social studies course of study in our district. In addition, it was related to the civil rights thematic unit mentioned above. I rewrote the text to make the author visible by using the same procedure previously described, which was adapted from Paxton (1997). Again, I rewrote the excerpt in first person, I clearly addressed the reader, and I occasionally used attitudinal metadiscourse. The original social studies text contained 244 total words in 19 total statements. The rewritten visible author text contains 278 total words in 19 total statements. Once again, my colleague, an experienced and National Board Certified social studies teacher, verified that my rewriting maintained the gist of the excerpt and kept the statements in their original sequential order. I added 17 rhetorical devices throughout the excerpt. I used self-disclosure two times, I
addressed the reader three times, and I used attitudinal metadiscourse 12 times, including emphatics, saliency, evaluative, and hedges. Five statements remained unchanged. The original excerpt and the rewritten text with the visible author can be found in Appendix B.

*Double-Entry Diaries*

On Day 10 (Phase 3: application phase), students worked in pairs to read a historical text with a visible author. Pairs of students read the texts and filled out double-entry diaries, or DEDs (Ollmann, 1996; Tovani, 2000). The students then wrote answers to summary questions. The DEDs are two-column worksheets. In the left column, the students recorded the words and phrases that they believed revealed something about the author. In the right column, the students explained the functions of the words and phrases they recorded, indicating the author’s purpose for including them. The double-entry diaries (DEDs) provided the students with a graphic organizer to record their work and to help them see the relationship between the rhetorical devices that make an author visible and the author’s purposes or reasons in selecting particular words and phrases. I had the students work in pairs on their DEDs in order to support learning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) and to foster student conversations, which provided a way for the students to practice thinking aloud and to rehearse the language related to their learning (Wilhelm, 2001).

*Instruments*

A variety of instruments were used to collect data throughout Study 1 (see Table 3.5). These included surveys, questionnaires, classroom-based assessments, classroom observations notes recorded in my teaching journal and anecdotal records,
transcripts of videotaped class discussions, double-entry diaries, written retellings and answers to comprehension questions, and think-aloud protocols and individual interviews with the four case study students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 (preparation</td>
<td>Student surveys</td>
<td>Completed by all students in the beginning of the school year</td>
<td>To develop a profile of each student as a reader and writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phase)</td>
<td>Student literacy questionnaires</td>
<td>occasionally throughout the school year.</td>
<td>To ascertain reading abilities and interests for each student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom-based assessments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental Reading Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(DRA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 (instruction</td>
<td>Dialogue calendars</td>
<td>Co-constructed by students and teacher-researcher each day through</td>
<td>To contribute to individual student profiles and to promote trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phase)</td>
<td></td>
<td>written dialogue.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>&amp;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 3 (application</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To monitor students’ understanding of instruction and texts on a daily</td>
</tr>
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<td>phase)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>basis.</td>
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Continued

Table 3.5: Summary of data collected in Study 1.
Table 3.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 2 (instruction phase) &amp; Phase 3 (application phase)</th>
<th>Class observation notes</th>
<th>Logged by the teacher-researcher throughout the school year.</th>
<th>To contribute to individual student profiles and to develop a profile of the class as a community of learners. To provide information regarding students’ understandings of author’s voice and visible author.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 (instruction phase)</td>
<td>Transcripts of classroom instruction</td>
<td>Classroom instruction videotaped throughout Phase 2 (instruction phase).</td>
<td>To provide information about teaching and learning within the context of the instructional unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3 (application phase)</td>
<td>Double-entry diaries (DEDs)</td>
<td>Collected from pairs of students on Day 10 of Phase 3 (application phase).</td>
<td>To provide information about students’ understandings of metadiscourse and visible authors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3 (application phase) &amp; Phase 4 (evaluation phase)</td>
<td>Comprehension questions</td>
<td>Collected from all students during Phase 3 (application phase) and Phase 4 (evaluation phase).</td>
<td>To provide information about students’ recall and comprehension of history texts with visible and anonymous authors, as well as students’ perception of text comprehensibility and author credibility. Continued</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 4 (evaluation phase)</th>
<th>Closing questions</th>
<th>Collected from all students during Phase 4 (evaluation phase).</th>
<th>To provide information about student learning in regard to the concept of visible author.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4 (evaluation phase)</td>
<td>Think-aloud protocols, audiotaped and transcribed Interviews, audiotaped and transcribed</td>
<td>Conducted with four case study students during Phase 4 (evaluation phase).</td>
<td>To provide information regarding instructional influences on students’ understandings of metadiscourse, the concept of visible author, and judgments in regard to comprehensibility and author credibility for texts with visible authors and anonymous authors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Surveys, Questionnaires, and Classroom-Based Assessments

Significant amounts of important background information about students can be gathered through surveys, questionnaires, and classroom-based assessments (Hubbard & Power, 1993). I used these tools to help me to get to know my students better as readers and writers.

At the beginning of the school year, my sixth graders completed an “About Me” survey that focused on themselves and their families in a broad sense. The purpose of this survey is to help me get a general sense of each student (such as family composition, likes and dislikes, and strengths and struggles in school) from the outset. There are also five broad questions related to literacy that help me get an initial impression of each student’s literate life.
Within the first two weeks of school, I have my sixth graders complete a more detailed literacy questionnaire. This questionnaire asks the students to indicate their individual reading preferences and habits, including strategies they tend to rely on when their comprehension breaks down. The literacy questionnaire also includes questions about writing, the language spoken at home, and the family’s literate lives. Finally, the questionnaire asks the students to evaluate themselves as readers and writers and to jot down goals they have for themselves to improve as readers and writers. The literacy questionnaire gives me a more detailed picture of each student’s literacy habits and preferences, as well as his or her self-perception as a reader and a writer, and an indication of goals the students have for themselves.

These tools served to uncover the students’ previous literacy experiences, past and current literacy behaviors, and perceptions of themselves as readers and writers. As suggested by Allen (2000), I looked for patterns in students’ responses in order to aid in my understanding of individual students. I also looked for patterns of response within the class so that I might develop a fuller understanding of the class as a whole.

Throughout the school year, a variety of classroom-based assessments are used to determine what the students know and are able to do. For example, the students in my class keep writing portfolios. Some of the work collected in the writing portfolio is used for assessment purposes. In terms of reading, the students keep logs of books and articles they have read over the course of the year. These logs are used to determine that the students are engaged in wide reading. During the year, the students are asked to use sticky notes to hold their thinking while they read. At times, the students are directed to apply a particular reading strategy (such as making
connections or interpreting a passage) as they make their sticky notes and to bring this evidence of their thinking to a small group discussion. Occasionally, sticky notes that indicate target reading behaviors are collected and placed in the students’ files in order to show growth. Classroom-based assessments take a variety of forms throughout the school year. These assessments help me to determine what the students know and are able to do, which students may need more help, and which students are ready to move on to something more challenging.

Classroom Observations

Class observation notes were kept throughout the duration of the school year, and I videotaped my classroom instruction for the duration of Study 1. Videotapes were transcribed. These notes and transcripts provided a window to the day-to-day happenings of the classroom (Glesne & Peshkin, 1993). Through reflection, classroom observation notes, anecdotal records, and transcripts of class discussions were “cooked” in my teaching journal to allow for analysis (Hubbard & Power, 1993). All notes, anecdotal records, journal entries, and transcripts were coded for evidence of learning in regard to rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse related to author visibility, including student use of terminology and language tied to the concept of author visibility.

For example, in one of our earliest class discussions during Study 1, we talked about what the term “author’s voice” means. Based on the transcript of the class discussion, the students’ comments fell into six broad categories, with two comments that did not fit into any of the categories that emerged. This helped me see in general how these particular sixth graders were thinking of the concept of author’s voice, and
it helped me to see instances where individual students were thinking in ways that most of the other students were not.

These data sources also helped me to identify patterns in my teaching, including successful teaching strategies and sources of confusion for the students.

*Double-Entry Diaries*

Double-entry diaries (DEDs), also referred to as two-column responses, are graphic organizers that allow readers to record direct quotes from a text in the left column, and their responses to the quote in the right column (Ollmann, 1996; Tovani, 2000). In this study, the DEDs were collected from all pairs of students on Day 10 of the instruction phase (Phase 2). The DEDs allowed the students to record author-revealing rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse in the left column, and to evaluate their functions and purposes in the right column. DEDs were scored based on the number of metadiscoursal rhetorical devices identified and recorded. The extent to which, and the ways in which, the students evaluated the functions of the rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse were also coded. A double-entry diary is included in Appendix C.

*Recall/Retelling*

One of the primary goals of Study 1 was to get an overall picture of the students’ thoughts while reading two types of history texts: those written by a visible author, and those written by an anonymous author. Based on a random selection, half of the students read the text with the visible author first, and half of the students read the text with the anonymous author first. After reading the text, the students completed written retellings and answered written comprehension questions. They
also answered survey questions and closing questions. After reading one type of text (visible author or anonymous author) and completing all the related activities, each student repeated the entire sequence with the remaining type of text.

After reading the text, the students were given a prompt to write a retelling of the text (see Appendix D). The written retellings were scored according to two measures: key word score and overall gist score.

For each text, the students were asked to write answers to six open-ended comprehension questions. The questions were developed to include a variety of question-answer relationships, or QARs (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Raphael, 1986). Two questions were Right-There questions; two questions were Think and Search questions; and two questions were On My Own questions (Raphael, 1986). The two Right-There questions were worth one point each, while the remaining four questions were worth 2 points each. Points were awarded for correct answers. Partial points were awarded in cases where students provided some correct information. See Appendix E for the comprehension questions.

The students also answered written survey questions and closing questions. The survey questions were adapted from Paxton (1997) and asked the students to evaluate and rate the two types of text (visible author and anonymous author). The students were asked to consider the comprehensibility of each text and the credibility of each author. The students were also asked to give their opinions on where the author got his or her information, on the style of writing of each text, on the way the information is presented, on the author’s feelings about the topic, and finally, on how the author made the student feel about the topic. The students’ answers to the survey
questions were analyzed for patterns of response. The three closing questions asked the students to compare and contrast the two texts, especially in terms of comprehensibility and accuracy. As with the surveys, the students’ responses to the closing questions were also analyzed for patterns of response. The survey questions and the closing questions can be found in Appendix F.

*Think-Alouds*

The written responses to the retelling prompts, the comprehension questions, the survey questions, and the closing questions provided a broad view of how the students approached the two types of history texts. To get more specific information about the types of thinking processes used by middle school students when reading history texts, the four case study students completed think-aloud protocols, answered the survey questions, and answered the closing questions in one-on-one interviews with me. All session with the case study students were audiotaped and transcribed to allow for in-depth analysis.

For the think-alouds, I used a modified version of Wilhelm’s (1997) cued protocols. Instead of free-response protocols, in which students are asked to stop and comment on a text whenever they notice something about the text, cued protocols provided readers with an indication about when to stop. Wilhelm (1997) inserted a carat in the text to indicate the places he wanted his readers to stop and make comments (for example, in the middle and at the end of a page). For Study 1, I divided the texts into paragraphs and typed them up on cards, so that each card contained one paragraph of the text. I asked the students to read each card silently and then to make comments to me about anything they noticed about the visibility of
the author after they read each card. I decided to divide the text into paragraphs and to present the text one paragraph at a time so that the case study students would focus on the paragraph at hand, rather than concerning themselves with the entire text at once.

After transcribing the think-aloud session with each case study student, I analyzed the students’ comments by looking for patterns of response that indicated an understanding of how an author makes himself or herself more or less visible. I also looked for comments that included specific language that we had used in class in order to develop the concept of visible author, such as “addresses the reader.” In addition, I looked for comments in which students explicitly referred to the metadiscourse that was included in the text, including attitudinal metadiscourse such as “unbelievable.”

The think-aloud was intended to measure the degree to which the case study students were able to use the knowledge of visible author that we had constructed in class in order to read and understand two different types of history texts: one with an anonymous, authoritative author and one with a visible author. In addition, the think-aloud was intended to provide information regarding instructional influences on the case study students’ understandings of metadiscourse, the concept of visible author, and the judgments the students made in regard to the comprehensibility and author credibility for texts with visible and anonymous authors.

*Survey Questions and Closing Questions*

The survey questions were intended to provide information about the students’ recall and comprehension of history texts with visible and anonymous authors.
Furthermore, the survey questions were intended to probe students’ perceptions of text comprehensibility and author credibility for each type of text. The closing questions were intended to provide information about the students’ learning in regard to the concept of visible author. Instead of providing written answers to the survey questions and the closing questions like most of the students in the class, the case study students answered these questions in one-on-one interviews with me.

*Interviews*

In order to conduct the interviews, I asked my team teacher, Ms. E, to lead our third period language arts class for four days. While she conducted the class, I met individually with each of the four case study students. I was able to complete one case study interview per day. The case study students and I met in a small room that serves as a storage area for science equipment. There is a small table with two chairs in the room, which is where we sat to conduct the interviews. Although meetings were usually not interrupted, there were a few occasions when teachers came in to the storage room briefly to retrieve equipment. These minor interruptions did not affect the case study interviews, as the students and I were able to continue without difficulty.

The responses during the think-aloud sessions and the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. I looked for evidence that indicated the ways in which instruction influenced the students’ understandings of metadiscourse. I also looked for evidence that indicated how instruction impacted the students’ judgments of the comprehensibility and credibility of history texts with visible authors and anonymous authors.
The interviews were intended to provide a window to the case study students’
thinking as they attempted to use their knowledge of visible author in order to read
and understand two types of history texts.

Procedures

Phase 1: Preparation Phase

During the beginning of and throughout the school year, I collected
information about the students as individuals and about the class as a whole. I used
surveys, questionnaires, and classroom-based assessments to create profiles of each
student as a reader and a writer. I also administered the Developmental Reading
Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003), to each student. In addition, each
student engaged in a daily brief written exchange with me through the use of dialogue
calendars (Tovani, 2000). Dialogue calendars allowed me to have a brief, one-on-one
written conversation with each student every day, as the students wrote personal
messages at the beginning of each class period. At the end of the day, I responded to
each student in writing. This written daily dialogue promoted trust and provided me
with a more complete understanding of each student.

Classroom observations and notes from my teaching journal also informed my
understanding of individual students and each class as a whole. As Hubbard and
Power (1999) point out:

Taking notes is one of the main tools in the teacher-researchers’ repertoire.
Teachers have long relied on what Simon Ottenburg (1990) calls headnotes –
our memory for details and history in our classrooms. But some of this must
make its way into recorded writing, even very brief jottings. It’s looking back
on those written notes and elaborating on them that can provide a bridge
between what you are experiencing in the classroom and how you translate the
experience into larger meaning (p. 83).
I jotted down quick, brief notes whenever I had time during and between class periods. At the end of each day, I took some time after school to “cook” my notes in order to help me interpret the raw data (Hubbard & Power, 2003). In other words, the notes I took during the school days were intended to capture important data points, while the writing I did after school allowed for more insight and interpretation. In this way, even during busy class times, I was able to keep track of key ideas that I wanted to analyze further. For example, on one day the students were discussing what they had learned in regard to visible author versus anonymous author. In my teaching journal, I had jotted down the following notes from student comments during the discussion (all student names are pseudonyms):

4/26/05

Katie –

less facts/ more interesting (VA)

vs

more facts/doesn’t include reader (AA)

Beth –

visible author: casual

anonymous author: hidden, very proper (never wrong!)

Sam –

author tries to engage reader (VA)

Aaron –

hides opinions in facts (AA)
Later, I had gone back to that page in my teaching journal and written:

Students made very insightful comments about visible author and anonymous author. I am amazed by some of their comments. They seem to indicate a closer social relationship between reader and the visible author (‘more interesting,’ ‘casual,’ ‘tries to engage reader’). Also seem to think anonymous author is more socially distant (‘doesn’t include reader’). Beth accepts authority of anonymous author text: ‘NEVER WRONG!’ Similar to students in Paxton and Nolen? I wonder about Katie’s perception: ‘less facts’ (visible author) versus ‘more facts’ (anonymous author).

Keeping a teaching journal helped me to capture important data quickly in my busy middle-school classroom. It also provided opportunities for me to go back to the raw data and interpret the notes I had taken each day. In addition, the information in my teaching journal assisted me in selecting the four case study students from my third period class.

Phase 2: Instruction Phase

The instruction phase of Study 1 was designed to scaffold student learning, from teacher-directed activity, to teacher-guided learning, to peer-directed activity, and finally to independent application (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Karpov & Haywood, 1998; Wilhelm, 2001). The instruction during this phase combined the same elements that have proven successful in reciprocal teaching: expert scaffolding, guided practice of comprehension strategies, and cooperative learning discussions (Brown & Palincsar, 1986). By designing the instructional activities to include all of these elements, I was able to support student learning about authorship and to allow
for student practice in applying the strategy of identifying visible authors prior to achieving independent competence (see Table 3.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Instructional strategies</th>
<th>Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher read-aloud</td>
<td><em>The True Story of the Three Little Pigs</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole-class discussion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher read-aloud</td>
<td><em>Encounter</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Whole-class discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small groups read and discuss three related texts;</td>
<td><em>The Ruby Bridges Story</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fill out chart with guiding questions</td>
<td>(2 excerpts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Through My Eyes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Whole-class discussion and creation of class chart</td>
<td><em>The Ruby Bridges Story</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2 excerpts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Through My Eyes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Students highlight three related texts for evidence of</td>
<td><em>The Ruby Bridges Story</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>author’s voice</td>
<td>(2 excerpts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Through My Eyes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students write rationales for highlighting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole-class discussion of highlighting and rationales</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole-class discussion and generation of definition of</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>visible author</td>
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Table 3.6: Phase 2 (Instruction Phase) instructional strategies.
On Days 1-2 of the instruction phase (Phase 2), the students were introduced to the concept of author’s voice. To begin, I read aloud two fictional narratives that are written in styles that emphasize voice. These fictional narratives, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Scieszka, 1989) and *Encounter* (Yolen, 1996), are in the form of picture books. As previously mentioned, picture books are beneficial instructional materials to use with middle school students for a number of reasons. For example, picture books promote engagement in the reading task, support the acquisition of new vocabulary, build background knowledge in content areas, and foster critical thinking and thoughtful discussion (Albright, 2002; Carr et al., 2001; Miller, 1998). Picture books are relatively short, so that an entire text can be read and discussed in one middle school class period. In addition, the format of a picture book is often less intimidating than lengthier texts (such as novels or expository chapter books) to reluctant readers, with less text per page and illustrations to support comprehension. So using picture books to introduce the concept of author’s voice

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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teacher models and demonstrates thinking aloud and highlighting metadiscourse with overhead display</td>
<td>“The Path to Democracy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Whole-class discussion and creation of DED</td>
<td>“The Path to Democracy”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Students write about what they’ve learned about visible author so far.
was a way to move the students into unfamiliar territory while continuing to support their emerging understandings.

As a class, we talked about the differences between authors and narrators. We discussed the ways in which authors and narrators attempt to connect with readers and to reveal their attitudes, values, beliefs, and intentions. Issues of perspective were considered. We also discussed the similarities and differences between the texts. My role on the first two days of the instruction was that of the expert, and I provided a great deal of scaffolding.

On Days 3-6, our reading focused on historical texts. I selected three historical texts that were topically related, taken from a narrative picture book with an omniscient third-person narrator and from a mixed-genre picture book. The mixed-genre picture book contained a narrative text with a first-person narrator and an expository text with an anonymous author. All three texts were about Ruby Bridges, one of the young African-American girls who were escorted to school by federal marshals when segregation was declared unconstitutional. The narrative picture book was The Story of Ruby Bridges (Coles, 1995), which is told with an omniscient third-person voice. Two of the texts came from the mixed-genre picture book Through My Eyes (Bridges, 1999). From this book, one text was an excerpt from a newspaper article (expository text with anonymous author), and one text was Ruby’s own account of her first day of school, told in a first-person narrative. The students were not initially told the origin of the texts, and the texts were simply labeled Text A, Text B, and Text C.
The students were placed into small groups (4-5 students each) and given copies of the three texts. Students were asked to read and discuss each text as a group. Each group was given a chart to guide their analyses of the texts and to provide them a place to record their findings. The following questions were listed on the charts:

Who is the author?

Who is the narrator?

What are the specific features of the text that stand out to you? What do you notice about the text?

Where would you read/find this text?

Is there a clear author’s voice? What is the textual evidence?

What is the author’s attitude in this text?

Following the small group reading and analysis of all three texts, we created a whole-class chart that showed the responses of all groups for the three texts. We discussed the similarities and differences in the responses among the groups.

Finally, the students were asked to highlight any words in Text A, Text B, and Text C that helped them identify the author’s voice. The students were then asked to explain in writing what types of words or phrases they highlighted in each text and why they highlighted those specific words or phrases. After the students had highlighted the texts and written their explanations, we had another whole-class discussion. The students shared what they had highlighted and why they had done so.
I asked the students to visually scan the highlighting on their papers and to determine for which text they had done the most highlighting.

The task of highlighting allowed me to turn the conversation from the notion of author’s voice to the concept of a visible author. I explained that the concept of author’s voice was slippery, since there are so many different ways the concept is defined. I told the students that we were going to shift the focus of our conversation from author’s voice to visible author; that we were no longer trying to find an author that we could hear, but an author that we could see. The act of highlighting the text literally helped the students see the visible author.

I asked the students to look at their highlighting again and to tell me what it was that the author did to make himself or herself more visible. The students shared their thoughts, and as a class, we developed a definition of visible author. The students determined that a visible author writes in first person, talks to the reader (I later provided the language “addresses the reader”), and shows what he or she is thinking (again, I later provided the language “attitudinal metadiscourse”). Through our discussion, we explicitly named “visible author” and “metadiscourse.” We also discussed the reasons why an author might want to reveal himself or herself to readers and the reasons why an author might not want to reveal anything about himself or herself, such as a particular bias. Our conversation laid the foundation for talking about author visibility, arming the students with the knowledge of how to talk about metadiscourse and author visibility.

On Day 7, as a whole class, we reviewed the definition of a visible author, which we had created during our previous class discussion. We then read a history
text with a visible author. This text was “The Path to Democracy,” an excerpt from the students’ social studies textbook, *World Studies: Africa* (Prentice Hall, 2005), that I rewrote in order to make the author more visible (see Appendix B). This process seemed arbitrary, but I tried to portray an attitude for the author that would make the author’s opinions, thoughts, and biases clear to the students and encourage thoughtful reflection. In terms of educational scaffolding (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Brown & Palincsar, 1986), I continued to provide a relatively high degree of support to the students at this point in the instruction phase, with the intent to decrease the support over time. As the model of expert behavior, I used the overhead projector to model and demonstrate the strategy of identifying and analyzing the rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse that make the author visible, asking the students to copy the work that I did onto their own papers. The students would later practice using the strategy with my guidance and the guidance of peers. Ultimately, again, the goal was for the students eventually to use the strategy independently.

The primary format for instruction on this day was that of a strategy mini-lesson (Robb, 2000). A strategy mini-lesson is a short lesson (about 20 minutes, give or take), in which the teacher uses explicit instruction to teach students about literacy strategies. Wilhelm (2001) noted that explicit strategy instruction can be organized into six recursive steps: (1) teacher explains strategy; (2) teacher explains why strategy is important; (3) teacher explains when to use the strategy; (4) teacher models how to perform the strategy; (5) teacher guides learner practice; (6) students independently use the strategy. This is an instructional format that my students were
familiar with, since various strategy mini-lessons were frequently taught in my class throughout the school year.

The text was presented on the overhead projector, and the students had their own copies of the text. As I read the text on the overhead to the students, and as they followed along with their own texts, I modeled and demonstrated thinking aloud (Wilhelm, 2001). Before reading, I reminded the students that thinking aloud means that I will say what is going on in my mind as I read and try to understand what I am reading. As I read the text, I paused periodically to notice rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse, and how they functioned in the text to make the author visible. We highlighted the text, marking the rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse that the author used to address readers and to reveal attitudes and beliefs. This instructional approach allowed me to make the strategy of identifying and analyzing author visibility an overt and explicit process.

As a class, we made a two-column chart. In the left column, we listed the rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse that we highlighted in the text. In the right column, we attempted to describe the functions of the rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse. The design of this chart provided the students with a preview of the double-entry diaries, or DEDs (Ollmann, 1996; Tovani, 2000), they would be asked to fill out on Day 10 of the instruction phase (Phase 2). We discussed how the author used rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse to address the reader and to reveal something about the author.

We also discussed the importance of knowing an author’s biases when reading historical texts. For example, Wineburg (2001) emphasized the need for readers to go
beyond decoding historical texts in order to understand human motivations and actions. Readers of history, just like professional historians, need to know who is behind the text in order to know how to take or interpret the text. Analyzing author visibility allows students to see that the text is inseparable from the author. This view supports deeper historical understandings and more reflective interpretations of the world (Wineburg, 2001). Discussing the purpose of the strategy (identifying and analyzing author visibility) and teaching the strategy are two more components of successful strategy instruction (McKeown et al., 1993).

After reviewing our class DED chart from Day 7, on Day 8 we attempted to categorize and label the rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse listed on the chart, according to function. The categories, adapted from Nolen (1995) and Paxton (1997), are related to the ways in which an author attempts self-disclosure. These avenues to self-disclosure include agency in clauses with an action, means of addressing the reader, and attitudinal metadiscourse (Nolen, 1995; Paxton, 1997). For our purposes, our class determined that a visible author is one who writes in first person, addresses the reader, and uses attitudinal metadiscourse (which means he or she reveals opinions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, or attitudes). As a class, we used this definition to analyze the text and to help us understand what the author was trying to accomplish by making himself or herself more visible. We added our analyses to our class DED chart. At the end of this class session, I asked the students to briefly write their thoughts about what they had learned about visible author so far.

The instruction phase (Phase 2) was designed to allow for student scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the students.
Daily instruction was intended to scaffold student learning from teacher-directed activity, to teacher-guided learning, to peer-directed practice (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Karpov & Haywood, 1998; Wilhelm, 2001).

**Phase 3: Application Phase**

Following the instruction phase, I developed a more detailed portrait of the students’ understandings of metadiscourse, using as my primary data sources small-group and whole-class discussions, a highlighting and DED activity completed by dyads, and an independent application task. Table 3.7 summarizes the instructional strategies used during the application phase (Phase 3) of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Instructional strategies</th>
<th>Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Small groups answer discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole-class discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pairs read history text</td>
<td>“The Beginning of White Rule”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pairs highlight metadiscourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pairs fill out DEDs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Whole-class discussion</td>
<td>“The Beginning of White Rule”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Students individually answer discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7: Phase 3 (Application Phase) instructional strategies.
On Day 9, we took a break from analyzing texts and got into small discussion groups of 2-4 students each. The students were asked to talk in their small groups and to answer a set of discussion questions:

1. How and why do authors use metadiscourse?
2. What does metadiscourse help us know about the authors? How do we know it?
3. Why is knowledge of metadiscourse important?
4. Why is knowledge of authors important?
5. Does metadiscourse make the text easier to understand? Why or why not?
6. Does metadiscourse make the text more believable? Why or why not?

After the students had time to answer the questions in small groups, we shared our answers in a whole-class discussion.

On Day 10, the students worked in pairs to read a history text with a visible author. This text was “Beginning of White Rule,” an excerpt from the students’ social studies textbook (World Studies: Africa, Prentice Hall, 2005) that I rewrote to make the author more visible. The original text and the rewritten text can be found in Appendix B. Pairs of students guided one another through the process of reading the history text with a visible author. The students worked together to read their assigned text and to highlight rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse that the author used to address readers and to reveal attitudes and beliefs. The students then directed one another in filling out double-entry diaries, or DEDs (Ollmann, 1996; Tovani,
Although the students worked in pairs, each student was responsible for filling out his or her own DED. An example of the DED is provided in Appendix C.

On Day 11, we shared our pairs work and discussed, as a whole class, our experiences of trying to identify the rhetorical devices that make an author more visible and to analyze the author’s purpose for including the rhetorical devices. Finally, Day 12 was the last day of the application phase (Phase 3). The students were asked to answer the discussion questions (see above) one more time, in order to determine if their thinking about visible author had changed over the course of the instruction. This time, the students were asked to answer the discussion questions individually.

Working in pairs provided several benefits. One is that the importance of learning through social interaction was supported. Through the talk that occurred naturally as they worked together, the students practiced thinking aloud (Wilhelm, 2001). Having the students work in pairs was intended to promote student conversations. The students’ talk provided multiple opportunities to think aloud and to rehearse the language (Wilhelm, 2001) and the strategy of identifying and analyzing author visibility. Another benefit of working with others was that it offered continued opportunities for novices to practice their emergent skills with the help of others. Working in pairs also allowed the students chances to regulate others, which may have promoted their abilities to regulate themselves (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). In other words, the goal was for the students’ external speech, used to direct others’ behavior, to eventually become their inner speech, used to direct their own behavior and their own thinking (Karpov & Haywood, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).
Phase 4: Evaluation Phase

For this phase of Study 1, all students worked individually. The students were asked to read topically related, paired texts. One text was written by a visible author, and the other text was written by an anonymous author. Half of the students read the visible author text first, and half of the students read the anonymous author text first.

Table 3.8 summarizes the instructional strategies used during the evaluation phase of the Study 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Instructional strategies</th>
<th>Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning on Day 13 of Study 1 with one version of the text (visible author or anonymous author)</td>
<td>Individual students read topically related, paired texts</td>
<td>“Aksum”: one version with visible author and one version with anonymous author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual students construct written retellings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual students write answers to open-ended comprehension questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual students answer survey questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated one week later with remaining version of text</td>
<td>Repeat above sequence in its entirety</td>
<td>Remaining version of “Aksum” (visible author or anonymous author)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8: Phase 4 (Evaluation Phase) instructional strategies.

Additionally, I asked the four case study students to complete think-aloud protocols and to answer interview questions. The principal focus of these case studies was a
consideration of how the instruction influenced the students’ understanding of metadiscourse, a visible author, and history texts.

The text I selected for the evaluation, “Aksum,” is an excerpt from the students’ social studies textbook, *World Studies: Africa* (Prentice Hall, 2005). One reason for selecting this text is that it was a part of the sixth grade social studies course of study in our district, but the students had not yet read it in their social studies class at this point in the school year. Another reason I chose this text is that the topic, the ancient civilization of Aksum, was one that would not be familiar to most of the students. For this reason, I assumed that most of the students would probably have low topic knowledge, meaning that very few of the students (if any at all) would have an advantage in their comprehension and recall of the text due to background knowledge. This textbook excerpt offered a brief introduction to the development of civilizations through trade in ancient eastern Africa. It was written in the anonymous, authoritative style typical to most textbooks, with no visible author.

I rewrote the textbook excerpt to create the visible author text, adapting Paxton’s (1997) procedure. I attempted to make the author more visible by rewriting the excerpt in the first person (in other words, using author self-disclosure), addressing the reader, and intermittently using attitudinal metadiscourse (see Table 3.9).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original text</th>
<th>Rewritten text</th>
<th>Rhetorical device used to enhance author visibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The boundaries of East Africa include the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.</td>
<td>Picture in your mind the boundaries of East Africa, including the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.</td>
<td>Addressing the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Africa’s early trading civilizations developed on or near a coastline, providing access to important markets in Arabia, India, and East Asia.</td>
<td>It is easy to see how East Africa’s early trading civilizations developed on or near a coastline, since it provided access to important markets in Arabia, India, and East Asia.</td>
<td>Attitudinal metadiscourse: emphatics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The kingdom of Aksum was located in East Africa, where the present-day countries of Ethiopia and Eritrea lie.</td>
<td>The kingdom of Aksum was located in East Africa, where the present-day countries of Ethiopia and Eritrea lie.</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were ancestors of the people of Aksum.</td>
<td>It’s important to understand that they were the ancestors of the people of Aksum.</td>
<td>Attitudinal metadiscourse: saliency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued

Table 3.9: Comparison of anonymous author text and rewritten visible author text for “Aksum.”
Table 3.9 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Over time, Aksum came to control trade in the Red Sea area.</th>
<th>Over time, powerful Aksum came to control trade in the Red Sea area.</th>
<th>Attitudinal metadiscourse: evaluative.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By the A.D. 200s, the kingdom controlled a trade network that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to India.</td>
<td>By the A.D. 200s, would you believe that the kingdom controlled a trade network that stretched incredibly from the Mediterranean Sea to India?</td>
<td>Addressing the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas, as well as goods, traveled along trade routes.</td>
<td>I find it interesting that ideas, as well as goods, traveled along trade routes.</td>
<td>Self-disclosure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take religion, for instance.</td>
<td>In the A.D. 300s, many people in Aksum became Christian as news about the religion spread.</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aksum became a center of the early Ethiopian Christian Church.</td>
<td>More important, Aksum became a center of the early Ethiopian Christian Church.</td>
<td>Attitudinal metadiscourse: saliency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the A.D. 600s, Aksum began to decline as Arabs took control of much of the region’s trade.</td>
<td>At some point during the A.D. 600s, Aksum unfortunately began to decline as Arabs took control of much of the region’s trade.</td>
<td>Attitudinal metadiscourse: hedge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The original social studies textbook excerpt contained 170 total words in 12 total statements. The rewritten visible author text contains 210 total words in 13 total statements. My rewriting maintained the gist of the excerpt and kept the statements in their original sequential order. I added 13 rhetorical devices throughout the
excerpt. I used self-disclosure once ("I find it interesting..."), I addressed the reader three times ("...would you believe...") and I used attitudinal metadiscourse nine times, including emphatics ("It is easy to see...") saliency ("More important..."), evaluative ("...unfortunately...") and hedges ("Probably around..."). One of the original statements remained unchanged.

After reading the text, the students were instructed to write a retelling in which they wrote all the important information and details that they could remember. The students were not timed during this task, and they could take as much time as they needed to write their retellings. They were not permitted to look back at the text while constructing their written retellings. Another language arts teacher and I independently scored the retellings according to a key word score and according to the overall gist and coherence of the retellings. These scores were intended to provide a measure of the students’ comprehension.

The students subsequently wrote answers to open-ended comprehension questions for their assigned text (visible author or anonymous author). The students were directed that they were permitted to look back at the text, if needed. The answers to the comprehension questions were given a score. Pearson and Johnson (1978) developed a taxonomy for questioning that focused on where the answer to the question was found. They identified three categories for comprehension questions: text-explicit, text-implicit, and script-implicit (Pearson & Johnson, 1978). Raphael (1986) later modified this question-answer relationship (QAR) taxonomy for children, labeling each category as Right There, Think and Search, and On My Own. At the time Study 1 was conducted, all of my students had been instructed in QAR as a
means for understanding and answering comprehension questions, as a part of our regular classroom instruction. For each text, there were two questions at each of the comprehension levels (Right There, Think and Search, and On My Own), resulting in a total of six comprehension questions per text. Answers to comprehension questions were scored in order to provide an additional measure of comprehension. The comprehension questions for each text are listed in Appendix E.

Finally, after reading the text, writing the retelling, and answering the comprehension questions, the students wrote answers to survey questions about their evaluations of the text. The following survey questions are adapted from Paxton (1997) and Goetz, Sadoski, Fatemi, & Bush (1994):

1. How understandable did you find this text?

   1  2  3  4  5
   very hard        very easy
   to understand    to understand

   Explain why you rated the text as you did.

2. Where do you think the author got the information for this text? How do you know?

3. How believable did you find this author?

   1  2  3  4  5
   not believable   very believable

   Explain why you rated the text as you did.

4. Describe the style of writing in the text you just read.
5. What do you think of the way the information is presented?

6. How do you think the author feels about the topic?

7. How does the author make you feel about the topic?

The survey questions were coded and analyzed for common themes across questions.

One week later, the students repeated the entire process (read, write retelling, answer written comprehension questions, and answer written survey questions) with their second text (the remaining visible author or anonymous author text). Having the students wait a week in between reading the two texts was an attempt to reduce the effects of passage-specific knowledge on the students’ comprehension of the second text.

When all of the students had read and responded to both texts, they were asked to respond in writing to closing questions in order to compare and contrast the two texts. The following closing questions are adapted from Paxton (1997):

1. Compare the two texts as best as you can.

2. Which text was easier to understand? Why?

3. Which text do you trust the most to be accurate? Why?

The answers to the closing questions were coded and analyzed for patterns of response.

Procedure for Case Study Students

The procedure for the four case study students was similar to that of the general population of students, except that the case study students were asked to read the texts in a one-on-one setting with me and to complete think-aloud protocols for
each text. Not only do think-aloud protocols help readers examine and develop reading behaviors and strategies, but they also provide a means of studying the cognitive processes that readers and writers use as they develop meanings (Tierney, Readence, & Dishner, 1995; Wilhelm, 2001). In other words, working with the case study students and asking them to complete think-aloud protocols allowed me to examine their on-line thinking and learning processes. The purpose of the think-aloud protocols in Study 1 was to provide a window to the case study students’ thinking during the reading of history texts, both with a visible author and an anonymous author.

Because we used a variety of think-alouds during strategy mini-lessons (Robb, 2000; Wilhelm, 2001) throughout the school year, the students were familiar with the practice of thinking aloud. Furthermore, prior to completing the think-aloud protocol for this study, all of the students had practiced thinking aloud with a partner, reading a historical text with a visible author and completing a DED. In addition, each of the case study students practiced thinking aloud with me at least two times during one-on-one reading conferences prior to the start of this study. Individual reading conferences were built into our regular language arts class structure, so that all of the students were familiar with them and participated in them throughout the school year.

Think-alouds were audiotaped and transcribed to allow for in-depth analysis. Think-aloud protocols were coded so that patterns of response could be identified. Specifically, I looked for evidence of the students’ identification and analysis of rhetorical devices and attitudinal metadiscourse that render an author more visible.
The case study students also provided their responses to the survey questions and the closing questions in one-on-one interviews with me. Again, in order to discover patterns that emerged, interviews were audiotaped, and responses were coded and analyzed. I looked for patterns of response that indicate the ways in which the case study students differentiated between the visible author text and the anonymous author text in terms of perceptions of comprehensibility and credibility.

Data Analysis

Students’ Backgrounds and Reading Abilities

In order to get to know my students as readers and writers each year, as well as to get to know them as people, I compile a file for each student, beginning the very first day of school. Prior to beginning Study 1, I asked each student to fill out a student survey, providing me with information about his or her family, pets, friends, likes and dislikes, hobbies, goals and dreams, and school experiences. I also asked each student to fill out a literacy questionnaire, in which each student indicated his or her reading and writing habits and preferences. This questionnaire also asked students to provide information about the language(s) spoken at home and their literacy goals. The student survey and the literacy questionnaire are two informal tools that help me to develop a well-rounded profile of each student. Information from the survey and the questionnaire is placed on a chart in the student’s classroom file. I refer to this information throughout the year to help me meet each student’s language and literacy learning needs. Furthermore, as we go through the year, additional information that contributes to my understanding of each student as a
reader and writer, such as anecdotal notes and assessment information, is added to the file.

Another tool I use to get to know students as readers and writers is the Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003). Middle school students in the district in which I teach must complete the intermediate version of this assessment each fall and each spring. This assessment requires the students to complete a reading survey, to read aloud an excerpt from a short booklet (fiction or nonfiction) for a miscue analysis, to read silently the remainder of the short booklet, and to write responses to the text. The students are assessed in the areas of reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. The comprehension section of the assessment requires the students to make predictions, to answer literal and inferential questions, to reflect on their reading, and to use metacognition. The reading survey, the miscue analysis, and the students’ written responses to the text are all scored according to a scoring rubric. The DRA yields an assessment score and a developmental reading stage, as well as an indication of the students’ areas of strength and areas needing improvement. Because the students must write responses on the survey and for the comprehension section, the DRA also gives me some insight into the students’ writing, at least in regard to written responses. Since I had planned to examine the students’ reading of history texts for the purposes of Study 1, I had all of my students read nonfiction selections for their fall assessments.

Throughout the year, classroom-based assessments are used to round out the profiles of students as readers and writers. These assessments vary, depending on student needs and class goals, but may include participation in literature circles,
individual and group projects, reading logs, reading strategy application tasks, writing portfolios, and performance assessments, such as readers’ theatre or process drama.

Dialogue calendars (Tovani, 2000) are also used throughout the school year. The students use the dialogue calendars to write to me each day and to record reflections about their own learning. This information contributes to the individual student profiles and also serves to support the teacher-student relationship and to promote trust. In addition, dialogue calendars provide a quick way to monitor the students’ understanding of instruction and texts on a daily basis.

As another means of gathering data about student learning, I maintain anecdotal class observation notes and a teaching journal each school year. In this way, I am not only developing profiles of individual students, but I am also able to build a profile of each class as a community of learners. Furthermore, my daily notes and journal entries provide information about the students’ learning, and specifically for this study, their understandings of the concepts of visible author and author’s voice.

For my anecdotal class observation notes, I keep one or two pages of small labels on hand for each class period. As the class progresses, I jot down observations about individual students or events on the labels. After the class period or after school, I review all of the labels I have written for each class. I look for any issues, patterns, or themes that might have emerged from a particular class or from the day in general, then I transfer the labels into my individual student profile folders. This allows me to see any patterns that emerge for individual students. Finally, I use the
information I have recorded on the labels to help me write my journal entry for the day.

In my teaching journal, I divide my paper in half vertically into two columns, then I write my journal entries in the left-hand column. Later, I go back to read over my journal entries, then write my reflections, or my “cooked” notes (Hubbard & Power, 2003) in the right-hand column. These cooked notes represent a first cut through the notes and allow categories and themes to emerge (Hubbard & Power, 2003).

In order to further analyze my anecdotal class observation notes and my teaching journal, I made a list of the initial categories and themes that emerged. I then wrote additional notes in which I reflected on what I noticed from the initial categories and themes. This process helped me to begin to index (Hubbard & Power, 2003) recurring themes that were germane to Study 1, such as the students’ appropriation of the terms related to visible author after class discussion, or the instances where the students noticed examples of author bias. Based on my index, I was able to assign codes that helped me to organize my data.

**Studying Classroom Instruction**

During Phase 2 (instruction phase), classroom instruction was videotaped. The videotapes were transcribed in order to allow for analysis. The transcripts provided information in regard to teaching and learning within the context of the instructional unit about visible author.

In order to analyze the transcripts of classroom instruction, I again used a two-column method to record the data, similar to the method described above for how I
organized my teaching journal. The transcripts were typed in the left-hand column, and the right-hand column was used for reflection and coding purposes. I coded the transcripts according to the students’ comments regarding visible author, such as when the students identified an author’s purpose for making himself or herself more visible. This allowed me to see patterns relative to students’ perceptions of a visible author. In addition, I coded the transcripts according to Nystrand’s (1997) analysis of classroom discussion, looking for evidence of authentic questions, uptake, and high-quality teacher evaluation.

During Phase 3 (application phase), double-entry diaries, or DEDs, (Tovani, 2000) were collected from pairs of students. The students used these DEDs to record evidence of a visible author in history texts in one column. In the other column, the students analyzed the author’s purpose in including the rhetorical devices or metadiscourse that made the author visible. The DEDs helped me to gather information about the students’ understandings of metadiscourse and visible authors.

Measuring Text Comprehension

In order to collect information about the students’ comprehension and recall of history texts with visible and anonymous authors, the students wrote retellings and answered comprehension questions after reading the texts. The written retellings were scored according to two measures: key word score and overall gist score.

In order to determine the key words and the gist for the passages for the purposes of scoring, I worked with a social studies teacher in my district who has taught sixth-grade social studies for 10 years and who was familiar with the textbook from which I selected the text for the students to read, as well as familiar with the
content of the text. This teacher also holds National Board Certification in Early Adolescence Social Studies/History. After reading both passages, she helped me to determine the key words and to identify the overall gist. Because both texts contained the same factual information, we developed one retelling rubric for both texts.

For the key word score, we assigned point values (from 1 to 3 points) to the key words and phrases, based on the level of importance to the overall content of the text. For example, the texts were about the rise of an ancient East African civilization based on its ability to develop strong trade. The word “trade” was assigned 3 points, while the word “Ethiopia” was assigned 1 point. The highest key word score a student could earn was 68 points. Students’ written retellings were scored according to how many of the key words they included in their retellings and according to the point values assigned to each of the key words.

For the gist score, retellings were scored from 1 to 4, based on how close their retellings were judged to capture the overall essence of the text. For instance, a score of 4 points was assigned when a student demonstrated a superior understanding of the gist of the text, while a score of 1 point indicated that a student demonstrated very little understanding of the gist of the text.

In order to score the students’ retellings, I worked with another language arts teacher in my building. She has been teaching for eight years, and she holds National Board Certification in Early Adolescence English/Language Arts. We worked through the retellings from one of my classes that I had decided not to include in the data analysis for my study. We practiced scoring 20 retellings, discussing how and
why we each assigned points to each particular retelling. After our training session with the 20 practice retellings, we each individually scored the retellings from my third period language arts class, both for key word and for gist. For the key word scores, because there was such a wide range of possible scores, student scores within two points of each other were considered to be similar. Retellings for which we differed by more than two points were considered to be scored differently. Based on this criterion, our inter-rater reliability for the key word scores was 82%, while our inter-rater reliability for gist was 88%. The retelling prompt and scoring rubric can be found in Appendix D.

The students answered six open-ended comprehension questions after writing their retellings. Two of the questions were worth 1 point each, and four questions were worth 2 points each. Student responses were scored for correctness.

Additionally, the students answered survey questions about the texts in order to provide information about their perceptions of text comprehensibility and author credibility for each type of text. This information was collected during Phase 3 (application phase) as the students practiced applying their knowledge of visible author, and again during Phase 4 (evaluation phase) as the students demonstrated what they had learned.

At the end of Study 1, the students answered closing questions that asked them to compare and contrast a text with a visible author and a text with an anonymous author. This information was collected during Phase 4 (evaluation phase) in order to provide insight into student learning in regard to the concept of visible author.
Finally, think-aloud protocols and interviews were conducted with four case study students. These think-aloud protocols and interviews were audiotaped and transcribed to allow for analysis. These data were intended to provide detailed information in regard to how instruction influenced the students’ understandings of metadiscourse and the concept of visible author. This information was also used to examine how the students made judgments in regard to comprehensibility and author credibility for history texts with visible authors and anonymous authors, prior to, during, and following instruction. I looked for evidence that indicated the ways in which instruction influenced the students’ understandings of metadiscourse. I also looked for evidence that indicated how instruction impacted the students’ judgments of the comprehensibility and credibility of history texts with visible authors and anonymous authors.

In order to analyze the think-alouds, I again used a two-column method in which the transcripts of the case study sessions were typed in the left-hand column, and the right-hand column was used for reflection. This allowed me to see patterns and themes that emerged and to create codes that helped me to organize the students’ comments about the texts.

Presentation of Findings

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine how sixth-grade students come to understand authorship in history texts and learn to use this knowledge to read and understand history texts. In this section, research questions are addressed
individually, with a detailed description of the data that support the findings related to each question.

**Research question 1: What are sixth-grade students’ prior understandings of authorship as indicated by class discussion?**

As the students and I began the unit about visible author, we engaged in a whole-class discussion about authorship that was video-recorded. This discussion lasted for about 25 minutes, which is approximately half of a class period. In order to answer my first research question, I analyzed transcripts of the videotapes of classroom instruction and discussions from the beginning of our unit of instruction. I discussed the concept of author’s voice with the students in order to determine their levels of background knowledge about authorship and to establish common language regarding the notion of authorship with the students.

*Class Discussion as a Window onto Prior Understanding of Author’s Voice*

I began the discussion by asking the students if they had ever heard of the term “author’s voice.” Many of the students indicated that they were familiar with the term. I then asked the students to tell me what they knew about author’s voice, or to explain how they would define the term. The students were directed to make comments without raising their hands so that I could take notes, and so they would not have to wait for me to call on them. As the students contributed to the lively discussion, I made a list of what they said, recording all of their definitions and comments on a large piece of chart paper, on which I wrote at the top, “What is author’s voice?” Often times, the students would piggyback or elaborate on, or even clarify, the comments of another student. For example, after one student stated that
The student's voice is “what the author thinks in words,” another student attempted to
clarify by following up with the comment that author’s voice is “the author’s thoughts
on paper.” The following transcript excerpt from the videotaped classroom
discussion illustrates this example:

T: What is author’s voice?

S6: We guessed that it might be the author’s point of view on the book.

S7: What he thinks of the story that he wrote. And the moral of the book. Like the
lesson.

S17: The author’s comments about a book.

S6: The moral of the story or the message.

S17: What the author thinks in words.

T: What the author thinks in words. Can you explain that a little bit more?

S17: Like, he talks about what he thinks.

T: OK. So are you saying that every time the author writes, the author is writing
about what he or she thinks? They’re just putting it into words?

S11: It’s the author’s thoughts on paper.

Some of the students contributed a definition at the beginning of the discussion, then
later elaborated on their original definition or changed their definition. For this
reason, there were more definitions on our class chart than there were students in the
class. One student started with this definition:
S3: And then also depending on what the main character said and how they say it might tell you what the author’s voice sounds like.

T: So you’re saying that the characters can give you a clue about the author’s voice?

S3: Yeah.

T: You mean the way it sounds when you hear it?

S3: Yeah.

Later, the student (S3) said:

S3: What the main characters say and how they say it tells you what the author’s voice might sound like. Not really sounds like, but like the person…their personality, I guess.

T: So now you’re changing from what their voice actually sounds like to …

S16: Like about what the author…

S3: It tells you how the author’s personality is.

We did not discuss the merits of each of the definitions put forth by the students. We simply brainstormed all of the definitions we could think of and put them on our list. At times, I asked questions to clarify student responses. For example, one student said that author’s voice was “the voice on what’s going on around the world and what the author is doing about it.” I asked the student what he meant by “what is going on around the world.” He replied, “Like the tsunami and world hunger.” When I asked the student if he were referring to social issues, he explained that he was thinking about a current events article we had just read, which
was written by a man who had traveled to Sumatra in Indonesia to help with rescue
and recovery efforts after the 2004 tsunami disaster:

S13: We thought it [author’s voice] was the author’s message in a book.
S4: Or a voice on what’s going on, like what going on around the world and what
they’re doing to help it.
T: Go back to the part where you said “the voice on what is going on around the
world.” What do you mean by that?
S4: Like what they’re doing about it.
T: What who is doing about it?
S4: The author.
T: OK. Can you give me an example?
S4: Like they’re helping with the tsunami relief effort or world hunger.
T: So you’re talking about social issues, like problems in the world?
S4: Yeah. Like in the article [we read in class].

Although many of the sixth graders were familiar with the term “author’s
voice,” there were many different definitions and conceptualizations that were offered
during our class discussion. During the discussion, the students did not argue against
or refute one another’s comments. Instead, they tended to accept the various
deinitions of author’s voice that their peers offered. In fact, they sometimes built on
one another’s statements, as illustrated in the first example above.
The students in this sixth-grade language arts class were familiar with the concept of author’s voice, but there did not seem to be agreement as to how the concept should be defined. To examine my impression more systematically, I did a content analysis of the discussion. The students demonstrated a range of ideas regarding author’s voice and what it might mean. In all, our whole-class discussion generated 28 different definitions for author’s voice. From these varied definitions, five general categories emerged: (1) Author’s Point of View, (2) Author’s Thoughts/Opinions, (3) Style of Writing, (4) Author’s Message, and (5) Moral of the Story. Three definitions could not easily be categorized, and were thus labeled “Miscellaneous statements” (see Table 3.10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage of total definition statements for author’s voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author’s point of view</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s thoughts/opinions</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of writing</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s message</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral of story</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous statements</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10: Sixth graders’ definitions of author’s voice.

Two categories, Author’s Point of View and Author’s Thoughts/Opinions, contained most of the student definitions contributed to the class discussion. Of the 28 definitions of author’s voice offered by the sixth graders, 21% (6 out of 28) were related to the author’s point of view or perspective. For example, the students stated...
that author’s voice is “The author’s point of view on the book,” or “The author’s perspective on a situation.” Another 21% (6 of 28) of the definitions were related to the author’s thoughts and opinions. Statements in this category included definitions such as “What the author thinks in words,” and “The author’s opinion.”

Two other categories, Style of Writing and Author’s Message, contained a relatively large number of definitions. Each of these two categories was made up of 18% (5 out of 28) of the total definition statements. For the Style of Writing category, the students contributed definitions such as “The author’s way of telling something about the story,” and “A personal touch.” In the Author’s Message category, definitions included statements such as “The message that the author is trying to get through,” and “The author is trying to tell you something.”

The final category, Moral of the Story, comprised 11% (3 out of 28) of the total definitions. In this category, student definitions included statements such as “The author’s lesson,” or “The moral in the story.”

Three definitions did not fit into any of the above-mentioned categories. These statements included a comment on the author as a person: “Depending on what characters say and how they say it, you get clues about what the author’s personality is like.” Another definition related author’s voice to the significance of the text: “When the author writes a strong piece, the important part defines the book.” One student defined author’s voice as a construct that is not limited to the pages of a book, but has implications for social action: “The voice on what’s going on around the world and what the author is doing about it.”
Although the sixth graders demonstrated some understanding of the concept of author’s voice, they defined the term in a number of different ways. However, the majority of the students indicated that author’s voice was in some way an attempt by the author to communicate to the reader, whether that attempt was through the author’s point of view, the author’s thoughts and opinions, or the author’s message within the text. This is similar to Shanahan’s (1998) finding that seventh graders have some awareness that an author is trying to communicate with readers. But the results of the content analysis of the discussion indicate that the sixth graders were capable of understanding the dialogic nature of text, especially when authorship is overt. Accordingly, though a year younger than Shanahan’s students, the sixth graders in Study 1 understood that a text with a visible author represents at least two voices.

The sixth graders in Study 1 had many different perspectives on authorship. In other words, as a group, the students demonstrated an awareness of authorship as a complex, multi-faceted concept that could be understood in many different ways.

**Research question 2: How does classroom instruction support student learning in regard to identifying visible authors in texts?**

During the instruction phase (Phase 2), we defined and investigated the concept of visible author. This was followed by an application phase (Phase 3) during which the students were asked to work in pairs to read an expository text (“Beginning of White Rule”), which I had rewritten to include a visible author. After reading the text, the students were asked to identify the textual evidence or metadiscourse that revealed a visible author and to describe how the metadiscourse
functioned in the text. The students highlighted the metadiscourse in the text, then recorded it in the left column of a double-entry diary, or DED. They listed the function of the metadiscourse in the right column of the double-entry diary.

Since the concept of author’s voice and the DED task were unfamiliar, I asked the students to work in pairs to allow them to work collaboratively. Because we had an odd number of students in this class, three of the students worked in a group together, instead of working in a paired arrangement. This meant that we had seven pairs of students and one group of three working together on this task. The students were given the freedom to select their partners.

Most of the students (five out of the seven pairs, along with the group of three) were able to identify all or most of the metadiscourse included in the text (see Table 3.11). In other words, 76% of the students in the class had success with this task. Specifically, these students correctly identified at least 73% (11 out of 15) of the rhetorical devices in the text that made the author more visible. These rhetorical devices were of the type that we had discussed in our previous class sessions: writing in first person, addressing the reader, and using attitudinal metadiscourse. For example, “I find this shocking…”; “But did you know…”; and “More important…” are all rhetorical devices that serve to make the author more visible in the text.

Table 3.11 lists the rhetorical devices included in the text, “Beginning of White Rule” (World Studies: Africa, Prentice Hall, 2005). These rhetorical devices were intended to make the author more visible. In addition, the number of students, along with the corresponding percentage of students, who accurately identified each rhetorical device is presented.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical device impacting author visibility</th>
<th>Quote from text</th>
<th>Number (percentage) of students who accurately identified rhetorical device</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing in first person (self-disclosure)</td>
<td>“We know”</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I find this shocking”</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing reader</td>
<td>“did you know”</td>
<td>16 (94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“as you might have predicted”</td>
<td>13 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“you might have guessed”</td>
<td>10 (59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using attitudinal metadiscourse</td>
<td>“sadly”</td>
<td>14 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“more important”</td>
<td>14 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“desperately”</td>
<td>12 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“without a doubt”</td>
<td>12 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“unfairly”</td>
<td>12 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“greedily”</td>
<td>11 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“bitterly”</td>
<td>11 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“of course”</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“best”</td>
<td>6 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“forced”</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued

Table 3.11: Students identification rates of rhetorical devices impacting author visibility.
Five students went on to identify several additional rhetorical devices (in other words, rhetorical devices that I had not identified as contributing to the visibility of the author) in the text and provided support for how they helped to make the author more visible. These students included on their DED extra rhetorical devices such as “white-led,” “only,” and the punctuation (in one case an exclamation point; in another a question mark) at the end of a sentence. These students argued that the author’s inclusion of these rhetorical devices indicated that he or she was attempting to emphasize certain points in the text or to engage the reader.

The students who were not considered successful in this task recorded relatively few rhetorical devices on their DEDs. One pair identified only 40% (6 out of 15) of the rhetorical devices in the text, while the other pair identified only 27% (4 out of 15) of the rhetorical devices.

The author seemed to be most visible to the sixth graders when using first-person pronouns. On only two occasions, all 17 of the students agreed on the rhetorical devices that made the author more visible. In these instances, all of the students were able to identify a visible author based on the presence of first-person pronouns.

Table 3.11 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional rhetorical devices identified</th>
<th>“white-led”</th>
<th>2 (12%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“only”</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pronouns. The opening sentence of the text began with “We know….” All 17 of the students in the class indicated that this was textual evidence of a visible author. Likewise, later in the text, all 17 students were able to identify a visible author based on the phrase, “I find this shocking…."

The sixth graders also had some success in identifying a visible author when the author addressed the reader. Most of the students (94%, or 16 out of 17) noted the phrase “But did you know….,” as an instance of visible author. However, in other examples where the author addressed the reader, the students were less successful. For example, 76% (13 out of 17) of the students identified “As you might have predicted…,” as textual evidence of a visible author, and even fewer (59%, or 10 out of 17 students) identified the phrase, “…you might have guessed…,” as evidence of a visible author.

When attitudinal metadiscourse was included in the text, the success rate again varied among the students. For some attitudinal metadiscourse, such as “sadly” or “more important,” 82% (14 out of 17) of the students were able to identify the rhetorical devices as indicating a visible author. In contrast, only 35% (6 out of 17 students) identified “best land,” and only 29% (5 out of 17 students) identified “forced” as textual evidence of a visible author.

This analysis indicates that the sixth graders were most successful in identifying a visible author when the rhetorical devices were clearly labeled or cued, such as first-person pronouns like “I” or “we.” When the author addressed the reader, the sixth graders still had a relatively high degree of success in identifying the visible author, possibly because they could look for the pronoun “you.” However, when the
rhetorical devices were less well-cued, such as “of course” or “best,” the sixth graders were less successful in identifying the visible author. This seems to indicate that the sixth graders have some awareness of the author, but their understanding may still be developing.

To illustrate, Shanahan (1998) investigated third-grade and seventh-grade students’ understandings of authorship in literature. All of these students were able to discuss aspects of authorship, but the nature of the students’ ideas indicated that the seventh graders were more sophisticated in their thinking. For example, when asked why the author would write a particular story, the seventh graders referred to the author’s thematic message, whereas the third graders indicated that an author writes in order to elicit responses from readers, for example, to write something that children will like to read. The third graders did not refer to themes or messages that the author might be trying to convey. So while the third graders demonstrated some awareness of authorship, the seventh graders’ awareness of authorship was at a deeper level of understanding.

As Shanahan (1998) pointed out, “…children do think about authors, and …the ways they do this thinking seem to change over time” (p. 107). Even after instruction, my sixth graders may need a little more time in order to develop the understanding that an author is revealed by a number of rhetorical devices, including those that are less well-cued, such as “of course” and “best.”

The sixth-grade students in Study 1 were also successful in describing the function of the metadiscourse, by drawing conclusions such as: “The author is addressing the reader, because he’s asking if you knew this before.” My analysis of
the content of their DEDs indicated that students made a total of 225 comments about
the function or the purpose of the metadiscourse in the text. These comments tended
to fall into thirteen general categories. Table 3.12 presents categories of the functions
or purposes of the metadiscourse in the rewritten text “Beginning of White Rule”
(*World Studies: Africa*, Prentice Hall, 2005), as indicated by the students. The
frequencies and percentages of the total for statements in each category are also
listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function/purpose of metadiscourse</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
<th>Percentage of total statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Expressing opinions/sharing thoughts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Addressing the reader</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Making assumptions about the reader’s knowledge</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Persuading the reader</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Choosing high-impact words</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Engaging/including the reader</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Revealing feelings</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Displaying bias</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Emphasizing important facts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Making hedges about factual details</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued

Table 3.12: Student identified functions/purposes of metadiscourse in text.
The comments that the students made about the purpose or the function of the metadiscourse most often fell under the first and second categories listed above. More specifically, 44% (99 of 225) of the student comments related to the author’s opinions or thoughts, and fell into the category of Expressing Opinions/Sharing Thoughts. Comments in this category included statements such as, “This shows the author’s opinion,” and “The author’s trying to express that he thinks the fighting was very bad.”

Another 18% (44 of 225) of all students comments related to the author’s attempts to talk to the reader, placing them in the Addressing the Reader category. For example, some students indicated that “The author is talking to the reader and saying that they know this,” while others made comments such as, “The author is trying to ask your prediction or opinion.”

The remaining eleven categories contained relatively few comments each, ranging from 7% of the total (or 16 out of 225 comments) for Making Assumptions About the Reader’s Knowledge, to less than 1% of the total (or 2 out of 225 comments) for Revealing the Author’s Tone of Voice.
Based on the above analysis, the sixth graders came to believe that the primary reason an author would make himself or herself more visible to readers is in order to express opinions or share thoughts. Nearly half of the comments made by the students (44%) indicated that the visible author was attempting to let readers know what he or she thought about the topic. This finding is similar to that of Shanahan (1998), whose seventh-grade students “showed some awareness that the author was trying to communicate with readers” (p. 104).

The students’ success with the double-entry diaries indicates that, through direct instruction, most of the sixth graders gained an understanding of the concept of visible author and learned how to identify the metadiscourse or rhetorical devices that make authors more visible. Students were able to draw reasonable conclusions about the author’s purposes for including the metadiscourse in the text.

**Research question 3: How do visible authors and anonymous authors affect students’ comprehension and recall of history texts?**

In order to investigate this question, the students read two texts about ancient East Africa, “Aksum.” Both texts contained the same factual information, but one text had an anonymous author, and the other text had a visible author. After reading the two texts, the students wrote retellings and answered comprehension questions. Retellings were scored according to a rubric for key words and for gist. In comparing the two types of texts, the students demonstrated slightly higher key word scores on the anonymous author text (M = 20.0, SD = 9.0) than on the visible author text (M = 19.0, SD = 13.0). The students’ gist scores were also slightly higher for the
anonymous author text (M = 2.0, SD = 1.0) than for the visible author text (M = 2.0, SD = 1.0).

Table 3.13 summarizes the means and standard deviations for the retelling scores, including key word score and gist score, for both the anonymous author text and the visible author text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of text</th>
<th>M (S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retelling scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous author</td>
<td>Visible author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key word</td>
<td>20.0 (9.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gist</td>
<td>2.0 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.13: Mean retelling scores and standard deviations for texts with anonymous and visible authors.

From these retelling scores, it appears that the students demonstrated slightly better recall of the text when the author was anonymous. With an anonymous author, the students were able to include slightly more key words in their retellings and to retell the overall text with slightly more cohesiveness, as indicated by the gist scores.

Comprehension questions were scored based on the number of open-ended comprehension questions answered correctly out of 10. Once again, the students scored only slightly higher when reading the anonymous author (M = 7.2, SD = 1.9), as compared to the visible author (M = 7.1, SD = 1.7). Table 3.14 summarizes the
mean comprehension scores for both types of text, anonymous author (Text AA) and visible author (Text VA).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of text</th>
<th>M (S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous author</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Text AA)</td>
<td>Comprehension score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible author</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Text VA)</td>
<td>Comprehension score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.14: Mean comprehension scores and standard deviations for texts with anonymous and visible authors.

Similar to the results with the retelling scores, the students seemed to comprehend the text only slightly better when reading a text with an anonymous author, as compared to reading a text with a visible author. I wondered if this outcome had anything to do with the fact that school texts are typically written so that students can read and retain the information they contain, while students tend to learn early on that the preferred approach to school texts is to read and remember (Wineburg, 2001). Could it be possible that the students were ignoring the rhetorical devices in the visible author text in order to glean the factual information from the text? Was the anonymous author text slightly easier to understand because it did not contain the overt rhetorical devices that were intended to make the author more visible?

Since the means for the retelling scores and the comprehension scores appeared to be slightly different, I conducted t tests for key word scores, gist scores, and comprehension scores. For the key word scores, t(16) = ± 0.29, p < .05, two-
tailed. For the gist scores, $t(16) = +0.64$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. For the comprehension scores, $t(16) = +0.16$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Although there appeared to be slight differences in the retelling and comprehension scores between the visible author text and the anonymous author text, none of the measures reached statistical significance. The statistical analyses were used as a means of “buttressing the qualitative data” (Paxton, 1995, p. 246), and my suspicions were confirmed. In terms of recall and comprehension, there was no statistically significant difference between the visible author text and the anonymous author text.

At first glance, these results surprised me. Since the sixth graders spent multiple class sessions investigating visible authors, practicing how to identify a visible author in a text, and discussing how and why an author would choose to make himself or herself more visible to readers, I had thought that the students would demonstrate better recall and comprehension for the text with the visible author. This assumption was based on Nolen’s (1995) research with female college students and Paxton’s (1997) work with high school students. In both of these studies, readers demonstrated greater engagement when reading texts with visible authors. More specifically, Paxton (1997) concluded that the high school students were more likely to engage in constructing higher-level historical understandings and critically assess what they had read when a visible author was present. I assumed that my middle school students would also demonstrate greater engagement and higher-level reading behaviors, leading to increased comprehension and recall, when confronted with a visible author. However, I had not taken into account the students’ individual
perspectives on visible author. This issue is addressed in regard to the final research question.

Research question 4: What conclusions do students draw in regard to texts with visible authors versus texts with anonymous authors?

During Phase 4, at the end of our instructional unit, I administered a survey to the students that asked them to evaluate and to compare and contrast the two history texts, one with an anonymous author (labeled “Text AA” for students use) and one with a visible author (labeled “Text VA”). The students noted differences between the two texts, for example, stating that “Text VA [visible author] is longer than Text AA [anonymous author],” or “Their [sic] the same except some words are different.” Many students (11 out of 17) stated that they preferred reading the visible author text (Text VA) over the anonymous author text (Text AA) because it was more interesting and easier to understand.

Only three of the students out of a class of 17 used the terms “visible author” or “author’s voice” when comparing and contrasting the two texts. For instance, one student noted, “In Text VA [visible author] it showed more of a visible author. Text AA [anonymous author] didn’t show any evidence.” Another student stated, “Text AA [anonymous author] was all about facts and made me bored. Text VA [visible author] was still mostly facts but with an author’s voice, it made me more interested.”

A third student’s comment gave me some insight into the students’ thinking and conclusions about visible author: “Text VA [visible author] had more visible author than Text AA [anonymous author]. Text AA [anonymous author] is more believable because it doesn’t look like it has much opinion.” This student concluded
that when a text has a visible author, the veracity of the text is called into question. Because a visible author reveals feelings, opinions, thoughts, and beliefs, the student concluded that the text is not factual. In fact, it appeared that many of the students came to the same conclusion: When I asked the students to evaluate which text they could trust to be more accurate, most students (8 out of 15; 2 students did not respond to this question) indicated the anonymous author text (Text AA) as the more accurate text. Student explanations included, “Text AA [is more accurate] because in Text VA there was a visible author and he seemed a lot more unsure about things.” Another student noted, “Text AA [is more accurate] because no author voice and more factual words.” A third student stated, “I trust Text AA [anonymous author] the most because it doesn’t have any bias or opinion.”

That last student statement really caught my attention. It seemed that my instruction about visible author had an unintended effect on the sixth graders. They came to believe that if an author is visible and reveals bias, the facts in the text must not be accurate or trustworthy. Many students in my class learned that if a text does not have explicit biases, it must be accurate and trustworthy. Unfortunately, texts always contain biases and subtexts, even if they are hidden. In fact, many history texts contain hidden biases and subtexts (Wineburg, 1991). My students had learned to identify bias in history texts, but only if the biases were explicitly revealed by the author.

Learning from Study 1: A Need to Probe Further

The purpose of my original study (Study 1) was to examine the influence of my instruction on my sixth-grade students’ understanding of two different authors’
voices in history texts and to investigate differences in recall and comprehension after
the students had read history texts with visible and anonymous authors. I analyzed
transcripts of classroom discussions for two purposes: first to assess the students’
understandings of authorship and then to explore how instruction regarding
metadiscoursal cues related to authorship may foster understanding of author’s voice.
To evaluate student learning, I took measures of recall and comprehension. These
measures, which included retellings and answers to open-ended comprehension
questions, showed only slight differences between the two types of history texts
(visible author versus anonymous author).

However, in their answers to survey questions, the sixth graders indicated a
preference for texts authored by a visible author: Most of my students stated that the
visible author text was easier to understand and more interesting to read, and so they
would rather read a text with a visible author than a text with an anonymous author.
Similarly, most students in Nolen’s (1995) and Paxton’s (1997) studies also showed a
preference for visible authors. The college students and high school students that
Nolen (1995) and Paxton (1997) worked with preferred the visible author text over
the anonymous author text, as evidenced by their increased levels of self-efficacy,
engagement, and critical reading. From Study 1, it appears that my students at the
middle school level demonstrated a similar preference for visible author text versus
anonymous author text, due to their perception of increased ease of understanding of
the text with a visible author.

Nevertheless, when asked about the credibility of the texts, most of my sixth-
grade students claimed that the anonymous author text was more trustworthy. In
other words, the sixth graders were more likely to believe that the text with the anonymous author was factual and accurate. To illustrate, one of the case study students said that the anonymous author text was “Informative and factual. Maybe a little boring.” When I asked him what made it boring, he said, “It’s all like facts. There’s no like enthusiasm or opinion. But this makes it more like, believable.”

The high-school students in Paxton’s (1997) study indicated similar biases toward the two types of texts. Although they expressed preferences for reading the visible author text, they were reluctant to completely accept the legitimacy of such authorship for the academic discipline of history. Instead, the students viewed the anonymous author text as a more legitimate way to write and think about history as a field of study. In fact, one student went so far as to say that the anonymous author text represented the way “you’re supposed to write” about history (Paxton, 1997, p. 247).

Probing a bit further during interviews with the case study students, I found that they developed perceptions of the authors based on author visibility. For instance, one less successful reader said that the anonymous author text was “…just saying stuff. It’s not helping me understand. It just wants me to learn some stuff, but it just doesn’t help me learn. It’s not helping me try to understand, like this one [visible author text] is.” With another student, a more successful reader, I referred to the anonymous author text and asked, “Do you visualize an author behind the text?” The student responded that he visualized a man in his 40s. I asked what kind of person the author was, and if he would care about his readers. The student said, “He probably wants to give you the information. He doesn’t care much about you, but he
cares that you have to learn the facts about it.” The case study students saw the anonymous author as socially distant, only interested in stating facts. In contrast, students perceived a closer social relationship with the visible author, concluding that the visible author cared about them as learners and wanted to help them learn.

I came to understand that in teaching my students about authorship in history texts, I needed to account for the students’ knowledge of authors and of historical narrative as an interpretive tool to read and understand history (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994). I also came to understand that this type of historical reading and thinking is more complex than I had anticipated. In retrospect, the measures of recall and comprehension I had selected were too limiting to illuminate the kind of understanding I was trying to foster among my students. My measures had asked for literal comprehension, and my students obliged. But I was interested in the students’ interpretations of history texts and how authorship affects those interpretations, so a second study (Study 2) became necessary.

In Chapter 4, I present Study 2, in which I explored a more in-depth understanding of how authorship impacts students’ perceptions of authors of narrative history texts and the development of deeper historical understanding. Study 2 demonstrates that students’ own historical narratives mediate how they interpret new historical narratives, that is, their previous experience with historical narrative functions as a pre-text for understanding their historical interpretations (Wertsch, 2002). Study 2 also provided me with opportunities to compare sixth graders and eighth graders in order to examine changes over time (Shanahan, 1998), including
possible effects of U. S. history curriculum on students’ understandings of authorship in narrative history texts.
CHAPTER 4

STUDY 2: THE EFFECTS OF AUTHOR’S VOICE ON INTERPRETING HISTORY

In Study 1, my goal was to investigate how my sixth graders’ notions of authorship shape their comprehensions of history texts told by a visible author as compared to an anonymous author. Specifically, I was curious to know how the sixth graders learned to identify a visible author in a history text, and how the students’ knowledge of a visible author influenced reading comprehension. In addition, Study 1 provided me with an opportunity to examine my own practice, focusing on what I do in my classroom to support and improve teaching and learning of history texts.

From Study 1, I realized that my sixth graders learned to consider specific linguistic features of a history text in order to identify the rhetorical devices, or metadiscourse, that made an author more visible (Crismore, 1984). The sixth graders also learned to analyze the function of the metadiscourse, or the author’s purpose for including the metadiscourse. In other words, the sixth graders were able to identify the author and to state what the author was trying to do, such as engage the reader or emphasize a point in the text. When compared to understanding anonymously authored history text, however, the sixth graders’ understandings of visible author did
not appear to have a significant impact on their reading comprehension, specifically when written retellings and response to open-ended comprehension questions were employed as measures.

I decided that the students and I would need to go beneath the surface features of the text (such as the rhetorical devices and metadiscourse that serve to make the author more visible) if I expected them to be able to use their knowledge of authorship as a tool for interpreting history. The sixth graders were successful at identifying the textual evidence that indicated a visible author, but their interpretations of such authors served to make them suspicious of and, at times, to deny, the author’s credibility. For example, the sixth-grade students did not engage in a dialogue with a visible author, as I thought they would do. However, the sixth graders appeared to read the visible author text with a critical lens. In fact, most of the students took the stance that a text with a visible author could not be trusted due to author bias, while a text with an anonymous author is free of bias, and therefore must contain credible factual information. Although the students read the visible author text more critically, they tended to accept the anonymous author text, which is the typical style of writing in most textbooks, as simply stating fact beyond question. This stance may be explained by the fact that most students tend to learn history from textbooks, in which the metadiscourse that indicates judgment, emphasis, and uncertainty is usually removed (Crismore, 1984; Wineburg, 2001). Thus students learn to equate the study of history with the acquisition of facts and come to rely on the textbook-style of historical writing to provide the facts, while they also learn to
develop mistrust for academic historical writing, which often “convey[s] the uncertainty of historical knowledge” (Wineburg, 2001, pp. 47-48).

As I came to understand the complexity of authorship in history texts and how it influences readers, I realized that I would need to investigate further. Paxton’s (1997, 1999) research that examines how students respond to authentic historical writing suggested another path. In order to further understand how authorship affects students’ interpretations of history texts, I decided to do a second study (Study 2) to examine how authors’ voices influence students’ interpretations of historical narratives. I also examined how students’ prior understanding of a specific episode in American history (the discovery of America) shaped their understandings of written narrative with differing accounts and differing first-person narrators.

In addition, because I wondered what the effects of instruction and maturation might be on these interpretations, I compared one group of sixth graders and one group of eighth graders. I also wanted to make sure that the students involved in the study all had some background knowledge about the same historical topic. In the state in which my school is located, students are expected to study American history in the fifth grade and in the eighth grade (Ohio Department of Education, 2003b). By choosing students from the sixth grade and eighth grade, I felt confident that most of the students in Study 2 would have some general familiarity with the story of the discovery of America, at least in terms of how it is typically presented in social studies textbooks. This assumption of common background knowledge allowed me to select a topic (the discovery of America) that most of the students were familiar with and to design all the research-related tasks around that topic. Moreover, since
Shanahan’s (1998) research indicated that students’ awareness of authors of literature changes over time, I was curious to see if the eighth-grade students’ perceptions of authorship in history texts would reflect differences when compared to the sixth-grade students’ perceptions.

Accordingly, the purpose of Study 2 was to examine how author’s voice, as well as students’ prior understanding of a specific historical narrative, influence middle school students’ (sixth and eighth graders) interpretation of history texts, and the development of deeper historical understandings. Put another way, the purpose of Study 2 was to consider how students understood historical texts that are more similar to the types of texts professional historians read, in contrast to authoritative textbook discourse. While I had focused on expository texts in Study 1, I learned that narrative is more authentic to the study of history, as Paxton (1999) pointed out that narrative is “the written discourse of practicing historians” (p. 320). What I ultimately learned from Study 2 is that the historical narratives that middle school students have mastered from history textbooks and other sources serve to mediate how the students read, write about, discuss, and interpret history. Since most of the students I worked with reported learning history from textbooks and teachers, the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) of the official narratives dominated what these students have come to know as history.

In Study 2, sixth-grade and eighth-grade students were first asked to write their own historical narratives about the discovery of America as an indication of prior understanding. The students then read two texts about the discovery of America, as told from two different first-person perspectives. After reading each text,
the students wrote a retelling and completed a task called “Image of the Author” for each text. At the end of the study, the students answered questions in a survey, in which they expressed their perceptions of the differences between the two texts in terms of accuracy, complexity, and pedagogical appropriateness. Finally, eight students (four sixth graders and four eighth graders) were selected for detailed case studies of the process of understanding these two narratives. These eight case study students participated in one-on-one debriefing interviews with me after they had completed the reading, retelling, Image of the Author, and survey tasks with the rest of their peers.

Students’ Background Knowledge and Characteristics of the Instructional Setting

During the 2005-2006 school year when I conducted Study 2, I taught at the same building in which I had collected data for Study 1 in 2004-2005. This school is a suburban public middle school in a midwestern state. For the 2005-2006 school year, I was assigned to serve in an academic support position, and I did not have my own classroom on a daily basis. Fortunately, this position gave me the flexibility to work with students at different grade levels. I selected one class of sixth graders and one class of eighth graders for Study 2. It should be noted that the class of sixth graders in Study 2 is a completely different group of students than the sixth graders who were included in Study 1.

For Study 2, I looked for classes with characteristics similar to those of the class selected for Study 1. Specifically, the selected classes were comprised of about the same number of students and included students with a relatively wide range of abilities and needs. I chose an intact sixth-grade language arts class (Ms. G’s class)
and an intact eighth-grade social studies class (Mrs. M’s class). I selected students at two different grade levels in order to study the possible differences between the sixth-grade students and the eighth-grade students, including differences in the historical narratives for the discovery of America that they had mastered or appropriated, their own written historical narratives, their retellings, and their Image of the Author tasks.

Because I wanted to focus my research on middle school students, my choices of grade levels to work with were limited to sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. Nevertheless, I wanted to see what differences might emerge between groups of students at different grade levels. Shanahan (1998) determined that students’ understandings of authorship in narrative texts change over time. Accordingly, I elected to include sixth graders and eighth graders in Study 2 in order to investigate how students’ understandings of authorship in history texts might change over time.

I chose sixth grade and eighth grade because I wanted to try to ensure that students had background knowledge in regard to the discovery of America, as it is typically taught. In our state, adopted social studies academic content standards dictate that students in grades 3-5 should be able to explain why European countries explored and colonized North America (Ohio Department of Education, 2003b). In our district, fifth grade students specifically study Christopher Columbus’s voyage. State social studies academic standards also indicate that students in grade 6-8 should be able to describe the political, religious, and economic aspects of North American colonization, including reasons for colonization, such as religion, desire for land, and economic opportunity (Ohio Department of Education, 2003b). In our district, students in eighth grade social studies classes study American history from the pre-
Columbian era through Reconstruction, including, once again, a study of Christopher Columbus’s voyage. Thus all of the students in Study 2 should have been exposed, on at least one occasion (during fifth grade), if not on two occasions (during fifth grade and again in eighth grade), to the historical account of the discovery of America, as it is typically portrayed in most social studies textbooks.

In addition, according to national history standards, students in grades 5-12 should be able to trace routes taken by early explorers, while students in grade 7-12 should be able to evaluate the significance of Columbus’s voyages and his interactions with indigenous peoples (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Therefore, since most of the students had had opportunities to build background knowledge related to Christopher Columbus, I assumed that the task of writing a historical narrative about the discovery of America was a task that the students would be able to perform. In addition, the products of this task provided a window onto both groups’ narrative understanding of the discovery of America.

In the sixth-grade language arts class, there were 20 students. Of these, ten students were females, and ten students were males. Fourteen students were Caucasian, of European descent. One male was African-American; one male was Middle Eastern; one male was Hispanic; and one male was Indian. One female was Chinese-American, and one female was Hispanic. Two students were excluded from the study for different reasons. Specifically, parental consent was not obtained for one student; the other student was frequently absent during data collection and did not finish all of the tasks. Full data sets were analyzed for 18 students in this class.
The sixth graders came to middle school with varying social studies experiences. Fifteen of the 18 participating sixth graders had attended three different elementary schools within our district, while the remaining three students had attended elementary schools outside the district. Most of the students reported learning about the discovery of America from their social studies textbooks, while some students indicated that their teachers has used supplemental materials, such as videos or movies, historical fiction, and even music.

The students in this class had taken the Terra Nova (2001) in fifth grade. The Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003), was administered to all of the students during the first month of school during the 2005-2006 school year. Table 4.1 summarizes the range of reading scores of the students in the sixth-grade language arts class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terra Nova national percentile ranking</th>
<th>DRA reading stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest score</td>
<td>Extending (grade 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest score</td>
<td>Extending middle school (grade 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Range of reading scores in Ms. G’s sixth-grade language arts class.

The eighth-grade social studies class was comprised of 22 students. Of these, 14 were females, and eight were males. Sixteen students in this class were Caucasian, of European descent. Two males were African-American, and two males
were bi-racial. One female was bi-racial, and one female was Hispanic. As with the sixth-grade class, two students were excluded from the study: one excluded student did not have parental consent to participate, while the other student’s absences prevented her from completing all the tasks. Full data sets were collected for 20 students in this class.

The students in the eighth-grade social studies class had taken the Terra Nova (2001) in seventh grade. The Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA (Beaver & Carter, 2003), was administered to all of the students during the first month of school during the 2005-2006 school year. Table 4.2 summarizes the range of reading scores of the students in the eighth-grade social studies class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terra Nova national percentile ranking</th>
<th>DRA reading stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest score</td>
<td>Advancing intermediate (grade 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest score</td>
<td>Independent middle school (grade 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Range of reading scores in Mrs. M’s eighth-grade social studies class.

I selected an intact social studies class so that I could be reasonably sure that most of the students in the eighth-grade class had received the same instruction in regard to Christopher Columbus prior to participating in Study 2. Before selecting the class, I interviewed the two eighth-grade social studies teachers in our building. I chose to include Mrs. M’s class because her interview answers indicated that she tries to teach students about the controversies surrounding the story of Columbus’s
discovery of America. I wanted the eighth-grade students to have been exposed to multiple perspectives of this historical event so that I could examine how this exposure might influence the students’ historical narratives and retellings about the discovery of America.

Creating the Instructional Contexts for Data Collection

The instructional contexts were the same for both the sixth and eighth graders. For both groups of students, I led the classes during the data collection. The students’ regular classroom teachers remained in the classrooms with us, but they did not actively participate in the instruction. I asked the students to work quietly throughout the project so that other students could think and write. In the sixth-grade classroom, the students were seated at tables in groups of four. In the eighth-grade classroom, the students were seated at tables in pairs. On the first day of data collection, the students wrote historical narratives. All students, in both sixth and eighth grade, completed their narratives by the end of the 66-minute class period. The students then had two days to read two texts, write a retelling for each text, and complete the Image of the Author task for each text.

Upon completion of these tasks, the students filled out a closing survey. Again, all of the students completed the tasks within the two-day time frame. Over the next several days, the case study students were excused from their language arts or social studies classes in order to participate in one-on-one debriefing interviews with me. The debriefing interviews were conducted in a classroom that was not being used at the time. In the middle of one interview, a case study student had to leave school early, resulting in the need to continue the interview on another day.
Otherwise, the case study interviews were each completed within one 66-minute class period. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

Instructional Materials

As with Study 1, many of the materials used in this project were designed and developed especially for this research. Again, I used a combination of self-developed and published materials in order to investigate the students’ understandings of authorship in history texts. I also adapted some materials that were used by other researchers in previous studies. For example, all materials were developed to study the topic of the discovery of America. The reason I selected this topic is because I was trying to ensure that most of the students, if not all, would have background knowledge related to the discovery of America, especially since it is a curricular focus in both fifth and eighth grade social studies in our district and state.

For Study 2, I had decided to work with one class of sixth graders and one class of eighth graders. I chose to work with sixth-grade and eighth-grade students because these two groups of students should have American history relatively fresh in their minds. More specifically, both of these groups of students should have studied Christopher Columbus in the recent past. The fifth-grade social studies curriculum focuses on American history, including the discovery of Columbus, so the sixth graders should have studied Columbus in the previous school year. Likewise, the eighth-grade social studies curriculum centers on American history, from the pre-Columbian era to the Reconstruction. This means that the eighth graders in my project should have studied Columbus once again in the fall of their eighth-grade year.
By focusing on sixth graders and eighth graders, I felt I could be relatively confident that most (if not all) of the students in my project had been at least exposed to the story of the discovery of America, as it is taught in most social studies textbooks, on at least one or more occasions. My assumption was that most students would be able to write historical narratives, however short, about the discovery of America and would have some frame of reference for understanding texts and tasks related to that topic.

**Historical Narratives**

The historical narrative task in Study 2 was adapted from Wertsch and O’Connor (1994), in which college students wrote narratives about the beginnings of this country. In Study 2, the middle school students were given a writing prompt and asked to write a narrative about the discovery of America. The following prompt was provided:

Write a story about the discovery of America. Be sure to include details about key events, the people, and the challenges they faced. Write your story on the lines below. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space.

The purpose of this task was to provide a window to the historical narratives about the discovery of America that the students had already mastered or appropriated. More specifically, by analyzing the characters, events, and themes that the students included in their historical narratives, I was able to get an understanding of the historical narratives that the students used as mediational tools as they constructed their own historical narratives (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994; Wertsch, 1998). To put it more simply, the historical narrative task was designed to allow me to see what
stories of an event in the past middle school students used in order to help them construct their own versions of that same event. Examples of student-constructed historical narratives are included in Appendix G.

_History Texts_

The students were asked to read two history texts. Both texts are narratives written in first person, but they represent very different perspectives on Columbus’s arrival in the West Indies. I thought it was important to use narrative texts because narrative is “the written discourse of practicing historians” (Paxton, 1999, p. 320). I decided to use narrative texts told in first person so that the authors’ voices would be relatively easy for the students to identify. In other words, I wanted to use texts that “make plain to readers that a particular human (or humans) has produced the words that appear on the page” (Paxton, 1999, p. 319). I was curious to see how the students would react to each of the voices, such as whether they would engage in a dialogue with the text, accept the text, or resist the text. I was also interested in how the different texts might impact the students’ written retellings and images of the authors.

One text, “The Great Navigator,” was written from the perspective of a member of Columbus’s crew and portrays Columbus as a hero. I wrote “The Great Navigator,” compiling the information from several web sites (Carroll, 1992; Keegan, 1991; StarRise Creations, 2003) and a fifth-grade textbook account from _Build Our Nation_ (Bednarz, Clinton, Hartoonian, Hernandez, Marshall, & Nickell, 2003). I chose to use this text because it represents the perspective portrayed by typical, official narratives about the discovery of America that are included in most textbooks.
This dominant narrative maintains that Columbus was a hero. In order to compile “The Great Navigator,” I first looked for common threads in the texts, related to characters, themes, and events (Wertsch, 1998), that were representative of the official narrative, such as “Columbus left from Spain with a crew of 90 men and a fleet of three ships” (StarRise Creations, 2003). I also looked for statements in each text that portrayed Columbus as a hero. For example, “…of all discoverers Christopher Columbus was the greatest…” (Carroll, 1992). I selected a narrator for the story, a member of the crew on one of Columbus’s ships, and organized the common threads and “hero” statements into a cohesive narrative. I also added attitudinal metadiscourse, such as “Columbus…had a brilliant idea,” when it seemed appropriate to the overall narrative.

The second text, “The Untold Story,” was written from the perspective of a Native Taino and portrays Columbus as a villain. This text was written by a high school student and taken verbatim from a publication called Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years (Thomas, 1998). I selected “The Untold Story” because, like “The Great Navigator,” it is also a narrative written from a first-person perspective. However, the perspective is very different from that of “The Great Navigator.” The characters (such as Columbus, crew, Natives) and many of the events (such as Columbus sailed with three ships, Columbus planted the flag) are the same in both texts, but the themes, or motivations, are different. In “The Great Navigator,” the themes relate to finding new lands. In contrast, the themes in “The Untold Story” are more sinister, including greed for gold that leads to violence and killing.
As Paxton (1999) indicates, “…writing about past times demands both creativity and imagination. The result is not the truth, but a truth; not ultimate history, but competing narratives of the past” (p. 319). In creating “The Great Navigator” and selecting “The Untold Story” for use in Study 2, I attempted to present the students with competing historical narratives in order to determine the influences of the texts on students’ historical understanding. These two texts are included in Appendix H.

Instruments

Students in the sixth-grade language arts class and in the eighth-grade social studies class were asked to complete the same tasks for Study 2. These tasks included (1) a written historical narrative, (2) a historical narrative survey, (3) written retellings for two history texts (“The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story”), (4) the Image of the Author task, (5) the closing survey, and for the case study students, (6) debriefing interviews. Table 4.3 provides a summary of data that were collected in Study 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written historical narratives</td>
<td>Written by students on the first day of the project.</td>
<td>To reveal the historical narratives that students have currently appropriated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical narrative survey</td>
<td>Completed by students after writing historical narratives.</td>
<td>To provide information about students’ self-identified sources for writing their own historical narratives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written retellings for “The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story”</td>
<td>Written by students after reading each text.</td>
<td>To reveal the appropriation of information and/or language from specific history texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image of the author task</td>
<td>Drawings and written explanations completed by students after reading each text.</td>
<td>To reveal students’ perceptions of authors, including their judgments regarding accuracy and credibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing survey</td>
<td>Completed by students on the last day of the project.</td>
<td>To provide information regarding students’ perceptions of differences between “The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing interviews, audiotaped and transcribed</td>
<td>Conducted with four case study students at the end of the project.</td>
<td>To provide detailed information in regard to how students perceive authors of history texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Summary of data for Study 2.

*Student-Constructed Historical Narratives*

The students were first asked to write their own historical narratives. This task was adapted from Wertsch and O’Connor (1994), who conducted a study in which

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they asked college students to write narratives about the origins of the United States. These researchers based much of their thinking on Bakhtin (1981), who believed that every utterance, whether spoken or written, involves the appropriation of a previous utterance and, simultaneously, the act of making the utterance one’s own. In other words, anything we say or write is based on an utterance that someone else has spoken or written, but we make it our own through our unique retelling.

After Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) asked college students to write historical narratives about the origins of the United States, they found that the students had mastered (but had not appropriated) essentially the same story about the origins of the U.S. in order to generate their own narratives. The narratives constructed by the students tended to include similar, if not the same, characters, events, and themes. These characters, events, and themes were often those that are found in the dominant narrative of the origin of the U.S. that is found in most history textbooks. Although most of the students demonstrated that they had mastered the dominant narrative, some of the students appropriated the account of the past by making the story their own and adding their own voices in a number of different ways and to varying degrees. Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) concluded that most students master the historical narratives they learn in school, but only a few appear to appropriate the historical narratives and to make them their own stories. Furthermore, students very rarely resist the authority of dominant, official narratives.

The sixth-grade and eighth-grade students in Study 2 were asked to write their own narratives about the discovery of America. This task was intended to allow me to examine the narratives about the discovery of America that the students may have
mastered or appropriated and which they carry with them as they read two narratives about the discovery of America. The following prompt was provided:

Write a story about the discovery of America. Be sure to include details about key events, the people, and the challenges they faced. Write your story on the lines below. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space.

*Historical Narrative Survey*

After writing their historical narratives, the students were asked to fill out a brief “historical narrative survey” in which they identified and rank ordered any sources that contributed to their historical narratives. This task was intended to reveal the students’ perceptions of the sources for their historical narratives, as well as to illuminate similarities and differences in patterns of response between and among the students.

*Written Retellings*

After reading two narratives about Columbus’s arrival in the New World, as told from opposing viewpoints, the students wrote retellings for each of the texts. The purpose of this task was to reveal if the students had appropriated any information or specific language from either of the two narratives. In addition, I looked for evidence of instances where students had entered into dialogic contact with either of the narratives, such as students’ own evaluative comments added to the retelling or the infusion of their own voices through first-person commentary.
Image of the Author

For the Image of the Author task, the students were asked to draw pictures of the author of each text. The students were also given a set of guiding questions to help them write a brief description of the type of person each author was perceived to be. This task, adapted from Paxton (1997), Shanahan (1998), and Wineburg (2001), was intended to reveal how the students perceived authors of texts with differing perspectives.

In Paxton’s (1997) study, he interviewed high school students after they read two history texts (one with a visible author and one with an anonymous author) and completed think-aloud protocols. During the interviews, Paxton asked each student to describe the author of each text. I adapted this approach because I wanted to investigate whether the middle school students in Study 2 would reveal the same types of author perceptions, including differences between the visible author and the anonymous author, as the high school students had demonstrated in Paxton’s (1997) study.

Shanahan (1998) interviewed third-grade and seventh-grade students in order to investigate their awareness of authors of literary texts. He then asked students to write about the authors. Although there was an indication that students’ awareness of author changes over time, Shanahan (1998) notes, “…none of these students questioned the validity of my questions. No child seemed to find the task to be unreasonable or even especially difficult…” (p. 103). Based on this study, I assumed that the Image of the Author task I had designed for Study 2 was a developmentally appropriate task for my middle school students.
Wineburg (2001) asked fifth-grade and eighth-grade students to draw pictures of historical figures. Whether boys or girls, most of the students tended to portray the historical figures in their drawings as male stereotypes. Wineburg (2001) concluded that elementary and middle school students tend to see the players in our nation’s history primarily as men, while women are often omitted from the stories of our past. I was curious to see if a similar pattern would emerge: Would the middle school students in Study 2 tend to see the authors of history primarily as men?

Using the work of Paxton (1997), Shanahan (1998), and Wineburg (2001), I was able to develop the Image of the Author task for the purpose of examining the students’ perceptions of authors of history texts. This task was also intended to examine the students’ judgments of the authors’ accuracy and credibility, including any differences that the students may have attributed to gender.

This task was designed to capture the students’ perceptions of the author, including the author’s knowledge and each student’s perceived social relationship with the author. After reading each text, the students were asked to draw a picture of each author and to write about the author. The students were given guiding questions to help them write about their perceptions of the author. These guiding questions fell into three broad categories, including “Appearance of Author” (such as age, gender, and style of dress); “Author Knowledge” (such as what a class taught by this author would be like, and where the author got his or her information); and “Relationship with Author” (such as the author’s personality and perceived credibility). The Image of the Author task was intended to reveal how the students perceived authors of history texts written from differing perspectives. This task was also intended to
examine the students’ judgments of the authors’ accuracy and credibility, including any differences that the students may have attributed to gender. Examples of students’ drawings are included in Appendix I.

Closing Survey

I created a survey in which the students were asked to state their perceptions of the differences between the two texts (“The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story”), especially in terms of accuracy, complexity, and pedagogical appropriateness. The closing survey was intended to shed light on how the students perceived the two texts. This survey is found in Appendix J.

Procedures

Prior to the beginning of data collection, I visited both classrooms (sixth-grade language arts and eighth-grade social studies) and provided the students with an overview of the project. I answered student questions about the project and distributed parental permission forms and assent forms. Signed forms were collected the following week. One student from each class (sixth-grade language arts and eighth-grade social studies) was excluded from the study because parental permission was not obtained. Another student from each class was ultimately excluded due to frequent absences, resulting in incomplete data sets. For the sixth graders, 18 complete data sets were analyzed, while 20 complete data sets were analyzed for the eighth graders.

On the first day of the project, the students were asked to write their historical narratives. I gave each student a piece of lined paper and a ballpoint pen in order to complete the task. The writing prompt was located at the top of the paper. I asked
the students to read along while the directions were read aloud, and I read the prompt to the class:

Write a story about the discovery of America. Be sure to include details about key events, the people, and the challenges they faced. Write your story on the lines below. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space.

I allowed time for procedural questions, and the students were given the remainder of the 66-minute class period to write their narratives. At the end of the period, I collected the historical narratives from the students.

The purpose of this task was to explore the types of narratives about the discovery of America that the students have currently mastered or appropriated and that may, in turn, shape the students’ understanding of other narrative. According to Wertsch (1998), “we constantly employ speech genres to produce utterances and to understand the utterances of others” (p. 75). The students were also asked to complete a historical narrative survey, in which they indicated the sources (e.g. teachers, textbooks, etc.) from which they got their ideas for their historical narratives. The students rank ordered their sources and also provided information about what they found easy and what they found difficult about the historical narrative task.

Beginning on the second day, the students started to work with two texts about Columbus’s discovery of America. One text (“The Great Navigator”) was written from the perspective of a crewmember on one of Columbus’s ships, while the other
text (“The Untold Story”) was written from the perspective of a native of Hayti, which is the island we know today as Hispaniola, consisting of Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Zinn, 2003). After reading each text, the students were asked to complete a written retelling for each text. The written retellings were intended to reveal the degree to which the students appropriated information and/or language from the specific texts into their retellings.

On the second day, the students read the first of the two history texts described above. Half of each class was randomly assigned “The Great Navigator,” and the other half of the class was randomly assigned “The Untold Story.” The students read the assigned text and then constructed a written retelling. After writing the retelling, the students proceeded to the Image of the Author task. In this task, the students were asked to draw a picture of the author, as they visualized that author, and then write a description of the author. Prompts were provided for the writing portion of the Image of the Author task:

After reading [the] text, draw a sketch of the author as you visualize the author in your mind. Draw your sketch in the space below.

APPEARANCE OF AUTHOR

- Age
- Gender
- Style of dress

After you have drawn your sketch, write about the author. Write on the lines below. Consider the following topics as you write. Use the topics below to write in paragraphs.
AUTHOR KNOWLEDGE

• If you had a class taught by the author, what would it be like?

• How would you feel about being in the author’s class?

• Would you learn a lot from the class?

• Where do you think the author got the information for this test? What clues do you have?

RELATIONSHIP WITH AUTHOR

• How does the author act (what is the author’s personality)?

• What is the author’s attitude toward you?

• How credible is this author? In other words, can you believe that what the author says is accurate? How do you know?

When the students had completed the reading, the written retelling, and the Image of the Author task (drawing and writing) for their first assigned text, they moved on to the remaining text, either “The Great Navigator” or “The Untold Story.” They repeated the reading, written retelling, and Image of the Author task sequence for the second text.

On the last day of the project, the students completed a closing survey. The purpose of this survey was to explore the differences the students perceived between the two texts and how those differences impact students’ perceptions of authorship in history texts. The closing survey asked the students to note their perceptions of differences between the two texts, especially in terms of accuracy, complexity, and pedagogical appropriateness. For example, some of the students believed the author
of one text to be more knowledgeable or more credible than the other. The closing survey was intended to gain an understanding of how the students perceived the accuracy and complexity of the two different texts, as well as the judgments the students made in regard to the texts’ appropriateness for use in classrooms.

Case Study Students

In addition to the tasks that all of the students completed, the eight case study students (four sixth graders and four eighth graders) participated in one-on-one debriefing interviews with me. The purpose of the debriefing interviews was to gain a more in-depth understanding of student perceptions of the authors, including the case study students’ perceptions of the two authors’ motives for writing their texts. These interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Student-Constructed Historical Narratives

In order to analyze the student narratives about the discovery of America, I first examined the length by conducting a simple word count. I then analyzed the content of the narratives by adapting a procedure from Wertsch and O’Connor (1994). In their analysis of college students’ historical narratives, Wertsch and O’Connor examined characters, events, and themes. I decided to adapt this analytical scheme for a number of reasons. First, by analyzing characters, events, and themes, I was able to determine exactly the whos and the whats and the whys that the middle school students had included in their written narratives. This helped me to see what information the students thought important to include, and it also illuminated the dominant narrative upon which most of the students relied. I could also easily see the
differences in the main characters, major events, and the motivations of the characters as perceived by the sixth graders and the eighth graders.

Second, using the Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) analytical scheme helped me to examine the middle school students’ narratives beyond the words on the page. This scheme allowed me to take a more in-depth look at the narratives the middle school students had mastered or appropriated, helping me to understand how they had tried (or not) to add their own voices to the narratives, as evidenced by heteroglossia, and how they had tried (or not) to resolve conflicts in their narratives through means conflict.

In sum, the Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) analytical scheme provided me with a framework for examining the middle school students’ written historical narratives. By using this scheme, I was able to discover the characters, events, and themes that the sixth graders and eighth graders apparently thought important to include in their narratives. I was also able to go deeper in my analysis to look for evidence of multivoicedness through heteroglossia and means conflict in the middle school students’ historical narratives.

Characters

I analyzed character in a number of ways, including frequency, patterns of agency, and patterns of presupposed presence.

Frequency. For character frequency, I first simply counted all the characters included in a student’s narrative, then I counted how many times each character was mentioned within a particular student’s narrative.
Patterns of agency. Characters were also analyzed looking at patterns of agency (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994). Patterns of agency refer to which characters are the ones who carried out the action and which were the ones who were the bystanders. By analyzing patterns of agency, I was able to determine not only that certain characters were represented in the students’ narratives, but also how the characters were represented in the stories. These patterns are determined by the position of the subject in a sentence: superordinate or subordinate. Characters in the superordinate position are those who are the active participants in the story. Characters in the subordinate position are those who are the bystanders, or even the victims, in the story. Subject positions indicate the distribution of power among characters. For example, consider the following excerpt from an eighth grader’s narrative: “Christopher sailed the ocean blue and found a land that had Natives. He had to fight these natives so he could say he found ‘America.’” In this example, Columbus is the active participant in the story. He is the agent of the action and the character with the power, which puts him in a superordinate position. In contrast, the Natives are the bystanders, which puts them in a subordinate position. Patterns of agency can be determined by identifying who is doing the acting and who is being acted upon.

Patterns of presupposed presence. Finally, main characters were analyzed based on patterns of presupposed presence (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994). According to Wertsch (1998), “The notion of presupposed presence is concerned with the fact that the individuals or groups mentioned in a text can be treated as being more or less present in the speech context and hence assumed to be more or less accessible to
speaker and listener (or writer and reader)” (p. 95). This means that a character’s presence in the text is obvious, and thus there is no need for the speaker (or writer) to refer to the character in an explicit manner. Presupposed presence represents a tacit agreement between the author and the reader that a specific character (or characters) is assumed to be essential to the text, to the degree that the author can often forego explicitly mentioning the character, yet the reader will know about whom the text is written. With this assumption comes the understanding that the character is a central player in the text, an agent of action, an individual who wields power, so that explicitly mentioning the character is often unnecessary. For example, one eighth grader wrote: “The Native Americans tried to fight back but got their land stolen at the end.” Although this student does not explicitly state that Columbus stole the Natives’ land, the presupposed presence of Columbus allows the reader to infer that he is the one who stole the land from the Native Americans.

Events

Analyzing events helped to reveal the occurrences that the middle school students deemed important enough to be included in their written historical narratives. In order to analyze events, I looked for common events across the students’ narratives and grouped them into categories. The events mentioned most frequently fell into five categories: (1) Columbus found/discovered America; (2) Columbus/Europeans met Native Americans/Indians; (3) Columbus received funding from queen/king; (4) Columbus traveled west to find a shorter route; and (5) Columbus sailed on a ship. Themes
Wertsch (1998) identified theme as “the goals attributed to the actors and the motives underlying these goals” (p. 88). A theme often serves as a tool for organizing narrative, as the story maps out who (characters) did what (events) for what reasons or purposes (themes). When Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) looked at the historical narratives of college students, several major themes emerged, and students often included more than one theme in their essays. As with events, I looked for common major themes across students’ narratives. The frequently-mentioned themes fell into six categories: (1) Columbus was looking for a new/shorter route to Asia/China/India; (2) Columbus believed/wanted to prove the Earth was round; (3) Columbus wanted to find India for trade or financial reward; (4) Columbus was looking for the New World/new land/promised land; (5) the Pilgrims wanted to escape the tyranny of the king; and (6) no goals or motives were identified or indicated in the student’s writing.

Multivoicedness

For the literary theorist and critic Bakhtin (1981), any utterance, whether spoken or written, involves at least two voices. The first voice (or voices) represents previously spoken or written words. The second voice represents the current speaker or writer, who appropriates the previously spoken or written words, but makes them his or her own in a unique speech act. Thus all of our speech acts are marked by heteroglossia: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he Appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293).
Heteroglossia is one type of multivoicedness that Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) examined in their study of college students writing historical narratives. Evidence of heteroglossia in a student’s narrative would indicate that the student had appropriated the narrative and had added his or her own voice in order to construct a narrative that is uniquely his or her own, rather than just parroting a narrative from another source. In order to determine the presence of heteroglossia in the middle school students’ narratives, I looked for instances where the students explicitly inserted their own voices through first-person comments.

For example, one eighth grader wrote: “Then he [Columbus] ended up killing the [Native] Americans because none of them would give him what he wanted I don’t know how but then he found out that he was on unknown land so of coarse like most man would he claimed it, but really since the native americans were already their so it was really their land first so I really think that the Native Americans discovered America, but the text books all say Christopher Columbus discovered America.” In this example, the student inserts her own voice by explaining her interpretation of the event while acknowledging that she is speaking against the narrative typically found in textbooks.

According to Wertsch and O’Connor (1994), another form of multivoicedness occurs when individuals must deal with conflict. Conflict arises when individuals attempt to appropriate information from two or more conflicting or contradictory narratives in order to create a single text. Trying to weave these narratives into one results in this second type of multivoicedness, which Wertsch and O’Connor labeled “means conflict.”
An example of means conflict appeared in a sixth grader’s narrative when he used the dominant narrative of Columbus’s discovery of America to begin his own narrative, but then he attempted to reconcile the official narrative with his own version of the past by saying that people do not know the real story: “So since he found the United States Christopher Columbus was a hero. He was recognized as a good person. But, what people didn’t know is that Cristopher Columbus was a Terrible person. He killed people and made them do dirty work. And that’s what I’ve heard about Christopher Columbus.”

Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) analyzed college students’ narratives for evidence of both types of multivoicedness: heteroglossia and means conflict. For means conflict, they developed a coding system in order to analyze how college students in their study dealt with conflicting narratives about the origin of the United States within their own essays. For example, in writing about the discovery of America, students may be faced with the contradictory perspectives of the Europeans and the Native Americans. However, students may or may not attempt to resolve the conflict within their writing. Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) developed seven categories of means conflict.

I adapted these seven categories of means conflict to the historical narratives written by the middle school students in Study 2. This allowed me to investigate how the middle school students handled conflicting interpretations of history within their own historical narratives about the discovery of America. The categories and how I adapted them to apply to my research are listed in Table 4.4.
1. Student does not mention Native Americans and includes no conflict at all in the narrative.

2. Student includes information about Native Americans, but there is no indication of conflict.

3. Student includes information about Native Americans that seems to be in conflict with the student’s narrative, but there is no attempt to resolve the conflict.

4. Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by plot structure, organizing information in order to minimize the conflict.

5. Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by attribution to characters.

6. Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by commentary.

7. Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by satire.

Table 4.4: Categories of means conflict (adapted from Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994).

**Historical Narrative Survey**

In order to investigate students’ perceptions of their sources for their narratives and the challenges the students had in writing their historical narratives, I created a historical narrative survey for the students to complete after writing their narratives. For the narrative sources, student responses were tallied and ranked in order to determine the students’ perceptions about where they had learned their history. For example, the students in both the sixth grade class and the eighth grade class indicated that their teachers and their textbooks were the primary sources upon which they had relied in constructing their historical narratives.
In regard to the challenges the students faced in writing their historical narratives, student responses were coded and categorized in order to determine patterns of response. For instance, many of the students in both the sixth grade group and the eighth grade group indicated that one of the challenges to writing their narratives was remembering all the details of the historical account, such as names and dates.

Retellings

Student retellings of two history texts were analyzed according to word count and key phrase scores. In addition, I looked for evaluative comments that the students made in their retellings. These evaluative comments were coded for positive value comments and negative value comments, which allowed me to identify patterns in the comments. For example, “Christopher Columbus was infact a great and amazing navigator” was coded as a positive value comment, while “He [Columbus] messed up everything that the Haytis had to live for” was coded as a negative value comment. I also looked for instances where the students wrote from a first-person perspective, such as, “He [Coumbus] wanted us to find gold for him, but we told him that there is no gold.”

Closing Survey

In the closing survey, the students were asked to compare two history texts, especially in terms of accuracy, complexity, and pedagogical appropriateness. Survey responses were coded in order to identify patterns of response, as well as disruptions to patterns of response.
In order to investigate how authors’ voices influence the students’ images of the authors, I developed a task called “Image of the Author,” which was adapted from Paxton (1997). Paxton (1997) conducted a study in which high school students read two history texts about the same topic. One text had a visible author, while the other text had an anonymous author. I adapted this task to use with the middle school students in my study. After reading the two texts, the students were asked to draw a picture of the author of each text. The students were also asked questions about the author, including questions about the author’s appearance, personality, and what kind of teacher the author might be. Examples of the student drawings can be found in Appendix I.

Wineburg (2001) also used students’ drawings to investigate the kinds of images depicted by fifth graders and eighth graders when asked to draw historical figures, such as Pilgrims, settlers, or hippies. In this exploratory study, both female and male students tended to draw historical figures that were males. Boys in the study, in particular, almost never drew females to represent the historical figures. Wineburg (2001) concluded that students’ drawings were constrained by the culturally coded gender stereotypes that currently exist in history, especially in textbooks. Because students tend not to see female actors in the history they read in school, they tend not to include them in their drawings of historical figures.

Similar to Paxton’s (1997) students, the middle school students in Study 2 read two texts (“The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story”), completed drawings of the authors, and wrote brief descriptions of the authors based on guiding questions.
The guiding questions included probes about the author’s appearance, personality, credibility, and what kind of teacher the author might be. Answers to the guiding questions were analyzed for patterns of response.

Debriefing Interviews

I selected eight case study students to interview at the conclusion of Study 2. I conducted an individual debriefing interview with each case study student after they had completed all the instructional tasks. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed to allow for a more detailed examination of how students read and understood the historical narratives and constructed their own interpretation of the historical event. Student responses were coded according to emergent patterns and themes.

Presentation of Findings

The purpose of Study 2 was to examine how sixth graders and eighth graders understand historical narratives told from various perspectives as captured in the students’ narrative templates or schemes, as opposed to authoritative textbook discourse that presents a single view of an historical event. In general, my primary question was: How does author’s voice influence middle school students’ interpretation of historical texts and the development of deeper historical understandings?

In order to answer this question, as well as the related specific research questions, I collected data from the students’ own written historical narratives and students’ written retellings of two historical narratives, all about the discovery of America. I also collected data from a historical narrative survey, the Image of the
Author task, and a closing survey. I conducted individual debriefing interviews with eight case study students, and the transcripts of the audiotaped interviews provided another source of data.

Each of my specific research questions will be presented individually, with a description of the research data that support the findings.

**Research question 1**: What narratives of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America have students appropriated from their backgrounds and experiences? What are students’ perceptions of their sources for their narratives? What challenges do they report in writing the narratives?

In order to analyze the students’ historical narratives about the discovery of America, I adapted a procedure that had been developed by Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) who examined how appropriated historical narratives about the origin of the United States mediate the historical narratives written by college students. Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) developed an analytical scheme that included word count, along with characters, events, and themes in the student narratives. They also investigated two forms of multivoicedness: a concept they called “means conflict,” which will be explored later, and heteroglossia, which is a notion borrowed from Bakhtin (1981).

For comparative purposes and to describe the sources for the dominant narratives that the students likely drew upon in writing their own narrative accounts, I applied the above-mentioned analytical scheme to the passages about Columbus’s discovery of America that are included in the fifth-grade and eighth-grade social studies textbooks used by my district. This analysis allowed me to make comparisons
between the textbook discourse about Columbus and the student-constructed narratives.

**Analysis of Textbook Passages**

**Length**

Like Wertsch and O’Connor (1994), I began my analysis with a basic word count. The fifth-grade textbook passage consisted of only 370 words, while the eighth-grade textbook passage was comprised of 1,197 words.

**Characters**

Main characters were determined by frequency of mention, patterns of agency, and patterns of presupposed presence (Wertsch, 1998). I first simply noted all of the characters included in the textbook passages. The fifth-grade textbook passage contained a total of 51 different characters. In contrast, the eighth-grade textbook passage included a total of 158 different characters.

**Frequency of characters.** In both the fifth-grade and eighth-grade textbook passages, Christopher Columbus was the most frequently mentioned character. In the fifth-grade passage, there were a total of seven different characters (or groups, such as “crew”) included. Columbus was mentioned 22 times out of a total of 51 character mentions. This accounts for 43 percent of all character mentions. Tainos (Native Americans) were mentioned six times, resulting in 12 percent of total character mentions. In the eighth-grade passage, there were 14 different characters or groups included. Columbus was mentioned 83 times out of a total of 158 character mentions, accounting for 53 percent of all character mentions. Tainos/islanders were mentioned six times, resulting in only 4 percent of total character mentions.
Patterns of agency. The fifth-grade and eighth-grade textbook passages that the students had been assigned to read were strikingly similar in the patterns of agency for Christopher Columbus. To be specific, in the fifth-grade textbook, Columbus was placed in the superordinate position 12 out of 15 times, or 80 percent of the time he was mentioned. He occupied the subordinate position only 3 out of 12 times, accounting for 20 percent. Similarly, in the eighth-grade textbook, Columbus was placed in the superordinate position 59 out of 70 times, resulting in 84 percent of the time he was mentioned. Columbus held the subordinate position only 11 out of 70 times, or 16 percent.

The patterns of agency for Native Americans in the two textbooks differed greatly. In the fifth-grade textbook passage, the Native Americans held the superordinate position two out of four times (50 percent), and they occupied the subordinate position two out of four times (50 percent). In contrast, the pattern of agency for Native Americans in the eighth-grade textbook passage revealed superordinate positions only two out of seven times (29 percent) and subordinate positions five out of seven times (71 percent).

I was not surprised that Columbus most often held the superordinate position in the two textbooks. The pattern of agency for the Native Americans, however, was unexpected. Although the Native Americas were more frequently mentioned in the eighth-grade textbook when compared to the fifth-grade textbook, they were most often relegated to a position of inferiority. I wondered why the Native Americans appeared in the subordinate position more often in the eighth-grade textbook (comprising 71 percent of the time the Native Americans were mentioned in the text).
than in the fifth-grade textbook (50 percent of the mentions). I wondered if this had anything to do with Loewen’s (1995) assertion that “textbooks are often muddled by the conflicting desires to promote inquiry and to indoctrinate blind patriotism” (p. 14). In this light, perhaps the Native Americans were mentioned more frequently in the eighth-grade book under the guise of increasing students’ awareness of the other side of the story and to promote inquiry, but they were frequently kept in the subordinate position in order to inculcate national pride.

**Patterns of presupposed presence.** Finally, main characters were analyzed based on patterns of presupposed presence (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994). Presupposed presence refers to assumptions that authors and readers make in regard to an individual’s or a group’s presence in a text. If a character’s presence in the text is assumed to be obvious, then there may be no need to refer to that character explicitly. With presupposed presence, authors and readers enter into a tacit agreement that the character is essential enough to the text that the author can forego explicitly mentioning him or her, yet the reader will know to whom the text refers. This agreement represents an assumption that a character with a presupposed presence is an individual who wields enough power in the text that mentioning him or her explicitly is unnecessary.

In the two textbook passages that I analyzed, there was a pattern of presupposed presence for Christopher Columbus. For example, in the fifth-grade textbook, there were eight instances of presupposed presence through pronoun use, and two instances of presupposed presence as indicated by agent noun-phrase deletion in a passive clause. In the eighth-grade textbook passage, there were 30
instances of Columbus’s presupposed presence through pronoun use, and again, two agent noun-phrase deletions in passive clauses. There was no pattern of presupposed presence for Native Americans in either the fifth-grade or the eighth-grade textbook passages. This means that every time the Native Americans were mentioned in both of the textbooks, they were explicitly referred to or named. This indicates that authors recognize that the Native Americans, as characters in the text, lack agency and power, and so much be mentioned explicitly throughout the text.

Events

In my analysis of the fifth-grade and the eighth-grade textbook passages about Christopher Columbus, many events appeared in both passages. In fact, most of the events in the fifth-grade textbook were repeated in the eighth-grade textbook, and there were very few events that were unique to the fifth-grade textbook passage. The eighth-grade passage was significantly longer than the fifth-grade passage (1,197 words versus 370 words), and so many more events were included.

Themes

Wertsch (1998) identified theme as “the goals attributed to the actors and the motives underlying these goals” (p. 88). A theme often serves as a tool for organizing narrative, as the story maps out who (characters) did what (events) for what reasons or purposes (themes). When Wertsch (1998) looked at the historical narratives of college students, several major themes emerged, and students often included more than one theme in their essays. One theme, however, occurred in 23 out of 24 of the college students’ narratives about the origins of the United States.
When I analyzed the fifth-grade and eighth-grade textbook passages related to Christopher Columbus, two themes emerged in both passages. One of the themes was Columbus’s quest to reach Asia more quickly via a shorter route. Another common theme was Queen Isabella’s and King Ferdinand’s desire to expand Spanish power and to foster the spread of Roman Catholicism. In the eighth-grade passage, Columbus’s goal of garnering profit and a title for himself emerges as a theme, but Columbus’s goals and motives are obscured in the fifth-grade textbook.

*Analysis of Students’ Historical Narratives*

Among the sixth-graders in Study 2, the word count for the students’ narratives had an extensive range, from 18 total words to 239 total words, with a mean word count of 97. In contrast, the word count in the eighth-grade class ranged from 55 total words to 207 total words, with a mean word count of 133.95. Clearly, the eighth-grade students tended to write more than the sixth-graders. This finding could possibly be taken by some to mean that the eighth graders, since they have had more opportunities to learn about American history than the sixth graders (in fifth grade and in eighth grade), have more knowledge about the discovery of America and thus have more to write about. But a simple word count fails to indicate what the students actually wrote about.

Obviously, further analysis was needed. I applied Wertsch and O’Connor’s (1994) analytical scheme to the historical narratives the sixth graders and eighth graders had written for the purposes of Study 2 and looked at the characters, events, and themes that were included in the middle school students’ historical narratives. Wertsch (1998) noted that these aspects of narrative (characters, events, and themes)
are the basic properties of the cultural tool of narrative. These three properties contribute to the process of tying together many different types of interrelationships in order to create a whole narrative. By analyzing characters, events, and themes, I was able to understand how the form of historical narrative shaped the students’ individual historical narratives.

Characters

Looking at main characters in the students’ narratives helped me to determine which individuals or groups the middle school students thought were important to include. This aspect of analysis, as Wertsch (1998) pointed out, allows us to ask, “Who is at the center of the narrative? And Who is responsible for the events that make up the story’s main theme?” (p. 91).

I then noted all of the characters included in each student’s narrative. Among the sixth graders, a total of 31 different characters were mentioned, specifically including Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo, Amerigo Vespucci, Leif Eriksson, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, God, and even Pedro, a fictional character some of the students had read about in fifth grade. In the eighth graders’ narratives, 26 different characters were included. The eighth-grade students tended to refer to their characters more often in general terms, such as explorers, African slaves, and Europeans. In fact, the only two characters mentioned by name in the eighth-graders’ narratives were Christopher Columbus and Leif Eriksson. This may indicate that the sixth graders are more likely to view specific individuals as history-makers, while the eighth graders tend to see the agents and actors of history as groups of people.
**Frequency of characters.** Table 4.5 lists the characters most frequently mentioned in my students’ historical narratives and the number of times characters were mentioned in students’ writing. Characters who accounted for less than 1 percent of the total for both the sixth-grade and the eighth-grade groups were not included in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main characters</th>
<th>Frequency (and percent) of mention grade 6</th>
<th>Frequency (and percent) of mention grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Columbus</td>
<td>139 (47%)</td>
<td>141 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans/Indians</td>
<td>18 (6%)</td>
<td>75 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus’s crew</td>
<td>19 (6%)</td>
<td>53 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrims</td>
<td>13 (4%)</td>
<td>33 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (student referred to self)</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
<td>35 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europeans</td>
<td>11 (4%)</td>
<td>13 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans/us/people of US</td>
<td>7 (2%)</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vikings</td>
<td>13 (4%)</td>
<td>6 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leif Eriksson</td>
<td>7 (2%)</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro (fictional character)</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued

Table 4.5: Main characters included in sixth graders’ and eighth graders’ historical narratives (frequency and percentage of total character mentions).
Table 4.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>6th Graders</th>
<th>8th Graders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passengers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africans</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Lincoln</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then counted the number of times a character (for example, Christopher Columbus, Queen Isabella, or Native American) was included in a student’s writing. Unsurprisingly, among all of the students in Study 2, the most frequently mentioned character was overwhelmingly Christopher Columbus. The sixth-grade students and the eighth-grade students mentioned Columbus almost an exactly equal number of times (139 mentions among sixth graders versus 141 mentions among eighth graders). However, when looking at the percent of the total, Columbus accounted for 47 percent of the total times a character was mentioned in the sixth graders’ narratives, but only 33 percent of the total in the eighth graders’ narratives.

Columbus was far and away the most frequently mentioned character within both groups. After Columbus, the characters most frequently mentioned by the sixth graders were Columbus’s crew. The sixth graders mentioned the crew 19 times in their narratives, but this accounted for only 6 percent of the total character mentions.
Native Americans were mentioned 18 times in the sixth graders’ narratives, again accounting for only 6 percent of the total character mentions.

In contrast, after Columbus, the eighth graders most frequently mentioned the Native Americans/Indians (75 mentions). This accounted for 17 percent of the total character mentions. Although the eighth graders included the Native Americans more often in their narratives than the sixth graders did, the Native Americans were still relatively small players in the narratives. Columbus’s crew was mentioned almost as frequently as the Native Americans by the eighth graders: 53 times, comprising 12 percent of the total character mentions. This finding indicates that although the eighth graders see the Native Americans as having more of a role in the story of the discovery of America than the sixth graders do, the Native American role remains relatively minor.

Erroneously, the sixth graders mentioned the Pilgrims 13 times (4 percent of the total character mentions), while the eighth grade students mentioned the Pilgrims 33 times, accounting for 8 percent of the total character mentions. It surprised me that both groups of students included the Pilgrims, but it was amazing to me that the students in the eighth grade included the Pilgrims as characters in their narratives as often as they did. Since they are older and have had more opportunities for exposure to American history in school (in fifth grade and in eighth grade), I didn’t expect the eighth graders to make this mistake. This finding, however, does support Beck and McKeown’s (1994) conclusion that students often display confusion over who the actors in history really were.
I thought it would be interesting to look at how the students represented themselves in their constructions of their narratives of the discovery of America. The eighth graders included themselves in their narratives by using the pronoun “I” 35 times, or 8 percent of the total character mentions. In contrast, the sixth-grade students only mentioned themselves nine times in the contexts of their narratives, accounting for only 3 percent of the total character mentions. This may suggest that the middle school students do not perceive themselves as having a voice in the telling of our country’s past.

Although students in both sixth grade and eighth grade included the same people (Columbus, crew members, and Native Americans/Indians) as the top three most frequently mentioned characters, some differences are worth noting. First, among the sixth graders, Columbus was mentioned over seven times more frequently than any other character. In other words, when the sixth graders mentioned characters in their narratives, almost half the time the character was Columbus. This rate of inclusion of Columbus in the students’ narratives parallels the fifth grade textbook passage, in which Columbus was the character mentioned again nearly half the time (43 percent of all character mentions). Among eighth graders, Columbus was mentioned not quite twice as often than Native Americans/Indians. Nevertheless, Columbus still accounted for approximately one-third of the total character mentions in the eighth-grade students’ narratives. On one hand, this finding surprised me because in the eighth-grade textbook passage, Columbus accounts for 53 percent of all character mentions. On the other hand, this finding is not so surprising, given that there are a greater number of different characters included in the eighth-grade
textbook passage. Perhaps the eighth graders were attempting to include in their narratives many of characters they had read about in their textbooks. Another possibility is that the eighth graders are beginning to see the relationships among characters in this historical event, rather than ascribing most or all of the agency to one character. In other words, perhaps the eighth graders are beginning to understand that individuals do not exist in a vacuum, but rather, their actions influence and are influenced by others. Thus it could be that the eighth graders were more likely to include characters other than Columbus, because they understand that there were other actors who had parts in this historical event.

Based on my analysis, it seems that Columbus clearly dominates the sixth-grade student narratives, while the eighth graders are slightly more likely to include characters other than Christopher Columbus (for example, crew members) to help them tell the story of the discovery of America. A possible interpretation is that sixth graders see historical figures as acting alone in a more isolated manner, while the eighth graders are beginning to see interrelationships among actors in historical events. This difference may be maturational, as Wertsch (1998) points out, “…elementary school students often have a great deal of difficulty grasping together the diverse elements that go into historical narratives…” (p. 107). The sixth graders in Study 2 may not yet be developmentally able to understand the complex interrelationships between characters that shape historical events.

Second, for the sixth-grade students, Columbus’s crew and the Native Americans are mentioned almost an equal number of times in the narratives, resulting in about six percent of the total for each group of characters. This may indicate that
the sixth graders see Columbus’s crew and the Native Americans as having relatively equal parts in the story of the discovery of America. But for the eighth graders, the Native Americans/Indians are mentioned more frequently than Columbus’s crew (17 percent versus 12 percent), which may indicate that the eighth graders perceive the Native Americans/Indians to be more important than other characters in telling the story of the discovery of America.

Third, Beck and McKeown (1994) indicated that students often display confusion over who the characters are in historical events. My study supports this finding, as both the sixth graders and the eighth graders included inaccuracies in their historical narratives, particularly by including the Pilgrims in their stories of the discovery of America. For example, one sixth grader wrote: “Christopher began to sail to the new world. The ship was called the Mayflower. Many Pilgrims went on the Mayflower. Many died on the journey there.” One of the eighth-grade students wrote: “In England King George was being a tyrant and not letting many people practice their religion and ways so Christopher Columbus and many others set sail on the Mayflower to find a new home. The Mayflower, Pinta, and the Santa Maria landed in what is now northern America so it was very rocky and cold. The people also called pilgrims were not use to the new American illness so many died.”

Finally, the eighth graders included themselves in their historical narratives by weaving first-person comments throughout their writing on 35 occasions, whereas the sixth graders included themselves in their narratives only nine times. For example, some eighth graders started sentences with phrases like, “What I think happened was…” Or some eighth graders resisted the dominant narrative with phrases like, “I
don’t think Christopher Columbus was the first person to discover America.” These personal comments seem to indicate that the eighth graders were more likely than the sixth graders to see themselves as being able to comment on history, to agree with a story or to resist it. This finding may be related to Shanahan’s (1998) conclusion that children’s thinking about authorship changes over time. For example, the third graders in Shanahan’s (1998) study were more likely to suggest that authors write for their own purposes, while the seventh graders were more likely to refer to an author’s intention to communicate with readers. Perhaps the sixth graders in Study 2 are more likely to understand historical narrative as the telling of a familiar story, with a prescribed cast of characters and events, whereas the eighth graders are beginning to see opportunities in historical narrative to insert their own comments or to include themselves as a part of the telling of the story.

Patterns of agency. Characters were also analyzed by looking at patterns of agency (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994). Patterns of agency have to do with which characters are the ones who carried out the action and which were the ones who were the bystanders. By analyzing patterns of agency, I was able to determine not only that certain characters were represented in the students’ narratives, but also how the characters were represented in the stories. These patterns are determined by the position of the subject in a sentence: superordinate or subordinate. Characters in the superordinate position are those who are the active participants in the story; characters in the subordinate position are those who are the bystanders, or even the victims in the story. Subject positions indicate the distribution of power among
Patterns of agency can be determined by delineating who is doing the acting and who is being acted upon.

For example, consider this excerpt from an eighth grader’s historical narrative about the discovery of America: “Christopher Columbus had sailed the ocean blue and landed on a land with Natives on it. He had to fight all the Natives to say he found America.” In this excerpt, Columbus maintains a superordinate position: Columbus is the character who carries out the action and holds the position of power. When the student refers to “Natives,” he places them in a passive position in the sentence (object of preposition) and simultaneously in a subordinate political position (object of Columbus’s action). In contrast, another eighth-grade student placed the Natives in a superordinate position when he wrote: “The Native Americans tried to fight back.” In this case, the “Native Americans” are both subjects in the sentence and agents of action. As active participants in the story, at least in this case, the Native Americans hold the position of power.

In the students’ historical narratives, both the sixth graders and the eighth graders frequently started by assuming Columbus discovered America, but Native peoples were already living on the island where Columbus landed. For example, one sixth grader wrote: “He [Columbus] found Native Americans on the land he discovered.” An eighth grader wrote: “When they [Columbus and his crew] reached land they ran into Native Americans.” For the middle school students in Study 2, the primary conflict within the story of the discovery of America often focused on Christopher Columbus and the Native Americans, so I analyzed the patterns of
agency for Columbus and the Native Americans/Indians. Table 4.6 summarizes the patterns of agency in students’ historical narratives,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject position</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Columbus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans/Indians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate position</td>
<td>94 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate position</td>
<td>27 (22%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6: Patterns of agency in students’ historical narratives (percentages of total).

Based on this analysis, across both grade levels the students placed Columbus in the superordinate position in their narratives more often than Native Americans/Indians. Among the sixth-graders, Columbus was in the superordinate position 78 percent of the time (or 94 out of 121 mentions), while Native Americans/Indians were in the superordinate position only 25 percent of the time (or 6 out of 24 mentions) in the sixth graders’ narratives. Among the eighth graders, Columbus was in the superordinate position 56 percent of the time (or 64 out of 115 mentions), while the Native Americans/Indians were in the superordinate position only 31 percent of the time (or 20 out of 64 mentions). This analysis reveals that students placed Columbus in a position of power over the Native Americans/Indians. This pattern is consistent with the dominant “official” narrative about the discovery of America that most students learn in school.
In contrast, the sixth graders wrote about Columbus in a subordinate position only 22 percent of the time (27 out of 121 mentions). Native Americans/Indians were placed in a subordinate position by the sixth graders 75 percent of the time (18 out of 24 mentions). The eighth-graders included Columbus in the subordinate position 44% of the time (51 out of 115 mentions), while the Native Americans/Indians were in the subordinate position 69 percent of the time (44 out of 64 mentions). This analysis indicates that when students, whether sixth graders or eighth graders, included Native Americans/Indians in their historical narratives, they were more likely to write about this group from a subordinate position.

Thus both sixth and eighth graders in Study 2 saw clear differences between and among characters in terms of their roles in the story of the discovery of America and the positions of power that they hold. Generally speaking, most of the sixth-grade and the eighth-grade students placed Christopher Columbus in a superordinate role, or position of power, in their historical narratives. In contrast, Native Americans/Indians were most often restricted to a subordinate role in the students’ narratives. This finding is similar to that of Wertsch and O’Connor (1994), in which college students wrote about the origins of the United States. For Wertsch and O’Connor’s (1994) students, European settlers were most often placed in superordinate positions, while Native Americans tended to occupy subordinate positions. These findings suggest that the middle school students in Study 2 view these historical events from a white, Eurocentric perspective, in which the Europeans (including Columbus) are the “whos” initiating and carrying out the actions, while the Native Americans were the characters who were acted upon.
For Study 2, Table 4.7 summarizes the patterns of presupposed presence in the students’ historical narratives about the discovery of America.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 6</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td>Christopher Columbus 44 (96%) Native Americans/Indians 2 (4%)</td>
<td>Christopher Columbus 53 (77%) Native Americans/Indians 16 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent noun-phrase deletion in passive clause 2 (100%) 0</td>
<td>1 (100%) 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: Patterns of presupposed presence in students’ historical narratives.

In the narratives of the students in Study 2, there were very few instances where the presupposed presence of a character was indicated by an agent noun-phrase deletion that occurred in a passive clause. In one of the few examples of this construct, one eighth-grade student wrote: “The Native American were forced to move west [by Columbus].” In fact, there were very few passive clauses at all in the students’ writing. In the sixth graders’ narratives, the presupposed presence of Columbus was indicated through the use of an agent noun-phrase deletion in a passive clause on only two occasions. There was only one instance of this writing construct in the eighth graders’ narratives. This construct was not used at all in students’ narratives when writing about the Native Americans/Indians. However,
students frequently tended to use pronouns to indicate presupposed presence, especially when writing about Columbus. Among the sixth graders, Columbus’s presupposed presence was indicated 44 (out of 46) times through the use of pronouns. In other words, when the sixth graders used pronouns to refer to characters, the students were referring to Columbus 96 percent of the time. In contrast, the presupposed presence of Native Americans/Indians was indicated through the use of pronouns only two times by the sixth graders, accounting for 4 percent of the total.

Among the eighth graders, Columbus’s presupposed presence was indicated 53 (out of 69) times by the use of pronouns, resulting in 77 percent of the total. Meanwhile, the Native Americans/Indians’ presupposed presence was indicated via pronoun use only 16 times, accounting for 23 percent.

These findings suggest that the sixth-grade and eighth-grade students believed that Columbus’s presence in their narratives was obvious to the reader, and thus, they did not need to explicitly refer to him throughout their writing. On the other hand, the presence of the Native Americans/Indians was not as obvious, and so the students went to greater lengths to explicitly refer to them in their narratives. This finding, once again, is similar to that of Wertsch (1998). Among the college students in Wertsch’s (1998) study who wrote narratives about the origins of the United States, there was “a strong pattern of presupposed presence for European settlers but a near absence of presupposed presence for Native Americans” (p. 97). As with the patterns of agency, these findings indicate that most of the sixth-grade and eighth-grade students in Study 2 tend to view the discovery of America primarily from a white, European perspective, where Columbus is so obviously present in the story that the
students can often assume their readers know he is the primary character without explicitly referring to him.

**Events**

Analyzing events helped to reveal the events that the middle school students deemed important enough to be included in their written historical narratives. The events tended to be the same types of events included in the official dominant narrative, such as “Columbus/Europeans met Native Americans/Indians.” The most frequent events that the students included in their narratives are listed in Table 4.8, along with the number and percentage of students who mentioned each event in their writing. Because the students included multiple events in their narratives, percentages total greater than 100.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 6 n=18</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 8 n=20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Columbus found/discovered America</td>
<td>8 (44%)</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus/Europeans met Native Americans/Indians</td>
<td>4 (22%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus received funding from queen/king</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus traveled west to find a shorter route</td>
<td>6 (33%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus sailed on a ship</td>
<td>6 (33%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Events included in students’ historical narratives.
The students’ written historical narratives about the discovery of America tended to include very similar events. The events that the students included most frequently in their narratives all focused on actions related to Christopher Columbus, usually as the agent of the action. This is not surprising, given that Columbus was the main character most frequently mentioned by both the sixth graders and the eighth graders.

Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) had college students write narratives about the origins of the United States. Most of the students’ narratives were strikingly similar, as they frequently included the same events; so similar that Wertsch and O’Connor were able to identify five specific events that were regularly included in the narratives.

As in Wertsch and O’Connor’s (1994) study, the students who participated in my project tended to have similarities in the events they included in their historical narratives about the discovery of America. The similarity of events indicates that most of the students, both sixth graders and eighth graders, have mastered or appropriated comparable narratives about the discovery of America. Furthermore, the events that the students tended to include most frequently in their narratives can all be found in the “official” story of the discovery of America. In other words, the middle school students in Study 2 did not often resist the dominant narrative of the Christopher Columbus story that is widely accepted in the U.S. For their own narratives, they had mastered the same events that are frequently found in the dominant “official” narrative, which can be found in most social studies textbooks.
However, some differences between the sixth and eighth graders are worth noting. For example, the eighth graders included “Columbus found/discovered America” as an event more often than the sixth graders did (65 percent of the eighth grade narratives included this theme versus 44 percent of the sixth grade narratives). The eighth graders were also more likely to include “Columbus received funding from queen/king” (30 percent versus 11 percent). In contrast, the events that the sixth graders tended to mention explicitly more often than the eighth graders included “Columbus traveled west to find a shorter route” (33 percent versus 10 percent) and “Columbus sailed on a ship” (33 percent versus 5 percent).

Themes

In Study 2, several major themes were included in the middle school students’ narratives about the discovery of America. The themes most often included in student narratives are summarized in Table 4.9, along with the number and percentage of students who included each theme in their narrative. Because some of the students included more than one theme in their narratives, percentages total greater than 100.
Similar to the students in Wertsch’s (1998) study, the middle school students in Study 2 often included several goals within a single narrative. However, approximately 40 percent of the students in each of the classes (sixth-grade language arts and eighth-grade social studies) used the theme of looking for a new or shorter route to Asia as the organizing idea for their narratives. Three of the remaining themes (Columbus wanted to prove Earth was round; Columbus wanted to find India for trade; Columbus was looking for the New World) all indicate that Columbus was
trying to prove something or find something for some reward, whether it be for personal glory, financial gain, or the acquisition of land. For example, one eighth grader wrote: “Christopher Columbus…took a boat from wherever he was from and tried to find some new land.” One of the sixth-grade students wrote: “…Christopher Columbus was trying to find India because he has heard Marco Polo, an explorer that already went and got back spices and gold and other treasures.”

Boiled down, the basic theme that seems to emerge from all of the Columbus-related themes is that Columbus was out to achieve a lofty goal. This theme supports the portrayal of Columbus as “America’s first great hero” (Loewen, 1995, p. 38), a portrayal that is found in most social studies and history books. Once again, the middle school students in Study 2 depended on the dominant “official” narrative to help them organize and generate their own written narratives about the discovery of America.

In spite of this reliance on the dominant narrative, it is interesting to note that 33 percent (6 out of 18) of the sixth graders and 10 percent (2 out of 20) of the eighth graders in my study included no information about goals or motives within their narratives. In other words, these students wrote narratives without identifiable themes.

To illustrate, one sixth grader’s entire narrative reads as follows: “Christopher Columbus was the one that found America. He was born in Italy. Christopher Columbus found America in 1482. One day he thought of a brilliant idea and he got on the mayflower and he said we are traveling west. Then he saw the Admen Sea.”
As another example, one of the eighth graders wrote this narrative: “The first people who stepped in what is now America were nomads who traveled across the ice bridge that connected from Russia to Canada. The people ended up being Native Americans. Thousands of years after the ice age, Christopher Columbus and his crew became the first Europeans in America. This happened in 1692. After this hundreds of immigrants came from all over the world.”

This lack of any discernible theme seems to indicate that at least for some middle school students, the why (or the theme) of a historical event is not as important as listing the whos (characters) and the whats (events). These narratives tended to be more like simple listings of facts, without any steps toward interpretation.

**Multivoicedness**

For the literary theorist and critic Bakhtin (1981), any utterance, whether spoken or written, involves at least two voices. The first voice (or voices) represents previously spoken or written words. The second voice represents the current speaker or writer, who appropriates the previously spoken or written words by making them his or her own in a unique speech act. Thus all of our speech acts are marked by heteroglossia: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293).

Heteroglossia is one of two types of multivoicedness that Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) looked for in their study of college students writing historical
narratives. Evidence of heteroglossia in a student’s narrative would indicate that the student had appropriated the narrative and had added his or her own voice in order to construct a narrative that is uniquely his or her own. The other type of multivoicedness that Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) investigated is means conflict.

Means conflict. According to Wertsch and O’Connor (1994), another form of multivoicedness occurs when individuals must deal with conflict. Conflict arises when individuals attempt to appropriate information from two or more conflicting or contradictory narratives in order to create a single text. Trying to weave these narratives into one results in this second type of multivoicedness, which Wertsch and O’Connor labeled “means conflict.”

Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) analyzed college students’ narratives for evidence of both types of multivoicedness: heteroglossia and means conflict. For means conflict, they developed a coding system in order to analyze how college students in their study dealt with conflicting narratives about the origin of the United States within their own essays. For example, in writing about the discovery of America, students may be faced with the contradictory perspectives of the Europeans and the Native Americans. However, students may or may not attempt to resolve the conflict within their writing. A student’s attempt to resolve a conflict within his or her own narrative may be an indication of deeper historical thinking. In this case, a student may be trying to weave together a cohesive narrative, even when multiple perspectives of the past are in opposition. A student who does not attempt to resolve a conflict may not be thinking deeply enough even to understand that a conflict exists.
Or perhaps the student believes history to be a rote listing of facts and may not see the need for interpretation.

A Category 1 narrative does not include any indication of conflict. In fact, for Study 2, a narrative that falls in Category 1 omits Native Americans altogether.

Consider, for example, this narrative written by a sixth grader:

Long ago Christopher Columbus was about to voyage to China. He thought the only land of the world was Europe, Africa, and Asia. So, he thought going west would be shorter than going south around Africa. It turns out it took longer than Chris thought. Many days passed all of the crew was hungry. They were about to turn on Chris until they found land. They thought they were in Asia but the land looked different. He found out that the land they were on was uncharted. Chris explored the land and didn’t find much. Later on he claimed the land for England.

As an illustration of Category 1, this narrative contains no mention of Native Americans at all, and no conflict is evident in the narrative.

In contrast, for comparative purposes, an eighth grader wrote a narrative that is representative of Category 6. In this type of narrative, conflict is acknowledged, and the student attempts to resolve the conflict through commentary:

Christopher Columbus discovered America. He was looking for spices from Spain and he thought that he could go straight through to Spain, but their was land in the way, but he thought he had landed in Spain. So he had told all of the people to give him spices, but they didn’t have any spices because he wasn’t in Spain. So the people tried to tell him he wasn’t in Spain and that the land he was on didn’t have any spices. But of course he wouldn’t listen to them and he ended up killing them. Then he kept killing the Americans because none of them would give him what he wanted. I don’t know how but then he found out that he was on unknown land so of coarse like most man would he claimed it, but really since the native americans were already there so it was really their land first so I really think that the Native Americans discovered America, but the text books all say Christopher Columbus discovered America.
In this narrative, the student introduces the conflict between Columbus and the Native Americans and attempts to resolve it by commenting on the conflict, including the statement that the land belonged to the Native Americans first.

Table 4.10 presents the results of my analysis of the means conflict for the student narratives in Study 2. Table 4.10 includes the categories of means conflict the middle school students used in writing their historical narratives, along with the number and percentage of students who employed each category in their writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student does not mention Native Americans and includes no conflict at all in the narrative.</td>
<td>7 (38%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student includes information about Native Americans, but there is no indication of conflict.</td>
<td>8 (44%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student includes information about Native Americans that seems to be in conflict with the student’s narrative, but there is no attempt to resolve the conflict.</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued

Table 4.10: Categories of means conflict used in students’ historical narratives.
Interestingly, 32 percent of all the students involved in the project (7 sixth graders and 5 eighth graders out of a total of 38) did not even mention the Native Americans at all in their historical narratives (Category 1). This finding may indicate that middle school students often do not consider the role of the Native Americans important in telling the story of the discovery of America.

The historical narratives written by the students in Study 2 most often fell within Category 2. Of all the students (38 students, regardless of grade level), 37 percent of the students included information about the Native Americans in their historical narratives, but they made no indication of any conflict that the presence of the Natives Americans in their narratives may have posed to the official narrative of the “discovery” of America. The fact that these students included the Native Americans in their essays but did not acknowledge any type of conflict that their presence may pose to the official narrative makes it unclear if these students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by plot structure, organizing information in order to minimize the conflict.</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by attribution to characters.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by commentary.</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Student includes conflict and attempts resolution by satire.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
recognized that there may be opposing narratives represented by Columbus and the Native Americans.

One of the most surprising findings of this analysis is the overwhelming number of students in both sixth and eighth grade who did not acknowledge in any way that there may be opposing narratives about the discovery of America behind their own historical narratives. Out of all the student narratives, 68 percent (Category 1 and Category 2 combined) gave no indication whatsoever that there may be a story of the discovery of America that is in opposition to the official narrative that students appropriated as their own narratives. In other words, 26 of the middle school students in Study 2, out of a total of 38, used the official, dominant narrative of the discovery of America in order to write their own historical narratives, and they included nothing in their narratives to challenge the dominant narrative, or even to suggest the possibility of an opposing perspective.

In their narratives and during case study debriefing interviews, some of the students revealed that the narratives they relied on to help them construct their own written narratives were those that they had heard most often: the textbook version, or the official school account, which is typically the dominant narrative. The students often mentioned that they had heard the story of Columbus’s discovery of America in school or had read it in textbooks, and therefore, it must be true. The students tend to perceive the school and textbook versions of the story that they have heard frequently repeated to be accurate. This may account for the similarities between the sixth graders and the eighth graders.
Another possible explanation for the similarities may be related to the context. If the students have repeatedly heard the dominant narrative throughout their school careers, they may have assumed that was the story I wanted them to write when I gave them the directions for the task to write a narrative about the discovery of America. This could account for those students who wrote the dominant narrative as their own historical narratives, but then added comments such as, “This is what I’ve heard in school.”

A third possible explanation could be that the middle school students in Study 2 perceive history as the memorization of facts. In this case, the students may not have attempted to demonstrate any degree of interpretation of historical events. If the students believe that writing about history entails listing names and dates, they may not consider that including multiple perspectives could be a valid way to write about the past.

*Heteroglossia.* Bakhtin (1981) defined heteroglossia as the process of appropriating the words of others and inserting one’s own intention, thus creating an utterance composed of at least two voices. Thus, heteroglossia is another type of multivoicedness. In Wertsch and O’Connor’s (1994) study, in order to determine the presence of heteroglossia in student essays, they examined the students’ stances taken toward the appropriated historical narrative as they produced their own essays about the origin of the U.S. For example, did students completely accept the dominant narrative about the origin of the U.S., or did they resist or reject the dominant narrative? Did students attempt to appropriate the words of others and insert their own? If so, their essays are characterized by heteroglossia.
In order to determine the presence of heteroglossia in the student historical narratives in my study, I looked for evidence of resistance against the dominant narrative; evidence of a student’s own voice within the student narrative; multiple stories woven together into the student narrative; or a student narrative that completely resisted or rejected the dominant narrative. Of the 38 student narratives that I analyzed, 39 percent, or 15 student narratives (7 sixth-grade narratives and 8 eighth-grade narratives), contained evidence of heteroglossia. This indicates that some middle school students are using the dominant “official” narrative as a mediational tool to write their own narratives, but they are not just repeating the dominant narrative. Rather, they are making the dominant narrative their own by populating it with their own intentions and their own accents (Bakhtin, 1981). In this way, these middle school students are appropriating the dominant narratives and adapting them to their “own semantic and expressive intention[s]” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). To illustrate, one sixth grader wrote:

There once was a man named Christopher Columbus. One day Christopher was sent around the world. During his travel he had to stop and stopped in what is now the U.S.A. What happened was the United States was found by accident. If it weren’t for Christopher Columbus stopping and finding the United States on accident we might not be there today. So since he found the United States Christopher Columbus was a hero. He was recognized as a good person. But what people didn’t know is that Christopher Columbus was a terrible person. He killed people and made them do dirty work. And that’s what I’ve heard about Christopher Columbus.

This sixth grader begins by appropriating the dominant narrative that claims Columbus was a hero, but then he adds his own “semantic and expressive intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981) by cluing the reader in on “what people didn’t know.”
Historical Narrative Survey

In order to investigate the students’ perceptions of their sources for their narratives and the challenges the students had in writing their historical narratives, I created a historical narrative survey for the students to complete after writing their narratives. The students were asked to identify and to rank order any sources they used to help them write their narratives. Table 4.11 summarizes the sources that the students identified for help with writing their historical narratives about the discovery of America, along with the number and percentage of students who identified each source as one that they used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 6</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>14 (27%)</td>
<td>15 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies textbook</td>
<td>11 (21%)</td>
<td>16 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV (History Channel or Discovery Channel)</td>
<td>9 (17%)</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade book selected by student</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class videos</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older sibling</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play performance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11: Sources of information used by students in writing historical narratives.
For the sixth-grade students, teachers were listed most often as the primary source of information on which the students relied, closely followed by information in social studies textbooks. Among the eighth-grade students, the students reported that social studies textbooks were most often the primary source of information, followed closely by teachers. As stated in Chapter 1, most teachers tend to rely on the social studies textbook as their own primary source of information (Loewen, 1995). And textbooks most often include the dominant narratives of historical events that are most widely accepted by the public (Wertsch, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). Accordingly, if the students are getting most of their history from their teachers and their textbooks, it seems unlikely that they are frequently exposed, at least in school, to historical narratives that conflict with or are opposed to the dominant or official narrative. However, several of the sixth graders and eighth graders identified other sources of information that may have provided them with opportunities to get differing perspectives on historical events. Nine of the sixth graders reported using television shows on the History Channel or the Discovery Channel as sources of information for their historical narratives, while seven of the eighth graders reported that they relied on their parents as sources of information. Other sources of information were less frequently reported, but it appears that some of the students occasionally get information about history outside of the classroom and use this information to help them shape their own historical narratives.

The students were also asked to report any challenges they had in writing their historical narratives. The students reported a number of challenges, but the most
frequently cited difficulty was being able to remember details, such as names and
dates. Table 4.12 summarizes the challenges that the students reported in writing
their historical narratives, along with the number of times (and percentage) each
challenge was mentioned by students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge to writing</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 6</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of mention grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can’t remember details (names and dates).</td>
<td>8 (44%)</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t remember what I have learned about the topic.</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haven’t learned much/don’t know much about topic.</td>
<td>3 (17%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting ideas/events in chronological order.</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much information to deal with.</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know about other explorers – only Christopher</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what to write about.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing was difficult for me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12: Student-reported challenges in writing historical narratives.

The finding that a relatively large number of students, regardless of grade
level, reported difficulties in remembering names and dates seems to indicate that the
students tend to view these details important to history. History, to many of the students, seems to be a listing of facts rather than an interpretation of past events, and so the students believed that it is important to be able to remember names and date in retelling history.

Curiously, 15 percent (or 3 out of 20) of the eighth-grade students reported that “nothing” was difficult for them in writing their historical narratives. Perhaps these students are so entrenched in the official narrative of the discovery of America that they find it easy to write about it. No real thinking is required in this case; the students just have to repeat what they have often heard.

Research question 2: How do two different narratives about Christopher Columbus shape students’ retellings?

In order to investigate this question, I analyzed the students’ written retellings by looking at a simple word count, assigning a key phrase score to each retelling, and looking for evidence of value comments and/or first-person perspective in the students’ retellings.

The students read two narratives about Christopher Columbus, his voyage, and his “discovery” of America. “The Great Navigator” was written from the perspective of a crew member aboard one of Columbus’s ships. “The Untold Story” was written from the perspective of a native Taino. Upon completion of a simple word count of the students’ written retellings, the retellings for “The Great Navigator” tended to be slightly shorter than the retellings for “The Untold Story.” This was true for both groups of students, sixth graders and eighth graders. Table
4.13 lists the mean word counts for the retellings of both “The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Mean word count grade 6</th>
<th>Mean word count grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Great Navigator”</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Untold Story”</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.13: Mean word counts for students’ written retellings.

The retellings for “The Untold Story” may be slightly longer than the retellings for “The Great Navigator” because “The Untold Story” contained information that was new to many of the students. Because “The Great Navigator” represented the dominant narrative of Columbus’s discovery of Columbus, the students may have assumed that their readers did not need the retelling to be as explicit as the retelling for “The Untold Story.” In retelling “The Untold Story,” the students may have included more details about events that were new to them, assuming that their readers may need more information about unfamiliar or new ideas. Furthermore, the students tended to include more value comments and to assume a first-person perspective in the retellings for “The Untold Story,” which also contributed to the slightly longer length of the retellings when compared to those for “The Great Navigator.” This finding will be investigated in more detail below.

Retellings were also analyzed using key phrase scores. Based on pilot data collected earlier in the school year, key phrases were identified for both “The Great
Navigator” and “The Untold Story.” Key phrases were those that occurred in at least 5 of the pilot students’ written retellings of “The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story.” In addition, two of my professional colleagues, a reading teacher and a social studies teacher, identified key phrases as those that were integral to the overall meaning of the text. Thus there were some key phrases identified by the teachers that were not included in any of the pilot students’ retellings.

Table 4.14 illustrates that for both groups, the sixth graders and the eighth graders, the mean key phrase score was slightly lower for “The Great Navigator” (4.9 for grade 6 and 3.3 for grade 8) than for “The Untold Story” (7.7 for grade 6 and 6.6 for grade 8). The mean key phrase score for “The Great Navigator” among the sixth graders was 4.9, while the mean key phrase score for “The Untold Story” among these same students was 7.7. Similarly, among the eighth graders, the mean key phrase score for “The Great Navigator” was 3.3, while the mean key phrase score for “The Untold Story” was 6.6. Table 4.14 summarizes the mean key phrase scores for the written retellings of both “The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story” among sixth-grade and eighth-grade students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Mean key phrase score grade 6</th>
<th>Mean key phrase score grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Great Navigator”</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Untold Story”</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean average</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.14: Mean key phrase scores for written retellings.
As with the word count, the key phrase scores may have been higher for “The Untold Story” because much of the information in “The Untold Story” was unfamiliar to many of the students. They may have felt the need to include more explicit information when retelling “The Untold Story.” In addition, the students may have assumed that most readers know the dominant narrative of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America, which was represented by “The Great Navigator,” and thus did not need to be as explicit in their retellings of that text.

I investigated two other aspects of the students’ written retellings: the students’ interjection of their own voices into their retellings through the use of value comments or the assumption of the narrator’s identity through the adoption of a first-person perspective.

Value comments were defined as any statements that did not appear explicitly in the texts and that indicated a positive or negative evaluation of any person or event, such as, “Christopher Columbus was very mean to the people.” This analysis is an adaptation of Paxton (1997), who used students’ positive and negative value comments during think-alouds to provide insight into students’ perceptions of two different texts, one with a visible author and one with an anonymous author.

In Study 2, only one sixth grader made any positive value comments at all during the retellings. This student made positive value comments for both “The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story.” Several sixth-graders (22 percent, or 4 out of 18) made negative value comments in their retellings of “The Untold Story.”
Among the eighth graders, 15 percent of the students (3 out of 20) made positive value comments for both “The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story.” For “The Untold Story,” 35 percent of the eighth-grade students made negative value comments during their retellings. Thus value comments occurred more frequently in the students’ written retellings for “The Untold Story,” for both the sixth-grade and the eighth-grade groups. Table 4.15 summarizes the number and percentage of value comments in the students’ written retellings for each text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of value comments grade 6</th>
<th>Frequency and percentage of value comments grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Great Navigator”</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Untold Story”</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>4 (22%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15: Frequency and percentage of value comments in students’ written retellings.

Three sixth graders adopted a first-person perspective in their written retellings. One of these retellings was for “The Great Navigator,” while the other two were for “The Untold Story.” Two eighth-graders adopted a first-person perspective in their written retellings: one in the retelling of “The Great Navigator,” and the other in the retelling of “The Untold Story.” In these instances, the students briefly assumed the roles of the narrators of the text, indicating that the students may have
identified with the narrators. As with value comments, first-person perspectives occurred more frequently in the students’ written retellings for “The Untold Story” than for “The Great Navigator.”

**Research question 3: What do students report as differences between the two texts, especially in terms of accuracy, complexity, and pedagogical appropriateness?**

In order to answer this research question, I devised a closing survey that all of the students completed at the end of Study 2. Among the sixth-grade students, the most frequently reported difference between the two texts appeared to be simple: “The Great Navigator” was about Columbus being a “good man” or a “hero,” and “The Untold Story” was about Columbus being a “bad man” or a “villain.” Many of the sixth graders also indicated that the two texts were told from different points of view. The eighth graders reported similar differences between the two texts. For example, many of the eighth graders said the difference was that “The Great Navigator” portrayed Columbus as a “hero” and a “saint,” while “The Untold Story” portrayed Columbus as a “cold-blooded killer” or as “cruel.” One student stated that “The Great Navigator” praised Christopher Columbus, but “The Untold Story” told “what really happened.”

Some of the eighth graders noted differences in the formats of the two texts, indicating that “The Great Navigator” was “like a textbook” and “more serious and true.” In contrast, “The Untold Story” was described as a “tale instead of facts” and “fun to read,” but it was asserted that the text “exaggerates a lot, like a fairy tale.” This finding is related to Paxton’s (1997) conclusion that when high school students
read a history text with a visible author, they demonstrated increased levels of engagement and were more likely to participate in a conversation with the author. But, according to Paxton (1997), students “had a hard time believing this was a legitimate way to discuss the subject. This is not the way ‘you’re supposed to write’” (p. 247). Because the students have come to accept textbook discourse as the authoritative form of writing about the past, they tend to doubt, or even reject, the credibility of a more narrative form of discourse.

When the students were asked to indicate which text was easier to read and understand, the students in both groups were split right down the middle. Half of the sixth graders said that “The Great Navigator” was easier to read and understand, while the other half said “The Untold Story” was easier to read and understand. The same phenomenon occurred with the eighth-grade group. One of the interesting findings is that many of the students said a certain text was easier to read and understand because the stories were the ones that they had heard before or previously learned about in school, and the information was familiar to them.

In terms of accuracy, the sixth-grade students were split down the middle again in their evaluation of the two texts. Half of the sixth graders said “The Great Navigator” was more accurate, while the other half said “The Untold Story” was more accurate. Among the eighth graders, the students slightly tended to believe that “The Untold Story” was more accurate than “The Great Navigator.”

When asked which text the students would use to teach other children about the discovery of America, most of the sixth graders indicated that they would use
“The Great Navigator.” Many of the sixth graders claimed that they would use “The Great Navigator” as a teaching tool because it is “more accurate,” and “this is what I have been told.” Six of the 18 sixth graders in the study said they would not use either text for teaching purposes, because the texts are “confusing” and “hard to understand.” Two of the students indicated that they could not determine which text was accurate, so they would not use either one to teach other children. Half of the eighth graders, however, said that they would use both texts to teach children about the discovery of America so that they could teach both sides of the story.

**Research question 4: How do the authors’ voices influence students’ images of the authors? How does gender shape students’ image of the author?**

The instrument intended to answer this research question is called “Image of the Author,” which was adapted from Paxton (1997). After reading two history texts, the students were asked to draw a picture of the author of each text. The students were also asked questions about the author, including questions about the author’s appearance, personality, and what kind of teacher the author might be.

Wineburg (2001) also used students’ drawings to investigate the kinds of images depicted by fifth graders and eighth graders when asked to draw historical figures, such as Pilgrims, settlers, or hippies. Wineburg (2001) concluded that students’ drawings were constrained by the culturally-coded gender stereotypes that currently exist in history, especially in textbooks. Because students tend not to see female actors in the history they read in school, they tend not to include them in their drawings of historical figures.
Similar to Paxton’s (1997) students, the middle school students in my study read two texts (“The Great Navigator” and “The Untold Story”), completed drawings of the authors, and wrote brief descriptions of the authors based on guiding questions. The guiding questions included probes about the author’s appearance, personality, credibility, and what kind of teacher the author might be.

Just as the students in Wineburg’s (2001) study tended to draw almost exclusively male historical figures, the students in Study 2 tended to draw the authors of the two history texts as men. In both the sixth-grade students and the eighth-grade students, for girls as well as boys, most of the students frequently saw the two authors as men. In “The Great Navigator,” the narrator was clearly a male, a member of the crew on one of Columbus’s ship. But in “The Untold Story,” the gender of the narrator was ambiguous. This did not seem to have much influence over the students’ images of the authors. But surprisingly, among the sixth-grade students, more sixth graders (all girls) indicated a female author for “The Great Navigator” (male narrator) than they did for “The Untold Story” (ambiguous narrator). Table 4.16 summarizes the gender of the authors as perceived by the middle school students in Study 2.
In the sixth-grade group, boys perceived the authors of both texts almost exclusively as males, except for one boy who indicated a female author for “The Untold Story.” For “The Great Navigator,” seven of the sixth-grade girls perceived the author as female, while two girls believed the author to be male. Again, this is surprising because the narrator of “The Great Navigator” is a member of Columbus’s crew. For “The Untold Story” (ambiguous narrator), only three of the sixth-grade girls thought the author was female, while six of the sixth-grade girls perceived the author to be male.

Among eighth graders, 71 percent (or 5 out of 7) of the boys indicated that the author of “The Great Navigator” was male, while the remaining 29 percent (or 2 out of 7) of the boys perceived a female author. Again, it is interesting to note that the narrator of this text was a member of Columbus’s crew. All of the eighth-grade girls indicated that the author of “The Great Navigator” was male. For “The Untold
Story,” most of the boys believed that the author was male. Only one boy indicated a female author for “The Untold Story.” More of the eighth-grade girls (8 girls) thought the author of “The Untold Story” was a male, while five of the girls indicated a female author. Examples of student drawings can be found in Appendix I.

A disconcerting finding from this analysis is related to the students’ perceptions of female authors. On nine occasions, when the students perceived the author of either text to be female, both sixth graders and eighth graders made negative comments about the author. For example, male and female students indicated that the perceived female author was “not accurate” or “unreliable.” One female eighth grader indicated that she “could not believe all of [the text by the perceived female author] …because it could be exaggerated.” Another female eighth grader suggested that the perceived female author “doesn’t really know some information,” while another girl went so far as to say “she’s [the perceived female author] against history.” Two of the eighth-grade boys questioned the perceived female author’s credibility, with one flatly stating that the perceived female author is perpetrating a “lie” in her text. Although the students most often perceived the authors of the history texts as males, when they did perceive the author as a female, they discounted the author’s expertise and authority, believing her to be inaccurate, unreliable, and even a liar.

**Research question 5: What are the case study students’ perceptions of the two authors’ motives?**

Among the sixth-grade case study students, three out of the four students indicated that the author of “The Great Navigator” wants readers to think positively
about Columbus, with statements such as Columbus was a “great explorer” and a “hero.” One struggling sixth-grade reader stated that the author “wanted to give us information about history…just telling this so we know.” A similar finding emerged from the eighth-grade case study debriefing interviews. Three out of the four eighth graders in the case studies also indicated that the author of “The Great Navigator” wants readers to see Columbus in a good light, that Columbus was “a good man” and a “good explorer” who was “proud” of his accomplishments. One struggling eighth-grade reader said that the author’s motive was simply that the author “wants you to learn about your history.” This finding indicates that the students perceive the dominant narrative, in which Columbus is regarded as a hero, to be factually accurate. This is the story they have most often heard, so this is the story that they believe must be correct.

For “The Untold Story,” three of the sixth-grade case study students claimed that the author wants readers to know that Columbus was not a hero, with statements such as he was “not a good person.” The students noted that this author is “not happy” and “wants us to know how the Native Americans were treated.” These students mentioned the story being told from a differing point of view, in which Columbus was a “villain” who “spread diseases.” However, one sixth-grade case study student, a struggling reader, indicated that the author intended to paint a more balanced picture of Columbus. This student noted that the author “thinks Christopher Columbus is a good guy, but greedy…when it came to stuff that he wanted or needed, he became a different person.” Two of the eighth-grade case study students, both competent readers, also indicated that the author was trying to portray a more
balanced version of Columbus in “The Untold Story.” These students said that Columbus was “really mean to the Natives, but he did complete his voyage and face tough times,” and he was “a person who did good in the world, but went about it in the wrong way.” Even though “The Untold Story” does not actually portray a more balanced image of Columbus, it seems that the students are reluctant to embrace the possibility that Columbus might have had more selfish or sinister intentions, or that he may have caused harm to others. This may be a result of the authority asserted by the dominant narrative, which perpetuates the notion of Columbus’s heroism. Even though the students acknowledge that Columbus was not all good, they do not totally reject him as a hero. These patterns in the case study students’ debriefings suggest the powerful effects of a dominant narrative as depicted among the students’ renderings of the discovery of America.

The eighth-grade case study students who tend to struggle with reading had a different view of the author of “The Untold Story.” For example, one student claimed this author “wanted to let people know what she knows” and “tells you things you don’t already know…[this author] wants people to have fun reading the text, but learn something at the same time.” The remaining eighth-grade case study student indicated that the author of “The Untold Story” “wants you to learn about what he thinks instead of what another person thinks.” These students indicate an understanding that the author may be trying to influence the reader’s thinking about Columbus, according to a particular bias (“learn about what he thinks”).

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Summary of Key Findings from Study 2

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine how sixth graders come to understand authorship in history texts and learn to use this knowledge to read and understand history texts. By teaching the students to identify two types of authors (visible and anonymous) in history texts, I attempted to teach the students how to use these distinctions as a tool to read and understand history. The results of comprehension tests revealed no statistical differences, but the qualitative data from analysis of classroom observation and interviews suggested that the students may have untapped ways of knowing and understanding history texts, or what Wertsch (2002) refers to as using narrative as a mediational means in order to understand history texts. In Study 2, I learned that the dominant narrative students had acquired is a mediational tool that plays a critical role in shaping those deeper historical understandings. One indication of this pattern was many of the students’ willingness to ignore elements of the narrative I asked them to read.

Students’ Appropriation of Historical Narratives

From Study 2, I learned that most of the middle school students in my study have mastered the dominant “official” narrative (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994) as their version of the story of the discovery of America. In other words, when thinking about the discovery of America, most of the students start from the perspective that Columbus set sail from Europe in order to find a shorter route to Asia, but ended up on an island in the Caribbean and ultimately discovered America. Even if the students appropriate the dominant narrative as their own, eventually resisting or even rejecting elements of this narrative, they use it as a frame of reference for
constructing their own narratives and to interpret new (for them) information about the discovery of America. The dominant narrative acts as a mediational tool, affording the students opportunities to construct their own narratives, but at the same time constraining the students in what they might include in their narratives (Wertsch, 1998). This finding reiterates the authority and strength of the official narrative that is included in the history texts that the sixth and eighth graders had studied in their respective grade-level history curricula. The dominant narrative acts as a filter for historical interpretation, even in cases where the students resist or reject the dominant narrative.

**Students’ Retellings of Historical Narratives**

When reading historical narratives told from two different perspectives, the students were more likely to write longer retellings and to make evaluative comments for the text that represented a perspective that was less familiar to them. Specifically, the students wrote more and made more value comments when they read “The Untold Story,” the story of Columbus’s arrival in the Caribbean as told by a Native Taino. When retelling a text that is told from a familiar perspective (“The Great Navigator”), the students tended not to elaborate as much or to make evaluative comments. This finding indicates that the students assumed they do not need to explain as much for their readers when retelling the familiar dominant narrative. In other words, the students assumed that their readers shared the knowledge of the dominant narrative that permitted information to be omitted from the retelling. Furthermore, because the dominant narrative is accepted as the truth, there is less of a need for the students to make evaluative comments in their retellings.
Students’ Perceptions Regarding Differences Between Historical Narratives

The students were asked to consider the accuracy, comprehensibility, and pedagogical appropriateness of the two narratives about the discovery of America, one told from the perspective of a crew member (“The Great Navigator”), and the other told from the perspective of a Native Taino (“The Untold Story”). In this case, the students were divided on which text was easier to read and understand. In terms of which text was more accurate, the sixth graders were once again divided, but the eighth-grade students tended to believe that “The Untold Story” was more accurate. The sixth-grade students were divided yet again when asked to evaluate the pedagogical appropriateness of the two texts. Some sixth-graders said they would use “The Great Navigator” because it is a familiar story and they believe it to be the accurate account, while others said they would not use either narrative because they are both confusing. Many of the eighth graders, however, indicated that they would use both texts in order to teach students both sides of the story.

The Influence of Author’s Voice

For “The Great Navigator,” the author’s voice was familiar to most of the students. This is because this voice represents the official, dominant narrative account of the story of Columbus’s discovery of America that the students have most often read and heard about in school and from their textbooks. Because this text represents the dominant narrative, most of the students believed it to be relatively factual. Many of the students indicated that this author’s voice was credible because it was telling the story that they have heard many times throughout their school careers. In contrast, the students often expressed doubt in the credibility of “The
Untold Story.” Because this voice was unfamiliar to most students, they questioned the veracity of the facts. This finding suggests that the students have mastered the dominant narrative and use it as a mediational tool when reading texts related to Christopher Columbus and the discovery of America. Any new information that the students encounter about Columbus and his voyages to the New World is likely to be filtered through this dominant narrative. As Paxton (1997) concluded, students develop “deeply entrenched schemata” (p. 247) in regard to history, and it is difficult to break through this schemata with new information that allows for revised interpretations. In addition, the narrative of “The Great Navigator” also represents the dominant narrative that is included in most textbook accounts, and students often respect the perceived trustworthiness of their textbooks (Paxton, 1997; Wineburg, 2001).

Most of the students in Study 2 saw the authors of both texts as males. When students perceived the authors to be female, they frequently discounted the author’s knowledge, expertise, and credibility. Students assumed that a male author is a credible source of historical information, but a female author often lacks knowledge or is even “against history.” Wineburg (2001) noted that the role of women has often been portrayed literally in the margins of history, relegated to excerpts and sidebars in textbooks. Dominant official narratives of the past have tended to omit women’s voice in large part. Perhaps the middle school students in Study 2 have come to believe that women do not have a voice in the telling of the past, nor do they have a voice in the interpretation of the past as historians.
Students’ Perceptions of Authors’ Motives

The case study students provided insights into the student perceptions of the author’s motives. For “The Great Navigator,” six of the eight case study students stated that the author wants the reader to think that Christopher Columbus is a good man or a hero. Two of the case study students, both struggling readers, thought the author of “The Great Navigator” was simply stating facts in order for readers to learn history. For “The Untold Story,” three out of the four sixth-grade case study students stated that the author wants readers to know that Columbus was not a good person. The remaining sixth-grade case study student, along with two of the four eighth-grade case study students, believed that the author was trying to portray Columbus in a more balanced way. The remaining two eighth-grade case study students claimed that the author was trying to teach readers something.

These findings suggest that some of the case study students perceived the author of “The Great Navigator” attempting to perpetuate the dominant narrative and to simply state facts. In this case, the narrative is serving primarily in a referential function, in which readers are expected to use the narrative as a remembering device (Wertsch, 2002). The middle school case study students appear to understand this type of narrative’s referential function and the constraints it presents for thinking about history.

In terms of “The Untold Story,” the students appear to have some understanding that the author is attempting to offer an alternative perspective and to present the text as a thinking device (Wertsch, 2002). In providing an alternative perspective, the narrative’s primary function becomes dialogic, as it represents the
opportunity for multiple voices to be heard. The case study students in Study 2 appear to recognize the affordances offered by this type of narrative, as they perceived the author attempting to go beyond just stating facts to be learned in order to encourage students to think.

Summary

Taken as a whole, these findings indicate that although most of the middle school students in my study had mastered the dominant “official” narrative of the discovery of America, some of the students, especially among the eighth graders, showed some signs of moving toward appropriation and deeper historical understanding when the text opened up the possibilities for dialogue and interpretation.

Using historical narrative as a mediational tool offers affordances for interpretation, yet at the same time, presents constraints for interpretation (Wertsch, 1998). For example, when students read “The Untold Story,” which was not only different from but worked against the grain of the dominant narrative, they were more likely to enter into dialogic contact with the narrative and to include value comments in their retellings. In this case, historical narrative as a mediational tool affords students the opportunity to evaluate the portrayal of an event from an unfamiliar perspective.

On the other hand, the narrative constrained the possible interpretations of the event as well, as students rejected some of the information contained in “The Untold Story,” such as violence against the Natives because, as one student stated, “Christopher Columbus wouldn’t do that.” This statement may be a reflection of
Loewen’s (1995) assertion that one of the functions of social studies and history textbooks is “to indoctrinate blind patriotism” (p. 14), often through heroification. This statement also reinforces the notion that students have enormous respect for their textbooks in regard to trustworthiness (Paxton, 1997; Wineburg, 1991). Dominant narratives, often repeatedly included in social studies and history textbooks, become deeply ingrained within students’ perceptions of history, ultimately defining and many times limiting their historical understandings.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss more thoroughly the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings in Chapters 3 and 4. In addition, I will explore the implications for further research and for teaching and learning.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

I began this research project with specific questions in mind about middle school students and reading, visible authors, and history texts. The purpose of Study 1 was to examine how sixth graders come to understand authorship in history texts and learn how to use this knowledge to read and understand history texts. To begin, I wanted to know what prior understandings the sixth graders possessed in regard to authorship. I also wondered how classroom instruction might support student learning to identify visible authors in texts. In terms of history texts, specifically, I compared how visible authors and anonymous authors affected the students’ comprehension and recall of history text with anonymous and visible authors. My initial focus was on comprehension of historical texts with visible and anonymous authors as evaluated by a recall measure and answers to open-ended comprehension questions.

As I searched for answers to my questions, I began to understand that the issues I was investigating were more complex than I had initially understood. I realized that my sixth graders learned to consider specific linguistic features of a
history text in order to identify the rhetorical devices, or metadiscourse, that made an author more visible (Crismore, 1984). The sixth graders also learned to analyze the function of the metadiscourse or the linguistic cues that authors use to signal their intentions, as well as the author’s purpose for including the metadiscourse. In other words, the sixth graders were able to identify the author and to state what the author was trying to do, such as engage the reader or emphasize a point in the text. When compared to understanding anonymously authored history text, however, the sixth graders’ understandings of visible author did not appear to have a significant impact on their reading comprehension, specifically when written retellings and responses to open-ended comprehension questions were employed as measures.

Results from Study 1 indicated that the sixth graders were successful at identifying the textual evidence that indicated a visible author, and their interpretations of such authors served to make them suspicious of and, at times, to deny the visible author’s credibility. However, the sixth graders believed the anonymous authors to be beyond question, accepting the text as the truth. In fact, most of the students took the stance that a text with a visible author could not be trusted due to author bias, while a text with an anonymous author is free of bias, and therefore must contain credible factual information. Thus the sixth graders in Study 1 demonstrated a tendency to equate the study of history with the acquisition of facts and to rely on the textbook-style of historical writing to provide the unquestionable truth, while also developing mistrust for a more analytical style of historical writing, yet studies of historical understanding have pointed out that this style is likely to
reflect the uncertainty and ambiguity of historical knowledge that professional historians assume in their own scholarship (Wertsch, 2002; Wineburg, 2001).

As I searched for a way to interpret these results, I began to reframe my efforts to study how middle school students understand history texts. In teaching my students about authorship in history texts, I came to realize that I was attempting to teach the students how to use their prior knowledge of authors and of historical narrative as an interpretive tool to read and understand history.

As I reframed my research questions in terms of theories of historical understanding (Wineburg, 2001) and collective memory (Wertsch, 2002), I constructed a second study to delve deeper into the issues of author’s voice and reading history texts. I decided that the students and I would need to go beneath the surface features of the text (rhetorical devices and metadiscourse that serve to make the author more visible) if I expected them to be able to use their knowledge of authorship and historical narrative as a tool for interpreting history.

As I came to understand the complexity of authorship in history texts and how it influences readers, I realized that I would need to investigate further. Paxton’s (1997, 1999) research that examined how students respond to authentic historical writing suggested another path: ask middle school students to read and respond to historical narratives with distinct author’s voices that more closely resemble the type of writing that professional historians typically read and write. To understand how authorship shapes students’ interpretations of history texts, I decided to do a second study to examine how authors’ voices influence students’ interpretations of historical narratives. Based on Wertsch’s (2002) exploration of how collective memory is
constructed and how historical narratives can be used as mediational tools, I also examined how students’ prior understandings of a specific episode in American history (the discovery of America) shaped their understandings of written narratives with differing accounts and differing first person narrators.

In addition to reframing my study, I wondered what the effects of instruction and maturation might be on the students’ interpretations, and so I compared one group of sixth graders and one group of eighth graders. I also wanted to ensure that the students involved in the study all had some background knowledge about the same historical topic. In the state in which my school is located, students are expected to study American history in the fifth grade and in the eighth grade. By choosing students from the sixth grade and eighth grade, I felt confident that most students in Study 2 would have some general familiarity with the story of the discovery of America, at least how it is typically presented in social studies textbooks. This assumption of common background knowledge allowed me to select a topic (the discovery of America) that most students were familiar with and to design all the research-related tasks around that topic. Moreover, since Shanahan’s (1998) research indicated that students’ awareness of authors’ intentions changes over time, I was curious to see if the eighth-grade students’ perceptions of authorship in history texts would reflect differences when compared to the sixth-grade students’ perceptions.

Accordingly, the purpose of Study 2 was to examine how collective memory of historical events (Wertsch, 2002) influenced middle school students’ (sixth and eighth graders) interpretation of history in general and a specific historical event in
particular. Put another way, the purpose of Study 2 was to consider how students’ understanding of voiced versus authoritative textbook discourse was mediated by their previously learned narrative of the discovery of America. Results of Study 2 indicated that the middle school students had mastered, and possibly appropriated, narratives from history textbooks and other sources that served to mediate how they read, write about, discuss, and interpret history. Since most of the students I worked with reported learning history from textbooks and teachers, the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) of the official narratives dominated what these students have come to know as history. In other words, the students’ distrust of voiced narrative was a result of their assumptions about the authoritative nature of history texts rather than just metadiscoursal cues that signal an author’s intentions or hesitations.

In this chapter, I will present the conclusions I have drawn from the two studies I conducted. I will then discuss implications for future research. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with implications for teaching and learning.

Study 1: The Effects of Visible Author on Reading History: History Texts as Remembering Devices

In this study, I was interested in investigating the understandings that sixth graders had regarding the concept of author’s voice. For instance, were they familiar with the concept? How would they define it? Could they identify elements of author’s voice in a text? In addition, I wanted to know how classroom instruction could support student learning in regard to understanding and identifying visible authors in history texts. Another question I had related to how visible authors in
history texts influenced students’ comprehension and recall. Finally, I was curious to know what conclusions the sixth graders would draw in regard to texts with visible authors and texts with anonymous authors. For example, would they prefer one type of text to the other? Would they find texts with visible authors easier to read and understand? Would they believe one type of text to be more credible than the other?

From the beginning of Study 1, the sixth-grade students who participated in the project demonstrated their knowledge of authorship. Evidence for this finding came from transcripts of videotaped whole-class discussions. The concept of author’s voice was familiar to most of the students, although they defined the concept in a number of different ways. Some students defined author’s voice as the author’s style, while others saw author’s voice to be the message, moral, or lesson that the author was trying to convey through writing. One student went as far as to say that the author’s voice could give the reader insights into the author’s personality. Shanahan (1998) asserted that until recently, most elementary readers had not been taught much about author’s voice. In addition, most research into the idea of authorship and its relationship to voice has focused mainly on college students. These facts may help explain why the sixth graders in this study do not have a shared understanding or even common language to talk about the concept of author’s voice. Shanahan (1998) also argued that, based on some evidence, children do think about authors, and this thinking develops and changes over time. More specifically, children’s awareness of authors and author’s voice seems to increase with learning (Shanahan, 1992). Again, this may help to explain the wide range of responses among my students: because middle school students vary so greatly in their development, and because they may all
have different degrees of familiarity with the concept of author’s voice, their
definitions and understandings of the concept exhibit a wide range. However, it is
clear that most of the sixth graders had some understanding of author’s voice and
recognized the presence of a person behind the text.

Furthermore, the sixth graders demonstrated an understanding that author’s
voice represents a real person whose intent is to communicate with readers. This
evidence comes from the double-entry diaries (DEDs) that the sixth graders filled out
while reading a history text with a visible author. During this task, the students were
asked to read a history text with a visible author and to take note of the textual
evidence that made the author visible. The students then used the DED to record
evidence of a visible author (in terms of rhetorical devices such as writing in first
person, addressing the reader, and using attitudinal metadiscourse) in the left column
of the DED and to explain the author’s purpose for including the rhetorical devices
that made the author more visible in the right column. Although some of the students
were more successful than others, all of the students in Study 1 (n=17) were able to
identify at least some evidence of a visible author and to indicate the author’s
intentions for including the rhetorical devices. These intentions most often were
perceived by the sixth graders to represent dialogic purposes, such as expressing
opinions or sharing thoughts, addressing the reader, persuading the reader, and
engaging or including the reader. In other words, not only did the sixth graders
recognize the author as a person behind the text, they also recognized the author as a
person who intentionally makes attempts to engage the reader in a dialogue about a
particular topic. This finding indicates that the sixth graders have at least an
emerging understanding of the dialogic nature of text: texts have the capacity to invite readers into conversations with authors.

As mentioned above, students’ understanding of author develops over time and is influenced by their learning (Shanahan, 1992, 1998). Beck and her colleagues (Beck et al., 1996; Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997; McKeown et al., 1996) had success in teaching teachers how to lead elementary students in questioning the author. After students learned this strategy, student participation in classroom discussions increased as teacher talk decreased. In addition, student responses became longer and more complex with an emphasis on building meaning. Students also worked together more collaboratively to build meaning through their class discussions. Tierney and his colleagues (Tierney et al., 1987) found that students’ awareness of authors increased through writing and conferencing activities.

The findings from these previous studies dovetail with my own findings. From Study 1, it appears that classroom instruction can support middle school students’ learning in regard to identifying visible authors in history texts. This finding is supported by the students’ success on the double-entry diaries (DEDs) as mentioned above. Following our whole-class discussions, mini-lesson, and guided practice, the students demonstrated success in identifying the textual evidence (the metadiscourse) that indicated the presence of a visible author. The students then successfully defined the function of the metadiscourse, indicating that they understood how and why an author might choose to make himself or herself more visible to the readers. Thus classroom instruction can influence students’ understanding of authorship, at least in terms of
identifying and describing the author with his or her own ways of describing historical events.

One finding from Study 1 that surprised me was in regard to the students’ reading comprehension and recall of a text with a visible author. I had made the assumption that if the students can see a visible author as a real person behind the text, someone with whom they could engage in a dialogue about the text, this realization would lead to increased student comprehension and recall of the author’s meaning. Furthermore, I assumed that simple measures of comprehension and recall would favor a text with a visible author when compared to a text with an anonymous author. What I found, however, was that there were no significant differences for the comprehension and recall tasks between the anonymous author and the visible author. This finding suggests that the students’ attention to the surface-level features of author visibility does not necessarily impact comprehension and recall to a significant degree. Based on this interpretation, regardless of the degree of author visibility, the sixth graders appear to be relatively successful at remembering factual information.

Another way to interpret this finding, one that is grounded in previous studies (Seixas, 1993), relates to the functions that the students may have ascribed to the texts. It may be that the sixth graders essentially ignored the metadiscoursal features of the visible author text, attending mostly to the facts they thought they would need to remember for the comprehension and recall tasks. This finding indicates that the students may have regarded both types of texts as “remembering devices,” as opposed to “thinking devices” that “involves a more dynamic and interactive stance on the part of the individual employing it” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 161). By viewing the two texts as
remembering devices, the salient information for the students was represented by the facts contained within the texts, not by the information about the author or the author’s perspective. From this analysis, the sixth graders’ purpose in reading the texts was to remember information, not to analyze the information or the author’s intentions “as a starting point for an active dialogue” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 161). Any metadiscoursal features were stripped away during the reading, and thus did not affect measures of comprehension and recall. The students’ assumption was that they were to read the text for facts to be remembered, which they did equally well, whether the text contained the metadiscourse that made the author visible or not.

Later, when I questioned the students about their perceptions of the texts, it became clear that some sixth graders found the visible author to be “confusing” and they believed such authors added too much “extra” information to the text. In general, these types of comments came from the students who were less successful readers than their peers. These sixth graders indicated that the metadiscourse added by the presence of the visible author made the text too long and cumbersome for their preferences. To illustrate, one case study student stated that the anonymous author text had “just facts, with no ideas that would confuse you.” In contrast, this same case study student said the text with the visible author “had a lot of things going on at once.” A second case study student said, “You have to analyze the writing [of a text with a visible author], and it takes a long time and confuses you.” It appeared that removing the author’s presence from the text stripped away elements that were confusing and that had the potential to interfere with comprehension and recall, at
least for some sixth-grade readers, especially those who may be less successful readers.

This finding stands in opposition to some previous studies in which students’ awareness of the author and/or author visibility had a positive impact on comprehension and recall. For example, college women in Nolen’s (1995) study indicated that they had a greater understanding of a statistics text when the author was visible. Similarly, Paxton (1997) reported that the high school students in his study developed a deeper understanding of a history text with a visible author. This contrast may be related to the development of readers’ abilities to use their knowledge of authorship to help them comprehend and recall texts. The sixth graders in Study 1 may have lacked the sophistication of the college and high school readers, simply due to developmental and maturational differences. However, it may also be the case that the comprehension and recall measures used in my study did not tap into how voiced texts may foster thinking and further exploration (Wertsch, 2002).

Nevertheless, Tierney and his colleagues (1987) indicated that elementary students demonstrated higher recall of text information when they participated in classes where there was an emphasis on author awareness. Furthermore, these students tended to read more critically. As mentioned above, Beck and her colleagues (Beck et al., 1996; Beck et al., 1997; McKeown et al., 1996) also worked with elementary children. After learning the Questioning the Author strategy, students demonstrated more complex responses to the text, indicating a deeper understanding. These studies suggest that elementary students are capable of learning
to use their knowledge of authorship to read and comprehend texts when approaches to author awareness are explicitly taught as interpretive strategies.

Although the sixth graders in Study 1 demonstrated that they had some understanding of author’s voice, it seems that they were unable to use the visibility of the author to consider issues and ideas in the text. Despite the instruction I provided, author visibility posed a challenge to some of the readers. Because students develop their awareness of authors over time (Shanahan, 1992; 1998), this may simply be an indication that my students needed more time and repeated exposure to the concept in order to build their understanding of author and author’s voice, and how to use this knowledge to enhance their reading experiences. Another possibility is that the measures I used, a written retelling task and written answers to open-ended comprehension questions, may have been too limiting to allow students to demonstrate more complex thinking about the texts and the authors.

The results of Study 1 also indicated that the sixth graders did not trust the visible author to be as accurate and credible as the anonymous author. Although this was not my intention, many of the students came to believe that a visible author, who reveals opinions, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs and who shows bias, cannot be trusted to be giving readers the facts. In this respect, the sixth graders in Study 1 demonstrated a certain wisdom regarding authors and texts: they became suspicious of an author who expresses uncertainty or bias. On the one hand, the sixth graders became critical readers of the visible author text. On the other hand, they came to see bias as a liability, as an indication that a text was not credible, rather than as a means for understanding a certain perspective.

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Furthermore, many of the students indicated that if an author is anonymous, and by extension authoritative, the author’s role is to transmit straight facts to readers and to avoid his or her personal biases. Unfortunately, the students did not come away from this instructional unit with the understanding that there can be bias in any text, whether that bias is overt or covert, and that it may serve readers well to regard all texts with some degree of suspicion. History and social studies textbooks are typically written in an authoritative, anonymous, distant way (Seixas, 1993, Wertsch, 2002). It seems that the sixth graders in Study 1 believe this is how history or social studies should be thought about and written. They respected and accepted the authority of the textbook to the degree that it is beyond question, and they seemed to believe that a text written in a way that reveals an author’s attitudes and opinions cannot be trusted to be accurate. The sixth graders appear to believe that there is one right way to think about and write about history, and that way is to conceal any bias or uncertainty. Accordingly, this finding should have come as no surprise, since this is how the students have most likely been learning about history and social studies all their lives.

Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Turning Point

Based on the findings from Study 1, I returned to the data on the videotapes and transcripts of my classroom instruction for another point of view. One trend that I noticed in the transcripts was that our class discussion spent a lot of time talking about a visible author and how a visible author might reveal biases. We focused on the surface features of the text to help us identify visible authors, but we did not spend much time talking about anonymous authors and the biases they might conceal.
For example, in this exchange, the students and I discussed the importance of knowledge of metadiscourse for identifying author bias:

T: Why is knowledge of metadiscourse important?
S15: If you know a lot about metadiscourse, you can notice when the author is using it.
T: You want to add to that, Nathan? What did your group say?
S5: So you can know what is behind the writing.
T: What do you mean by that?
[no response]
T: What do you guys think he means by that: To know what is behind the writing?
S16: Probably like what the author is thinking, like what they were thinking behind that.
S9: The way people hide behind like the story, or maybe like sort of like the author, his way of thinking.
T: OK. What was the one word we talked about yesterday, that means that the author could lean toward one side or the other?
Ss: Bias.
T: OK. So why would that be important in historical writing? Why would you need to understand the author’s bias?
S1: Because if he talked about one side, he might like only talk about the good stuff and leave out all the bad things.
In this discussion, we talked about how the metadiscourse used by a visible author can help readers identify bias, but we did not discuss how texts with anonymous authors may contain tacit biases. Perhaps the emphasis on using metadiscourse to identify bias in texts written by visible authors, along with the omission of the possibility of bias in anonymous author texts, constrained students’ thinking in terms of visible author. Students came to believe that a text with a visible author and its more explicit biases is less accurate and credible than a text with an anonymous author and no explicitly revealed biases.

Nystrand’s (1997) scheme for analyzing the classroom discourse indicated that my use of authentic questions was inconsistent throughout Study 1, ranging from only 38 percent to 97 percent of the total questions I asked of the students across our discussions. This means that during some classroom discussions, I infrequently asked questions of the students for which I was looking for authentic answers, as opposed to typical “teacher” questions, for which the answer is already known by the teacher. However, during other discussions, I asked many authentic questions for which I was seeking real answers. In other words, during some discussions, when I asked fewer authentic questions, I played the role of the expert, transmitting knowledge to the students. During other discussions, the students and I worked as co-creators of knowledge. These were the discussions in which I asked a high number of authentic questions. During these discussions, we worked together to build our understanding of authorship in history texts.

In addition to the inconsistent use of authentic questions, my use of uptake was relatively low. Uptake refers to the instances where the teacher picks up on a
line of reasoning or a topic of discussion introduced by a student (Nystrand, 1997). In my analysis, I found that I often steered class discussions in the directions that I had predetermined and neglected to pick up threads of discussion that students had offered. In fact, on one day of Study 1, I did not ask any questions at all in which I took up a topic introduced by a student. At most, only 34 percent of the total questions asked in one day represented uptake. This suggests to me that I could have been more alert to students’ input into class discussions, acknowledging and valuing their contributions to our shared goal of constructing knowledge, even if the learning strayed from the path I had in mind.

Furthermore, my evaluation of student comments tended to be low-quality responses that did nothing to challenge or to extend students’ thinking. For example, when students made comments during many class discussions, I frequently acknowledged their participation by saying, “OK” or “Good.” But I very rarely responded to students with specific evaluative statements that would help them extend their thinking or challenge their thinking.

Nystrand (1997) also found that most teachers are inconsistent in their use of authentic questions, uptake, and high-quality evaluation. Based on this analysis, I was certainly guilty of this inconsistency throughout Study 1. I also determined that I could have been more sensitive to the students’ ideas as we worked through the concepts of author’s voice and visible author. I could have encouraged the students more to think through complex issues, such as one student’s thinking about how authorship can be related to social action, or another student’s idea about authors “hiding” behind their words. As Wilkinson and Silliman (2000) pointed out, “…the
language used by teachers and students determines what is learned and how learning takes place” (p. 337). I was successful in teaching my students about visible author in a surface-level way, but the nature of the classroom discourse revealed that deeper understanding would require an extended commitment.

Study 2: The Effects of Author’s Voice on Interpreting History:

History Texts as Thinking Devices

The purpose of the second study was to further investigate students’ perceptions of authors of history texts written from different perspectives. In other words, how do different authors’ voices in history texts influence students’ interpretations of those texts? What perceptions of authors do students develop based on author’s voices? Furthermore, I was curious to know how authorship might impact students’ development of deeper historical understandings, that is, how internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) fosters thinking and interpreting beyond the information given.

In Study 2, I worked with two groups of students: one group of sixth graders and one group of eighth graders. I selected these two grade-level groups because in my school’s social studies program students in fifth grade and then again in eighth grade receive instruction in American history. I felt confident that I could select a topic for the students to read and write about that would be familiar to at least most of the students in the two groups. In addition, I was curious to see the differences that emerged between the two grade levels as there is some evidence that students’ understandings of authorship in literature change over time (Shanahan, 1998). I
wanted to see if similar changes in understanding of authorship would be evident between sixth and eighth graders reading history texts.

The students began by writing their own historical narratives about the discovery of America. This task was intended to identify the narratives that the students had already mastered or appropriated about this historical event. Most of the student narratives were based on the “official narrative” (Wertsch, 2002) that dominates most history textbooks and that is accepted by many people in our society (Seixas, 1993): Christopher Columbus, the brave and heroic explorer, was looking for a shorter route to Asia when he discovered America. The fact that certain historical narratives are frequently accepted and repeated, especially in history textbooks, may indicate a reliance on a schematic narrative template (Wertsch, 2002). Wertsch (2002) suggested that social studies and history textbooks may represent collections of schematic narrative templates, in which the same stories are told over and again, reinforcing the stories as the official versions of the past. As students hear and read these stories time and again, they develop “deeply entrenched schemata” (Paxton, 1997, p. 247) for these stories and find it difficult to accept new information that may not fit within the template or the schema. In addition, students tend to respect the authority of their textbooks (Paxton, 1997). For these reasons, the accounts of the past that students have learned may impede historical thinking.

Very few of the student narratives in Study 2 contained voices that resisted or rejected the official narrative, or contained the students’ own voices, a finding analogous to that of Wertsch and O’Connor (1994). This finding also reinforces the notion that an official narrative is incredibly strong, that is, once students have
mastered an official narrative, it is often difficult for students to amend it, even in light of learning new information about the topic (Loewen, 1995; Paxton, 1999; Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994; Wineburg, 2001). Put another way, the students used a schematic narrative template as a tool to help them write their narratives (Wertsch, 2002). The students repeated the same story that they had read or heard many times, including the details of characters, settings, and events to suit the particular historical episode about which they were writing.

In interviews with the case study students, I came to realize that some of the students in Study 2 indicated that they relied primarily on the information they had learned from teachers or from textbooks to shape their narratives. This finding supports the assertion that teachers of social studies and history rely heavily on textbooks, repeating the official narrative that students have heard throughout their school careers (Gabella, 1994; Loewen, 1995; Paxton, 1999; Wineburg, 2001). Over time, students learn to respect and accept the official narrative without question (Wineburg, 2001). Again, this may indicate that the students rely on a schematic narrative template as a tool for writing their own narratives, supplying the specific characters, settings, and events for the historical episode on which they are focusing (Wertsch, 2002).

The greatest challenge to writing the historical narratives, as reported by the students in Study 2, was that it was difficult to remember specific details, such as names and dates. From this finding, it seems that the students believe the importance of history is in the ability to remember names and dates, rather than in the ability to interpret past events. In other words, the students place a greater emphasis on the
referential function of historical narratives, as opposed to the dialogic function (Wertsch, 2002). This belief is reinforced by social studies and history textbooks, which are typically huge in size and crammed full of facts. According to Loewen (1995), “None of the facts is [sic] remembered, because they are presented simply as one damn thing after another” (p. 15). McKeown and Beck (1998) found that when students were asked to produce retellings after reading passages from social studies textbooks, the students’ retellings often did not seem related to the ideas in the text and contained factual errors. Further, these students reported that they could not remember the information they had read. Students have learned that the discipline of social studies and history is represented simply as a listing of facts that can be found in a textbook, yet because textbooks lack a coherent narrative structure, students often struggle to organize and remember historical information.

From another perspective, the difficulty that students have in remembering details about historical events may be related to their reliance on schematic narrative templates (Wertsch, 2002). If students rely on schematic narrative templates as a tool for mediating historical understandings, they essentially learn a generalized narrative upon which many historical accounts are based. As they learn about different episodes in history, students must provide specific characters, settings, and events within the schematic narrative template. In other words, students learn the same story in history over and over, but they must account for specific details from different historical episodes. This reliance on the schematic narrative template, for example, may account for my students’ difficulties in remembering specific details, such as the
names of Columbus’s ships, and may explain why the students exhibited confusion in regard to specific characters, settings, and events.

The students in Study 2 also read two different narratives about Columbus’s discovery of America, told from two opposing perspectives. “The Great Navigator” was told from the perspective of a member of Columbus’s crew, while “The Untold Story” was told from the perspective of a native Taino. After reading these texts, the students were asked to write retellings. Both the sixth graders and the eighth graders tended to write slightly longer retellings of the text told from the native perspective. In addition, when the retellings were scored for gist and key phrases, both groups received slightly higher scores for their retellings of the text told from the native perspective.

On the one hand, perhaps the students recognized “The Great Navigator” as the official narrative. If so, it is possible that the students assumed that most readers of their retellings know the official narrative, and therefore assumed that the readers have a certain amount of background knowledge about Columbus’s discovery of America. Thus it could be that the students did not feel the need to include every detail in their retellings of “The Great Navigator.” They may have assumed that certain key phrases could be omitted, and readers would still be able to comprehend the retelling. On the other hand, “The Untold Story,” told from the Native perspective, contains unfamiliar information, requiring students to explain more and include more of the key phrases, resulting in longer retellings. “The Untold Story” does not fit into the familiar schematic narrative template, and thus the students had to explain more about it to their readers.
In the students’ retellings, both the sixth-grade and the eighth-grade students were more likely to enter into dialogic contact (Wertsch, 2002) with “The Untold Story” than with “The Great Navigator.” In other words, the students were more likely to insert their own voices into their retellings of “The Untold Story” than “The Great Navigator.” The students entered into the dialogue by making positive or negative evaluative comments and by assuming the role of the narrator, writing in first person. Furthermore, the eighth graders were more likely than the sixth graders to enter into dialogic contact with both texts. Among eighteen sixth graders, five of them made value comments or wrote from a first person perspective in their retelling of “The Untold Story.” No sixth grader entered into dialogic contact with “The Great Navigator.” Out of twenty eighth graders, fourteen students included value comments or wrote from a first person perspective when constructing their retelling of “The Untold Story.” Of those fourteen students, five of them also entered into dialogic contact with “The Great Navigator.” However, none of the students demonstrated dialogic contact with “The Great Navigator” only. This finding indicates that the students, especially the eighth graders, have an understanding of the dialogic function of a historical narrative. By including value comments and first person perspectives in their retellings, these students incorporated their own voices into the historical narrative. In other words, these students have appropriated the historical narratives and have made them their own (Bakhtin, 1981).

When asked to evaluate the accuracy of the two texts, the sixth graders were divided over which text was the more accurate account. The eighth graders, however, tended to indicate that “The Untold Story” (the Native perspective) was more
accurate than “The Great Navigator,” the crewmember perspective. But when asked which text they would use to teach other students about the discovery of Columbus, most sixth graders noted that they would use “The Great Navigator” because it is “more accurate,” likely because it is the account that they have repeatedly learned about in school. One student stated that he would use “[“The Great Navigator”] because that [is] what I was told and they should have the same knowledge as me.” Again, this finding highlights the strength of an official narrative (Loewen, 1995; Paxton, 1999; Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994; Wineburg, 2001) built on a schematic narrative template (Wertsch, 2002). The sixth graders, in particular, seemed to respect and accept the dominance of the official narrative.

On the other hand, half of the eighth-grade students involved in the study said that they would use both texts to teach other children so that they could present both sides of the story. For example, one eighth grader stated that she would use “both, because they have good information on both sides and if you have both sides you can get the whole entire story.” Another eighth grader claimed, “I would use both texts, because they show how some people thought Mr. Columbus was a great leader, and that others thought that he was horrible and cruel.” The desire of many eighth graders to present opposing perspectives may be evidence of more sophisticated understandings of authorship (Shanahan, 1998) and deeper historical understanding that comes as a result of experience, instruction, and increased familiarity with different viewpoints of historical events (Wineburg, 2001).
Images of the Author: History as a Man’s World

When the sixth graders and eighth graders in Study 2 were asked to draw pictures of the perceived authors of the two history texts, most of the students drew men. This finding is similar to that of Wineburg (2001), who found that when asked to draw historical figures, most fifth-grade and eighth-grade students in the study, whether boys or girls, drew male figures. Wineburg interpreted this finding as evidence that students do not see women as playing a major role in history. In Study 2, it seems that the middle school students do not tend to see women as authors of history. Interestingly, when the students in Study 2 did see women as authors of history, they often evaluated the authors negatively, stating that the female authors were “not accurate” or “unreliable.” In the few instances when the students did perceive the authors of the history texts as women, they were not thought to be experts in the field. In fact, their knowledge was discounted and regarded with overt suspicion. This finding indicates that the middle school students do not believe women have a legitimate voice in the telling of history.

Finally, the case study students were asked about the authors’ motives in writing the two history texts, “The Great Navigator” (crewmember perspective) and “The Untold Story” (Native perspective). For “The Great Navigator,” the students indicated that the author wanted readers to know that Columbus was “a great explorer” and a “hero.” The author was thought to be “proud” of Columbus and perceived as wanting readers to learn about history. Although some students noted that “The Untold Story” revealed the darker side of Columbus (he was a “villain”),
other students did not seem to be able to relinquish the “hero” concept from the
official narrative of the discovery of America. For instance, one student maintained
that Columbus was a “good person,” but he simply did some bad things in order to
achieve his goals. Again, even in light of conflicting information, some students were
not willing or able to completely resist the official narrative of the discovery of
America, in which Columbus is portrayed as a brave hero. Once again, the
dominance of the official narrative based on the schematic narrative template is
evident (Loewen, 1995; Paxton, 1999; Wertsch, 2002; Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994;
Wineburg, 2001).

From Visible Author and Author’s Voice to Historical Thinking:

A Teacher-Research’s Journey

When I began my research, I was interested in the notion of a visible author as
conceptualized by Nolen (1995) and Paxton (1997). I assumed that if a student could
identify a visible author in a history text, then the student would be able to interact
with the author, improving comprehension and recall of the text. What I found was
that simply looking at surface-level text structure in order to determine the visibility
of an author does not necessarily lead to an interaction with the author of the text.
Even though the sixth graders in Study 1 learned to identify a visible author by
looking for a first-person perspective, reader address, and attitudinal metadiscourse,
many of the students believed that a visible author was less likely to provide accurate
facts and to be credible. This is similar to Paxton’s (1997) finding that even if a
history text had a visible author (as opposed to an anonymous, authoritative author)
who engaged students in an imagined conversation, the students were likely to
believe that the text with the visible author was not legitimate because it did not represent “the way ‘you’re supposed to write’” about history (p. 247).

The students in Study 1 would choose to present history as a listing of facts that could be deemed correct or incorrect, rather than offer the option of thinking through opposing facts or viewpoints. Thus my students’ view of teaching history is strongly rooted in the “one damn thing after another” school of thought. They don’t believe that history should be open to interpretation, and they lack the deep understanding characterized by Wineburg’s (2001) historical thinking.

The sixth-grade students who participated in Study 1 came away from the instructional unit on visible author with a conclusion that I had not intended. We had talked at length about how a visible author makes his or her biases known to the reader. An anonymous author, on the other hand, may conceal biases. Exposition, such as that found in social studies textbooks, often has a “corporate voice of authority” (Shanahan, 1992, p. 133) that may be used to mask biases. The sixth graders came to believe that if bias was overt in a text, the author was not to be trusted, but they did not recognize that anonymously written texts could conceal biases.

The more promising results from Study 1 indicate that the sixth graders showed evidence of emerging understandings of the dialogic nature of historical narrative. Even though the sixth graders indicated that they did not trust the visible author text to be credible, and they believed the anonymous text to be purely and accurately factual, this was evidence to me that they read the visible author text more critically than they read the anonymous author text. This pattern suggests an
emerging understanding of authorship and critical reading of a text with a visible author that students could build upon and investigate how bias might be masked in an anonymously written text.

During Study 1 and especially upon the completion of data collection, my concept of a visible author as a pedagogical tool started to evolve. I began by thinking of a visible author as one who could be observed by a reader through metadiscoursal cues. However, the ability to see an author in the surface structure of the text does not mean that a reader will enter into a dialogue with the author. In my mind, the notion of author’s voice became more compelling, as the opportunity of participation in a discussion or a dialogue is inherent in the concept of voice. While a visible author suggests contact with the author, an author’s voice suggests a conversation with the author. A visible author reveals the person behind the text, along with biases, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and opinions. The metaphor invites the reader simply to observe the visible author. An author’s voice also indicates the author’s presence behind the text, but the reader cannot just stand back and observe the author at a distance and wait for the author to reveal biases, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and opinions. An author’s voice invites the reader to enter into a discussion or a dialogue with the author. But readers may or may not notice the invitation, or they may reject it altogether. In terms of my teaching, I came to understand that it is not enough to teach my students how to see an author; it is critical for me to teach students how to enter into a dialogue with an author.

Thus Study 2 emphasized the notion of author’s voice. Sixth graders and eighth graders were asked to study two texts, told from different perspectives, each
with a distinctive author’s voice. According to Crismore (1984), an author’s voice can be heard in a “text that establishes an interpersonal relationship between the writer and the reader” (p. 279). This view also makes the assumption that an author’s voice needs to simply be present in a text in order for a reader to make an interpersonal connection with the author. However, Study 2 indicates that a text can have a clear author’s voice, but the reader can still fail to establish an interpersonal relationship with the author. In fact, it seems that an author’s voice can create distance between the author and the reader, such as when students rejected the credibility of the author of “The Untold Story.” While both texts in Study 2 were written with a clear author’s voice, students reacted differently to the two texts.

Most of the students in Study 2 accepted, or at least recognized, “The Great Navigator” (the crewmember perspective) as the official narrative of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, although a few of the students did resist this narrative. A few of the students were open to considering “The Untold Story” (the Native perspective) as a valid, opposing point of view. But other students rejected “The Untold Story” outright. Regardless of whether the students were open to the message in “The Untold Story” or were resistant to it, the point is that the students were more likely to enter into dialogic contact with “The Untold Story,” which offered an alternative voice to the familiar story of “The Great Navigator.” In order for students to want to enter into a dialogue with the author, it seems that the text has to contain a voice that students find compelling, even if that means it is from a controversial perspective. A narrative such as “The Great Navigator” that students
have heard over and over, a narrative that is built on a familiar schematic narrative template, lacks this ability to compel dialogue.

However, for some of the students in Study 2, a female perspective was frequently dismissed as invalid. When a text was believed to have a female voice behind it, the author was deemed inaccurate, unreliable, or even “against history.” This finding highlights the fact that women have very little voice in history in a number of ways. They are frequently left out of history textbooks, and therefore they are frequently left out of students’ images of history (Wineburg, 2000). And according to my research in Study 2, they are not regarded as experts in telling history. They have no authority. The students were more likely to credit perceived male voices with an accurate historical account, and they were less likely to trust the perceived female authors to tell the truth about the past. It is a complex issue, because although the students in Study 2 seemed more likely to enter into a dialogue with a text with an alternative voice (including that of a woman), they did not necessarily perceive that voice as accurate, knowledgeable, or trustworthy.

An official or dominant narrative is hard for students to resist. This is evidenced by the fact that many of the students in Study 2 based their written historical narratives about the discovery of America on the official narrative of Columbus’s journey to America that most people in this country accept. The students frequently stated that this is the story they have heard the most often or that they have been taught in school repeatedly, so this is the historical account they believe to be true. Many students achieve mastery of the historical narratives they learn from their social studies textbooks and teachers, and tend not to adjust their narratives, even in
the face of new or conflicting information. This finding reinforces the conclusion drawn by several studies and authors: the authority of “official” histories often remains unchallenged by students, and even by teachers (Loewen, 1995; Paxton, 1999; Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994; Wineburg, 2001). Furthermore, these types of official histories are based on schematic narrative templates, in which the same generalized story is told over and over within a given culture (Wertsch, 2002). Even the students who seem to be most dissatisfied with the official narrative of a particular historical episode tend to use the official narrative to some degree to explain their perspective and understanding of the episode. For example, in Study 2, one student began her written historical narrative about the discovery of America with “What I learned in class about the discovery of America was that Christopher Columbus set out on a journey towards America in 1492.” She then proceeded to reproduce the official narrative of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America. It was only after reproducing the official narrative that the student challenged it by recasting the event from the Native American perspective. She marked her resistance to the official narrative with: “What I think really happened was….” Official narratives, built on schematic narrative templates, are typically respected and accepted to the point that most students can accurately reproduce them, and very few students believe that these narratives are to be questioned or challenged.

The students’ responses to the two different texts in Study 2 emphasize the power of narrative. Cultural tools, such as historical narratives, shape our understanding of the past (Wertsch, 2002). Narratives introduce bias (Wertsch, 2002), as Bakhtin (1986) pointed out, “there are not voiceless words which belong to
no one” (p. 124). Historical narratives allow us to tell stories of our past from specific, multiple, personal perspectives. Furthermore, historical narratives allow us look at our past and to ask, “Which story am I a part of?” (Wertsch, 2002).

For middle school students, adolescent life is all about trying to figure out which story they are a part of. For many middle school students, they are not a part of the stories of our past. History and social studies textbooks strive to represent a collective voice of our past, but they come across as “voiceless words which belong to no one.” Especially in terms of history textbooks, many students do not hear their voices and the voices of their peers.

Throughout this project, I have struggled to find my voice as a teacher researcher. I began with one study, which led to another. As my project evolved, so did my thinking. At the beginning of this project, I focused on the concept of a visible author in history texts. But as I learned more, I began to realize that the issues I was investigating were more complex than I had initially understood. The notion of a visible author gave way to the notion of author’s voice. My thinking evolved from helping students to observe a visible author to helping students participate in a dialogue prompted by an author’s voice.

I also grew to understand that reading history is linked to developing true historical understanding, as conceptualized by Wineburg (2001). Reading and understanding history in this way requires more than the ability to comprehend facts and to recall names and dates. As noted by Wineburg (2001), the study of history includes specific ways of reading, which result in deeper ways of knowing. Developing historical understanding in our students means nurturing the ability to
read and think critically. Critical reading and thinking are essential for our students. In fact, these skills are essential for all citizens in our society, who are bombarded with messages about our world every day. We need only to consider the messages that are constantly being thrust upon members of our society, for example, through the media or in political campaigns, to understand that being an informed citizen in a democracy demands critical skills. Meaningful participation in a democratic society carries with it the very responsibility of critical thinking. By helping our students to develop historical understanding, we can teach students ways of deeper reading, which will support them in learning deeper ways of knowing. Not only will we be helping students critically read the words they encounter, but we will also help students critically read and know the world around them.

Implications for Future Research

Future research in the area of historical thinking will focus on the best ways for teachers and middle school students to learn how to read deeply, to challenge, and to interpret history texts. For example, how can teachers teach middle school students to learn to use historical narratives from different perspectives as thinking devices? More specifically, how can teachers and students learn to question how, by whom, and for whom are official narratives produced, consumed, and used? To take it a step further, how can teachers and students learn to resist the dominant narratives they frequently find in their textbooks? Once students resist the dominant narratives of collective memory, how can their use their resistance to change the world around them? Research presents the means to help us understand how teachers and students might use their knowledge of official narratives to take social action.
Investigations related to author’s voice should include studies about how historical narratives with author’s voice influence students’ understandings of what history is and how it should be read. It would also be beneficial to investigate how author’s voice in history texts can be used to teach students to challenge and to resist official narratives. For example, how does one author’s voice respond to another? Which voices do students tend to accept and which do they tend to reject? How can students learn to pay attention to wide range of voices, particularly those that have been previously silenced?

An important line of research related to author’s voice in historical narratives would investigate how students of different races, ethnicities, and backgrounds (particularly African America, Native American, and Latino students) read and interpret historical narratives (Porat, 2004). The voices of students who have been alienated throughout history and by history education are particularly valuable to investigations of history, collective memory, and the ways in which the past is documented and passed on to future generations. Do these students perceive themselves as a part of a particular story or stories of the past? If so, which ones? How do these students perceive official narratives? Do these students tend to master the official narratives? Do they appropriate the official narratives (insert their own voices), or do they resist or even reject them? If students are taught how to resist and/or reject the official narratives, how can they use this resistance to engender social action? Once again, research along these lines opens up the possibility for social justice and action.
This same line of questioning could be applied to issues of gender. Official narratives tend to omit the voices of women. Future research studies need to focus on how history texts by and about women shape students’ historical understandings and their own historical narratives.

It would also be helpful to develop an understanding of how historical narratives that teachers have appropriated impact their teaching. If teachers include alternative voices in their teaching, beyond the official narratives and schematic narrative templates found in so many social studies and history textbooks, would their students be successful at using these alternative narratives as tools for interpreting and understanding history? Would the students of these teachers be more likely to develop and demonstrate deeper historical thinking?

Implications for Teaching and Learning

Teachers of social studies and history often rely on textbooks. Textbooks, in turn, are likely to be filled with official narratives of historical events. Thus students tend to hear the official narratives repeated throughout their school careers. The authority wielded by textbooks and by the official narratives they contain is strong, and students grow to believe that this authority is to be respected and accepted. Most students do not challenge these “authorized” texts, and so they master the official narratives, repeating them as they have heard them. In addition, students tend to think that the discipline of history is about remembering facts, so their understanding of history tends to be superficial. Unfortunately, this perception of history seems to be reinforced by current practices in standardized testing.
Students must learn how to challenge these authorized texts. Teachers can help students by teaching specific strategies, such as questioning and interpretation. Students need to understand that history texts represent someone’s interpretation of historical events, and as such, are open to misinterpretations, mistakes, and challenges. A wider range of history texts from various perspectives (including those of women and minority populations) may help students to develop historical thinking and their own interpretations of history, ultimately appropriating historical narratives, or making the narratives their own, by inserting their own voices.

Furthermore, my study suggests that students’ understandings of author’s voice are varied and inconsistent. Teachers need to continue to help students understand the concept of author’s voice and its implications for interpreting texts. Students need to practice reading, questioning, interpreting, and discussing texts with and without visible authors and with different voices and perspectives. Teachers also need to help students understand how biases may be overt or concealed in texts, and how authors may use their biases to influence readers. Students’ familiarity with the concept of author’s voice may be especially important when reading history texts, as the perspective of the author could influence students’ interpretations and understandings of historical events.

Teachers also need to be aware of the historical narratives that students have already mastered, as well as the narratives that students have appropriated. Many students come to the social studies or history classroom with deeply entrenched narratives about the past. These narratives need to be examined and challenged. Students need to develop understandings about the sources of these narratives and
how collective memory serves to inculcate particular narratives, even with inaccuracies. Some middle school students will have begun to appropriate certain historical narratives, infusing them with their own voices. These students may offer other students a model of dialogic contact with the past. By sharing their own perspectives and interpretations, these students may help provide for their classmates a point of entrée into the dialogue, allowing students to construct narratives that speak to one another.

For many students, the discipline of history is the transmission of facts. Teachers need to work to change this misconception so that students see history as an interpretive discipline (Wineburg, 1991). Students must learn that analytical history is indeterminate, ambiguous, and uncertain. This may be why some of the sixth graders in Study 1 expressed frustration with the visible author text and felt that it was harder to read and understand. These students think that history should be represented as hard, fast facts, not uncertainties.

Furthermore, students need to view the act of reading history as “strategic and purposeful inquiry” (Greenleaf, Schoenback, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001). By teaching students to question and interpret history texts, teachers can help students learn that history itself is open to interpretation, and it is the right and responsibility of the reader to ask how and why historical events occurred and why people acted as they did in these events (Greenleaf et al., 2001). In other words, students need to learn how to read history in the way that historians do, using the tools, such as historical narratives, that historians use in order to interpret stories of the past. In this way, history becomes a way of thinking and a way of knowing. Furthermore, students who
learn to adopt a critical stance toward history may be able to apply this way of thinking beyond the confines of the classroom. As Werner (2000) asserted, “By encouraging students at times to question what is often sacrosanct in classrooms, we are also encouraging them to extend their critique more broadly to the terrain of their everyday lives, to see that social texts of various kinds are authored, and that meanings and effects change across context and time” (p. 215).

Final Thoughts

From the evidence gathered in my research project, middle school students show evidence of access to dialogic voices in history texts. In other words, middle school students do enter into dialogic contact with voices that resist or reject official accounts of the past and allow for critical reading and thinking. However, these dialogic voices are often eliminated from social studies or history classrooms, especially in those classrooms where the textbook dominates as the primary tool for reading and understanding history. In the textbook-dominated history classroom, texts are viewed as remembering devices. In these official, authoritative discourses, there is little opportunity for alternative voices to be heard, or for students to insert their own voices.

In contrast, historical narratives from multiple perspectives offer the benefit of using texts as thinking devices. These narratives are outside the schematic narrative templates upon which official accounts of history are often built, and they invite readers into dialogic contact with a variety of historical voices. Unfortunately, many middle school students tend not to believe that the narrative voice is a legitimate way to think about history. However, based on the results of my research, it is clear that
historical narratives speak to middle school students. The students in my project indicated that they prefer to read narrative history, as opposed to listings of facts with authentic voices stripped away. Furthermore, the students in Study 2, particularly the eighth graders, demonstrated that authentic historical narratives are more likely to invite students to enter into dialogic contact with the texts. As a teacher, I now see it as my job to help students find points of entry into the ongoing dialogue of the past and to add their own voices. In this way, I can assist in opening up possibilities for students in which they might challenge, resist, or even reject the dominant narratives they encounter. Furthermore, students can learn to interpret history through multiple authentic voices that may validate their own histories. As students learn this way of knowing the past, they may also learn to apply this way of knowing to the world around them.

Schools need to provide access to dialogic, interpretive voices within history in order to help students learn that multiple historical narratives, responding to one another, offer a valid way of knowing and interpreting stories of the past. This way of knowing legitimizes alternative voices that have often been excluded from history. In this way, schools will support diverse students in appropriating stories of the past. Moreover, schools will foster historical thinking among students. It is only in this way that students can make these stories their own, ensuring that their own voices are heard telling the stories of which they are a part.
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APPENDIX A

STUDY 1: EXAMPLES OF STUDENT SURVEY, QUESTIONNAIRE, AND CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENT
STUDENT INTEREST SURVEY

Please fill in the blanks for the following items.

1. Your full name _____________________________________________________

2. Name you prefer to be called (if applicable) _____________________________

3. List the people who live with you and their relationship to you. ____________
_____________________________________________________________________

4. What is your favorite subject in school? ________________________________

5. List any hobbies you have or tell how you like to spend your free time _______
_____________________________________________________________________

6. Do you collect anything? If so, what? ________________________________

7. Which school clubs or sports do you plan to join this year? _______________
_____________________________________________________________________

8. Which TV shows do you like? _________________________________________

9. What kinds of movies do you like? ______________________________________

10. Do you prefer to work alone, with a partner, or in a group? ________________

11. Do you like to listen to music while you work? _________________________

12. What is the most important thing about you that I should know? ____________
_____________________________________________________________________

FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS
What would you like me to know about your child?
LITERACY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How frequently do you read or listen to books for pleasure? (check one)
   _____ every day
   _____ at least two or three times a week
   _____ once a week
   _____ once a month
   _____ less than once a month
   _____ never

2. Which genres of books do you like to read or listen to? (check all that you like)
   _____ nonfiction/informational
   _____ biography/autobiography
   _____ realistic fiction
   _____ historical fiction
   _____ science fiction
   _____ fantasy
   _____ adventure
   _____ poetry
   _____ mystery/suspense
   _____ series
   _____ other

3. The best book I ever read was________________________.

4. What do you do when you are reading and you come to something you don’t understand?

5. Do you think reading is important? Why?

6. Do you go to another library besides the school library? If so, which one? How often? What types of items do you usually check out?

7. Is reading hard or easy for you? Why?

8. At home, where and when do you like to read? Why do you choose this time and place?

9. What is your favorite subject in school? Why?

10. Are you a good reader? Why?

11. I enjoy reading because__________________________________.

12. Sometimes I don’t like to read when______________________.
13. Are you a good writer? Why?

14. I enjoy writing because ____________________________.

15. Sometimes I don’t like writing when ________________.

16. List the types of writing that you normally do outside of school.

17. What languages do your or your family speak at home?

18. Is your family a family of readers?

19. What is the most important thing you need to do to become a better reader?

20. What is the most important thing you need to do to become a better writer?

21. List your favorite books and authors.

22. List the books your read over the summer.
READING LOG FOR FICTION

Name____________________
Period____________________
Week of____________________

MONDAY

TITLE_______________________________ AUTHOR_____________________

PAGES READ________________________

STRATEGY APPLICATION: MAKING CONNECTIONS
Identify a connection (T-S, T-T, or T-W) you made in your reading and explain how it helped you understanding the reading better.

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
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TUESDAY

TITLE_______________________________ AUTHOR_____________________

PAGES READ________________________

STRATEGY APPLICATION: ANALYZING CHARACTER
Identify a main character from your reading. Give some examples of what the character did and said, then explain what that tells you about the character’s personality.

_____________________________________________________________________
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_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

WEDNESDAY

TITLE_______________________________ AUTHOR_____________________

PAGES READ________________________

STRATEGY APPLICATION: UNDERSTANDING AUTHOR’S PURPOSE
Describe a setting, event, or minor character, from your reading and explain the
author’s purpose for including this particular literary element in the story.
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

THURSDAY

TITLE_______________________________ AUTHOR_____________________

PAGES READ________________________

STRATEGY APPLICATION: IDENTIFYING THEME
Identify a theme from your reading. Explain the significance of the theme.
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

FRIDAY

TITLE_______________________________ AUTHOR_____________________

PAGES READ________________________

STRATEGY APPLICATION: MAKING PREDICTIONS
Make a prediction and support it with specific textual evidence from your reading.
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

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APPENDIX B

STUDY 1: ANONYMOUS AND VISIBLE AUTHOR TEXTS
Unifying Nigeria’s many ethnic groups has not been easy. These groups live in different areas, speak different languages, practice different religions, and sometimes have access to different amounts of economic resources. Only a few years after independence, conflicts began to arise. In 1966, a military group took over the government. The next year, civil war broke out as the Igbo tried to separate from Nigeria and form their own country. In 1970, after thousands had been killed or injured, the Igbo surrendered. The fighting ended, and Nigeria remained united. However, tensions remained high, and military control of the country continued for years.

A key source of the tension in Nigeria is the religious diversity among the various ethnic groups. Most of the Hausa-Fulani practice Islam, while some Yoruba practice Islam and others practice Christianity. The Igbo are primarily Christian. Some members of these groups, as well as members of hundreds of others, also practice traditional African religions. Such religious diversity makes Nigeria rich in culture, but it also challenges national unity.
As you can imagine, unifying Nigeria’s many ethnic groups has not been easy. What could cause problems between the groups? Well, you see, these groups live in different areas, speak different languages, practice different religions, and sometimes have access to different amounts of economic resources. It doesn’t surprise me that only a few years after independence, conflicts began to arise. In 1966, a military group took over the government. The next year, civil war broke out as the Igbo tried unsuccessfully to separate from Nigeria and form their own country. In 1970, after thousands had been killed or injured, the Igbo finally surrendered. Thankfully the fighting ended, and Nigeria remained united. However, tensions remained high, and military control of the country continued for years.

A very important source of tension in Nigeria is the religious diversity among the various ethnic groups. We know that most of the Hausa-Fulani practice Islam, while some Yoruba practice Islam and others practice Christianity. The Igbo are primarily Christian. Although we don’t know how many, some members of these groups, as well as members of hundreds of others, also practice traditional African religions. Such religious diversity makes Nigeria rich in culture, but it clearly also challenges national unity.
People have lived in present-day South Africa for thousands of years. In 1652, the first white Europeans arrived in the region and set up a colony. These Dutch settlers called themselves Boers, the Dutch word for farmers. The descendants of these settlers called themselves Afrikaners. They spoke a language related to Dutch, called Afrikaans.

British and French settlers arrived in South Africa by the late 1700s. For years, black South Africans fought the white settlers, who took their land. But by the late 1800s, the white settlers had forced the Africans off the best land.

The Afrikaners founded their own states. After diamonds and gold were discovered there, the British wanted control of the land. British prospectors, or people who explore for minerals, pushed Afrikaners off their farms.

The British and Afrikaners fought over the Afrikaner land from 1899 to 1902. The British proved victorious and took control of the Afrikaner states. In 1910, the British created the Union of South Africa by unifying all the land they controlled in the region.

The white-led government of the Union of South Africa passed several laws to keep land and wealth in white hands. For example, the government declared that
blacks could live and own land in only 8 percent of the country. Blacks could work in white areas, but for very low wages. Other laws passed in the 1920s separated white and black workers. The best jobs and the highest wages were reserved for whites.
We know that people have lived in present-day South Africa for thousands of years. But did you know that the first white Europeans arrived there in 1652 and set up a colony? These Dutch settlers called themselves Boers, the Dutch word for farmers. The descendants of these settlers called themselves Afrikaners. They spoke a language called Afrikaans, which you might have guessed is related to Dutch.

British and French settlers arrived in South Africa by the late 1700s. For years, black South Africans fought the white settlers, who took their land. But sadly, by the late 1800s, the white settlers had forced the Africans off the best land.

The Afrikaners founded their own states. After diamonds and gold were discovered there, the British desperately wanted control of the land. British prospectors, or people who explore for minerals, greedily pushed Afrikaners off their farms.

The British and Afrikaners fought bitterly over the Afrikaner land from 1899 to 1902. As you might have predicted, the British proved victorious and took control of the Afrikaner states. More important, in 1910, the British created the Union of South Africa by unifying all the land they controlled in the region.

The white-led government of the Union of South Africa passed several laws to keep land and wealth in white hands. I find this shocking, but the government declared that blacks could live and own land in only 8 percent of their own country!
Blacks could work in white areas, but for very low wages, of course. Other laws passed throughout the 1920s, separating white and black workers. Without a doubt, the best jobs and the highest wages were unfairly reserved for whites.
APPENDIX C

STUDY 1: DOUBLE-ENTRY DIARY
DOUBLE-ENTRY DIARY FOR METADISCOURSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>

List all textual evidence (metadiscourse) of a visible author that you found in the texts. Include writing in first person, addressing the reader, and revealing thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. |

Describe the function of the metadiscourse that you listed in the left column. What is the author trying to do by including these words in the text? Explain in detail.
APPENDIX D

STUDY 1: RETELLING PROMPT AND SCORING RUBRIC FOR “AKSUM”
RETELLING PROMPT

You will read and write retellings for two articles titled “Aksum.” After I hand out the first article, you may begin reading. After you have finished reading, return the article to me. You may not use the article to help you with your retelling. I will give you a sheet of lined paper. Write a retelling of the article you just read, including all the important facts and details to the best of your ability.

When you are finished writing your retelling, turn it in to me. I will give you the second article. Read it and return it to me. Again, you may not use the article to help you with your retelling. I will give you another sheet of lined paper. Write your retelling of the second article, including all the important facts and details to the best of your ability.
### RETELLING RUBRIC

Name________________________  Text __________  Sequence _________

Key word score________/67
Gist score________/3

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APPENDIX E

STUDY 1: COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS FOR “AKSUM”
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did East Africa’s early trading civilizations develop?

2. When did African and Arab traders begin settling along the west coast of the Red Sea?

3. Explain how Aksum became a center of the early Ethiopian Christian Church.

4. Who were the ancestors of the people of Aksum?

5. How does settling on or near a coastline help a civilization develop?

6. What other ideas, besides religion, do you think traveled along the ancient trade routes in East Africa?
APPENDIX F

STUDY 1: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND CLOSING QUESTIONS
SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How understandable did you find this text? (circle one)

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</table>

2. Explain why you rated the text as you did.

3. Where do you think the author got the information for this text? How do you know?

4. How believable did you find this author? (circle one)

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<td></td>
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5. Explain why you rated the text as you did.

6. Describe the style of writing in the text you just read.

7. What do you think of the way the information is presented?

8. How do you think the author feels about the topic?

9. How does the author make you feel about the topic?
CLOSING QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the two texts as best as you can.

2. Which text was easier to understand? Why?

3. Which text do you trust the most to be accurate? Why?
APPENDIX G

STUDY 2: EXAMPLES OF STUDENT-CONSTRUCTED HISTORICAL NARRATIVES
Historical Narrative Writing Task

Write a story about the discovery of America. Be sure to include details about key events, the people, and the challenges they faced. Write your story on the lines below. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space.

Long ago Christopher Columbus was about to voyage to China. He thought the only land of the world was beyond Africa, and Asia. So he thought going west would be shorter than going south around Africa. It turns out it took longer than Chris thought.

Many days passed and all of the crew was hungry. They were about to turn back until they found land. They thought they were in Asia but the land looked different. He found out that the land they were on was uncharted. Chris explored the land and didn't find much. Later on he claimed the land for England.
Historical Narrative Writing Task

Write a story about the discovery of America. Be sure to include details about key events, the people, and the challenges they faced. Write your story on the lines below. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space.

Christopher Columbus discovered America. He was looking for spices from Spain and he thought that he could go straight through to Spain, but there was land in the way, but he thought he had landed in Spain, so he had told all of the people to give him spices, but they didn't have any spices because he wasn't in Spain. So the people tried to tell him he wasn't in Spain and that the land he was on didn't have any spices. But of course, he wouldn't listen to them and he ended up killing them, then he kept killing the Americans because none of them
would give him what he wanted. I don't know how but then he found out that he was on unknown land, so of course, like most men, would he claim it, but really since the Native Americans were already there, so it was really their land first so I really think that the Native Americans discovered America, but the textbooks call Say Christopher Columbus discovered America.
Historical Narrative Writing Task

Write a story about the discovery of America. Be sure to include details about key events, the people, and the challenges they faced. Write your story on the lines below. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space.

I believe that America was discovered by Christopher Columbus. I believe this because I learned this from my teacher. Christopher sailed the ocean blue, and found a land that had Natives. He had to fight these natives so he could say he found "America." These natives weren't so friendly. Christopher sailed from all the way from Spain to find his promise land. I believe Christopher Columbus founded America. He had many nights and went through many hard times. We tell stories about America. Some of
of us can be called discoveries.

But truly it was Christopher Columbus.
APPENDIX H

STUDY 2: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES
Once upon a time a group of people lived on an island, Hayti (now Hispaniola), in the Caribbean. These people, whom I consider my people, were proud of their island. They built beautiful farms and villages from dirt and rock. They respected the plants and animals. Many people lived on Hayti. They called themselves Tainos.

One day, some of my people saw three boats far off in the ocean. They gather around and watched as the boats came closer and closer. When the boats reached land, strange-looking people got off.

These people were not like us. Their skin was pink, their hair the color of sand, and their eyes the color of the open sea. They wore strange items that covered their bodies, even though it was very hot.

Their leader was a man called “Christopher Columbus.” He immediately put a cross and flag down and acted as if the land were now his. This was odd. We did not believe anyone could own the land. Besides, we were already living there.

Through motions and gestures, it became clear Columbus wanted gold. He wanted us to find it for him.

We tried to explain there was little gold on our land, just a few small pieces gathered from the water. “We have no gold. There is no gold here,” a man said in the Taino language.
Columbus appeared very angry and walked away. My people were afraid of his anger. They wondered what he planned to do next.

After several months, Columbus returned to our island for a second visit. He brought hundreds of people on 17 boats. Before he left this time, he captured many of my people; over 500 were forced onto his boats. We later heard they had been taken to Spain to be sold as slaves. Many died on this voyage to Spain. Their bodies were thrown into the ocean.

During this second visit, Columbus again told my people to bring him gold. “If you do not,” he warned, “we shall slay your people.”

Our people had to bring him gold, even though it was very difficult to find. Columbus made us wear buttons to show we had brought him gold. If we didn’t have our buttons, my people’s hands were cut off and they bled to death.

My people formed an army. But we did not have the guns, swords and vicious dogs used by Columbus and his crew. We were defeated.

My people ran for their lives into the mountains. Those who were caught were hung or burned to death. Many others killed themselves. Two years had passed and over half of the Taino people of Hayti were dead.

My people’s peaceful and proud land was taken over and destroyed. These newcomers cut down all the forests. They let their pigs and cows eat all the grass. Thousands of my people’s lives were destroyed for these people’s pleasure.

Before long, the conquerors killed almost all the Tainos. Other native peoples in the Americas were also attacked, some with weapons, some with terrible new diseases. But not all were destroyed. My people have survived.
We have little to show our children as proof of what happened to the Tainos. But we have our stories, told from generation to generation. The stories tell of the cruel genocide of my people, hundreds of years ago:

“Once upon a time, in an untold story….”
I will never forget the Great Navigator, Christopher Columbus. While Portuguese sailors were trying to reach Asia by sailing around Africa, Columbus, an Italian explorer, had a brilliant idea. He believed he could get there by sailing west instead of east. He also believed that the world was round, not flat, as many people of the time believed. The Admiral of the Ocean Sea, as we came to call him, was chosen by God to prove this belief.

Queen Isabella of Spain thought Columbus was right and trusted him to make a successful voyage to India. She and her husband, King Ferdinand, willingly agreed to pay for part of the voyage. On August 3, 1492, Columbus set sail with a fleet of three ships and a crew of about 90 adventurous sailors. As a Spanish sailor, I considered it a great honor to be chosen to sail with the man who would discover the New World.

With winds blowing steadily from the east, our ships made good progress. But after a month, some of the sailors became a bit worried.

“Admiral,” I said to Columbus, “the crew is beginning to worry about being at sea so long and not yet spotting land.”

Columbus agreed to calm the sailors.

“Men,” he said to us that evening, “I know you grow weary of all these days at sea. But keep faith. Soon we will make landfall. I promise a reward of gold to the first man to spy land.”
All of us cheered at the mention of nearby land and a reward of gold. We happily agreed to sail on.

On October 12, 1492, one of the sailors spotted land. We approached the shore, and Columbus led us to the beach. Carrying a flag, he knelt in the sand to give thanks to God for our safe journey. We sailors stood behind him as he began to speak in a strong, clear voice.

“In the name of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain,” he said, “I take possession of this land. I will name this island San Salvador, which means Holy Savior.”

I think Columbus was right to claim the land. He was the only navigator brave enough to attempt this journey. His courage made him a hero.

At that moment, there was a rustling of leaves. Out of the forest crept a band of people with brown skin. At first, I was afraid that they meant us harm, but they brought us fresh food and water, so we knew they wanted to become friends. To show our thanks, we gave gifts to the native people. Because he thought we had landed in India, Columbus decided that we should call the native people “Indians.” The friendly Indians smile and made all of us sailors feel at home.

October 12, 1492 would become one of the most memorable days in human history. Hundreds of years later, it would still be celebrated as Columbus Day. I will always remember the honor of sailing with the greatest navigator of all time, the discoverer of the New World, the hero Christopher Columbus.
APPENDIX I

STUDY 2: EXAMPLES OF IMAGE OF THE AUTHOR
IMAGE OF THE AUTHOR

After reading Text A [or Text B], draw a sketch of the author as you visualize
the author in your mind. Draw your sketch in the space below.

APPEARANCE OF AUTHOR

Age (be specific) __________

Gender (female or male) __________

Style of dress________________________________________________
After you have drawn your sketch, write about the author. Write on the lines below. Consider the following topics as you write. Use the topics below to write in paragraphs.

AUTHOR KNOWLEDGE

- If you had a class taught by the author, what would it be like?
- How would you feel about being in the author’s class?
- Would you learn a lot from the class?
- Where do you think the author got the information for this test? What clues do you have?

RELATIONSHIP WITH AUTHOR

- How does the author act (what is the author’s personality)?
- What is the author’s attitude toward you?
- How credible is this author? In other words, can you believe that what the author says is accurate? How do you know?
Image of the Author Task

After reading Text B, draw a sketch of the author as you visualize the author in your mind. Draw your sketch in the space below.

APPEARANCE OF AUTHOR

Age (be specific) 20-30
Gender (female or male) Female
Style of dress Art like, kind of geeky and nerdyish?
After you have drawn your sketch, write about the author. Write on the lines below. Consider the following topics as you write. Use the topics below to write in paragraphs.

AUTHOR KNOWLEDGE
- If you had a class taught by the author, what would it be like?
- How would you feel about being in the author’s class?
- Would you learn a lot from the class?
- Where do you think the author got the information for this text? What clues do you have?

RELATIONSHIP WITH AUTHOR
- How does the author act (what is the author’s personality)?
- What is the author’s attitude toward you?
- How credible is this author? In other words, can you believe that what the author says is accurate? How do you know?

If I had this person in class, I don’t know what I would do. We would be scared. All we know is she could accuse us of cheating someone’s hands off. You would learn a lot, but it may not all be true. The author probably would be prepared to tell us something she would’ve gotten it from the book but changed it. It was like
She's against history. But what did I know.
The author would be a pretty fun person. She would always want to have fun. You would never be bored.
Image of the Author Task

After reading Text B, draw a sketch of the author as you visualize the author in your mind. Draw your sketch in the space below.

APPEARANCE OF AUTHOR

Age (be specific) 12
Gender (female or male) Female
Style of dress: Her dress is like a bunch of little shapes and a bow tie with flowers
After you have drawn your sketch, write about the author. Write on the lines below. Consider the following topics as you write. Use the topics below to write in paragraphs.

**AUTHOR KNOWLEDGE**
- If you had a class taught by the author, what would it be like?
- How would you feel about being in the author’s class?
- Would you learn a lot from the class?
- Where do you think the author got the information for this text? What clues do you have?

**RELATIONSHIP WITH AUTHOR**
- How does the author act (what is the author’s personality)?
- What is the author’s attitude toward you?
- How credible is this author? In other words, can you believe that what the author says is accurate? How do you know?

This fun and energetic and she likes to go shopping alot. Sometimes she can get a little bossing when she's writing a book or story. She will start yelling at people to do things. For now, I don't believe everything that she wrote because she doesn't really know if they cut their hands off and believe to death. And she doesn't no if they burn them to death unless she research it in a book or on the computer. She would always get off track talking about shopping or
or something that relates not to the story. It would be fun because you wouldn't have to really learn anything because she would always be getting off track. No not really because we would be getting off track a lot. I think he got the information from a book or the computer or a website or even from a friend she could get it mostly anywhere she wants to get it from.
APPENDIX J

STUDY 2: CLOSING SURVEY
CLOSING SURVEY

1. What differences did you notice between the two texts?

2. Which text do you think is easier to read and understand? Explain why.

3. Which text do you think is the most factually accurate? Explain why.

4. Would you use either of these texts to teach children about the discovery of America? If so, which text(s) would you use? Explain why. If not, explain why you wouldn’t use one or both texts.