THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL GIFTED STUDENTS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM THROUGH THE USE OF PRIMARY SOURCES

By

Lara Elizabeth Creel Henry

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Rebecca Harrison, Ed.D, Committee Chair

Rebecca Burton, Ed.D., Committee Member

John Gardner, Ed.D., Committee Member

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs

ABSTRACT

Gifted education, although having been a part of the United States educational fabric since the early 1900s, has various definitions and programs throughout the nation. Many gifted students are being placed in regular education programs without consideration of their needs. In 1991 Wineburg began researching and proposing using primary sources for analyzing and research skills in social studies classrooms as a possible way to meet the needs of gifted students while teaching problem solving and critical thinking skills. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover two connected concepts: The perception middle school social studies teachers' have toward critical thinking skills and the development of critical thinking skills in gifted students, particularly through the use of primary sources. This phenomenon was researched with the cooperation of nine participants in a medium sized school district in South Carolina. Among the nine participants, three are National Board certified, two are endorsed for gifted education through the South Carolina Department of Education, and their teaching experience varied from one to twenty years. Using the constant comparative method, data were collected through survey, interviews, and classroom observations. The data indicated that these middle school social studies teachers had knowledge of and utilized primary sources to develop critical thinking skills even though they had not previously defined the concept. However, they were lacking professional development and knowledge of gifted students' needs in the classroom.

Keywords: gifted education, social studies education, middle school, primary sources, and critical thinking skills

Dedication

This journey would never have been finished without the amazing love and support of my husband, Jim, children Jenna and Luke, and my parents, Richard and Gail Creel. Jim – your loving support from the moment I started the program including encouraging me every time I felt discouraged, countless late-night editing of the many papers, and helping me make the various trips to Liberty is more than I could have ever asked. You are my rock and I thank God for you daily. Jenna and Luke when you were two and seven months old I started this journey, and you put up with mommy "doing school work" so many times without complaint and saw the trips to Liberty as an adventure. I could not have done this without your good nature and understanding. To my parents, I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for this degree, throughout my childhood and continue to do each day. You both instilled in me a belief in myself that I could achieve anything I set my mind to do and then supported the various "plans" I have had throughout my lifetime. You have always been there for me and in this most recent endeavor you did so through daily prayer, encouragement, going on trips to keep the children while I was in class, and just always being there in so many ways every time I needed you. For this, I dedicate this dissertation to all of you.

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Most of all, thank you to my Lord and Savior, for the amazing love and grace you have shown me and for providing me with an amazing support system in family and friends.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

Advanced Placement (AP)

Bachelor of Arts (BA)

Bachelor of Science (BS)

Committee on Social Studies (CSS)

Common Core Standards (CCSS)

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

Critical Thinking (CT)

English as a Second Language (ESOL)

Gifted and Talented (GT)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Kershaw County School District (KCSD)

Master of Arts (MA)

Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)

Masters of Education (M ED)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC)

National Board Certified (NBPTS

National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS)

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA – Center)

National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS)

Social Studies (SS)

United States Department of Education (US DOE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The early 20th century saw the beginning of the modern day social studies classroom and gifted education concepts in the United States. Prior to this time, schools taught history along with various social studies subjects. The modern social studies classroom consists of students learning the subjects of history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, sociology, geography, economics, anthropology, archeology, government, and civics framed within the concept of good citizenship promotion (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994).

This transformation from the history classroom to the social studies classroom was launched by a report presented by the Committee on Social Studies (CSS) of the National Education Association Commission on the Reorganization of the Secondary School at The Progressive Education Association's 1916 meeting. The Committee defined social studies clearly with history deemed as its primary subject. The primary purpose of social studies was to promote good citizenship. Today, many students and some educators, view social studies as being filled with rote memorization, thus making it the least important of the four core education classes (Conklin, 2011; Sunal & Sunal, 2007-2008).

The beginning of gifted education is viewed most often as having started with Lewis Terman's 1921 study of gifted students. Gifted education had its full beginning in 1957 when the space race between the US and USSR began with the Soviet launching of *Sputnik*. The space race spurred the federal government to fund identification of gifted students in math and science (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). Today gifted education exists in various forms depending on the state and/or district. Gifted education exists to help advance students in math or language arts after passing a variety of tests. Funding for

these various gifted programs continues to be lowered as school districts around the nation struggle to trim budgets (Kearney, 2005; United States Department of Education, 2012). The bureaucrats making these decisions are often far removed from the classroom environment.

Social studies classrooms and gifted education are not often viewed as an integrated concept. Gifted education is viewed as a time and place to increase a student's intrinsic motivation for knowledge and produce more creative problem solvers without simply focusing on rote knowledge acquisition (Renzulli, 2012). History and social studies are often presented as subjects focusing on the rote learning of facts that have been preassembled and presented by a teacher. Instead they should be subjects where questions are asked and evidence is sought through various sources, both primary and secondary, to form answers to the questions. They could be viewed as a jigsaw puzzle being put together with various shapes and forms. The end result being students' implementing historical thinking in the social studies classroom (Barksdale, 2013). Using primary sources in the social studies classroom for critical thinking skills development may provide gifted students with much needed skills, academic stimulation as well as an understanding of the importance of the social studies subject.

Background

Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, and Benjamin Franklin were Founding Fathers who proclaimed their ideas and beliefs about education including history through both public and private writings as well as speeches. Benjamin Rush stated in his essay *The Mode of Education Proper in the Republic* (1786) that, "it is possible to convert men into republican machines" (p. 7) through education that includes history lectures, particularly ones that dealt with constitutions and laws. When proposing the founding of the Academy of Philadelphia (later known as the University of Pennsylvania), Benjamin Franklin stated, "the good Education of Youth has been

esteemed by wise men of all ages, as the surest Foundation of Happiness both of private Families and of Common-wealths" (Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania [sic], 1749, p. 1). He gave details of what should be taught, including history, stating that "nothing delights" more than history (Franklin, 1749, p. 20). Thomas Jefferson, throughout his life in letters to his contemporaries, his autobiography, and reports, presented his belief on the importance of public education. In one such letter to Peter Carr, Jefferson stated, "It is highly interesting to our country, and it is the duty of its functionaries, to provide that every citizen in it should receive an education proportioned to the condition and pursuits of his life" (Personal correspondence, 1814, p. 4).

Today, history classes, the fundamental component of social studies courses, are considered to be an indispensable aspect of United States public civic education as the Founding Fathers had intended. However, United States citizens' lack of historical knowledge can appear as comical as Jay Leno's "Jaywalk" segment The Tonight Show presented in the past. The segment featured Leno asking questions about American history to random strangers with the purpose being to spotlight the incredible ineptitude of many citizens on the subject (Vickers, 2014). This ineptitude may be a result of history courses maintaining a class of rote memorization of facts and dates that most deem unnecessary and do not remember past the current test.

To combat this perspective, many books and articles are published on curriculum and instructional pedagogy for the social studies classrooms. Published books on the subject include *Teaching Social Studies that Matters: Curriculum for Active Learners* (Thornton & Noddings, 2004), *Social Studies for Secondary Schools: Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* (Singer, 2008), and *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching,*

Learning and Assessment (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010). The publications provide information on learning based on the current models of standards and teaching. A recent publication is entitled *Social Studies, Literacy and Social Justice in the Common Core Classroom: A Guide for Teachers* (Awarwal-Rangnath, 2013). This publication addresses the curriculum and standards changes that began in some states in 2013. Specifically, it addresses the use of primary source readings as information text.

While much has been published on the matter, there does not appear to be an overall consensus of what is the best practice for teaching students in the social studies classroom. With changes in standards beginning to occur in states, specifically in United State history in social studies in 2015, there is much anticipation of how the classroom will change along with it. Textbooks are still considered to be the main source of information for history education (Bisland, 2009; Bromlet, 2011; Chappell, 2010; Duran & Null, 2009; Lindquist, 2012; Mayer, 2006; Morgan, 2008; Neumann, 2012; Romanowski, 2009; Sanchez, 2007; Standish, 2008; Wiersma, 2008).

According to Wilcox, Bridges and Montgomery (2010), research on teaching social studies indicates inadequate training for teachers, inadequate instruction time, and a failure to relate "skills and concepts in relevant ways to students' lives or the teacher's inability to identify instructional resources other than textbooks" (p. 1) as reasons for inadequate learning outcomes within the subject. The authors state that such deficits result in elementary school children having inadequate cultural appreciation, limited geographical knowledge, and distorted knowledge about famous historical figures (Wilcox et al., 2010). To enhance cultural appreciation, geography knowledge, knowledge of historical figures, and critical thinking skills several concepts have been proposed including improved technology (Hernandez-Ramos & De

La Paz, 2009; Kingsley & Boone, 2008; Saye & Brush, 2007), arts integration (Lavere, 2008; Wilcox et al., 2010), fostering historical empathy (Brooks, 2009; Bryant, 2007; Endacott, 2010), and enhancing critical thinking skills through the use of primary sources in the history classroom (Barksdale, 2013; Bellows & Liaw, 2011; Morgan & Ransiski, 2012; Neumann, 2012; Ormond, 2011; Padurano, 2011; Salinas, Waring & Robinson, 2010).

The idea of intelligence as a numerical number began in 1905 with the development of a series of tests designed by Binet and Simon meant to identify children with inferior intelligence. The results were published in 1916 in a book entitled *The Development of Intelligence in Children*. In 1913, Lewis Terman believed that validation of the Binet-Simon Scale of mental intelligence would enhance the education of gifted and talented students. Terman's famous study of gifted students by standardizing the scale through large sample testing of American students began in 1921. Gifted students were described as "quick, understanding, insatiable curiosity, extensive information, retentive memory, early speech, unusual vocabulary" with a score 40% higher on the achievement test than other children of their chronological age (Terman, 1925, p. 287).

Leta Hollingworth also conducted studies on the nature of gifted students and published the first textbook for gifted education in 1926. The two were similar in their beliefs about gifted students except for one major difference; Terman believed giftedness was inherent while Hollingworth believed giftedness could be influenced by environmental and educational factors (Plucker, 2012).

In 1957, substantial amounts of money began to be funneled to the education of gifted students. After the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*, gifted education found a place in the public school classroom. Throughout the past 60 years, gifted education has evolved and changed

through legislation. This evolution includes additions and expansion to the definition of giftedness; however, a consensus cannot be found among researchers. At the same time, overall funding has been significantly decreased and continues to vary drastically based upon what state and district the gifted student attends (Hargrove, 2012; McCoy & Rader, 2008).

Social studies could be utilized as a highly effective subject in the overall development of gifted students. When social studies is used effectively the needs of gifted students can be met while still adding to the academic, emotional, and social development of students (Diffily, 2002; Kaplan, 2012; Little, Feng, VanTassel-Baska, Rogers & Avery, 2007; Moon, 2002; Troxclair, 2000). Primary sources in the modern social studies classroom can be used to effectively develop critical thinking skills in gifted students.

Situation to Self

As a middle school social studies teacher I observed social studies being viewed by many, including the writers of standards throughout the country, as a class for rote knowledge memorization that should be learned through one tract. Research has begun to show a belief that social studies can be much more than that (Conklin, Hawley, Powell, & Ritter, 2010; Little, 2012; Van Tassel-Baska, 2008; Wineburg, 2001; Wineburg, 1991). The class through primary source analysis can be used to develop critical thinking skills, and in turn, gifted students' development.

Problem Statement

The problem is gifted education has increasingly lost funding and importance in districts (US DOE, 2014). The gifted student population is not being provided the education they need to reach their full potential. Gifted students are often placed in age-locked classrooms without additional instruction (Berman, Schultz, & Weber, 2012). Many regular education teachers are

without gifted and talented endorsements and believe that these students do not need additional educational services to help them reach their potential (Bangel, Moon, & Capobianco, 2010). Social studies, as a subject, has become increasingly marginalized in K-8 classrooms with continued decrease in scores (Conklin, 2011). Middle school social studies teachers may be unaware of how gifted and talented students can effectively be taught critical thinking skills, a skill increasingly focused on with the implementation of common core standards, in the classroom through analysis of primary sources that include media, music, documents, photographs, and paintings (Kaplan, 2012; Little, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the perceptions of middle school social studies teachers' use of primary sources in the development of gifted students' critical thinking in a medium sized school district in South Carolina. Critical thinking skills in the social studies classroom has been defined as "the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions" (Halpern, 2007, p. 6) that has been facilitated through "understanding of history based evidence" (Salinas et al., 2011, p. 186), particularly primary sources. The purpose of this study is to illuminate the specific phenomenon of teacher perceptions' of utilizing primary sources to develop critical thinking skills in gifted students.

Significance of the Study

The year 2012 marked the ten year anniversary of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). While it states a goal of "raising challenges and improving student achievement" (Hargrove, 2012, p. 72) it was silent regarding the gifted and talented students of the United States, and within the first five years of its implementation funding for gifted programs was cut by one-third and has

not been increased since, with the last two or three years seeing no federal funding for gifted education (United States Department of Education, 2014). At the same time, social studies has increasingly become marginalized in the K-8 classrooms (Guidry, Cuthrell, O'Connor & Good, 2010; Sunal & Sunal, 2007-2008). Student scores have continued to decrease in the subject. Middle school social studies teachers must also overcome a need to teach a large amount of material in less time (Guidry et al., 2010) leading teachers to teach basic facts while excluding other sources that could foster historical critical thinking skills (Lindquist, 2012; Neumann, 2012; Waring & Robinson, 2010).

In the early part of the 21st century, middle school social studies classrooms were proposed as a means to provide gifted and talented students with various types of learning opportunities (Diffily, 2002; Kaplan, 2002; Little et al., 2007; Moon, 2002; Troxclair, 2000). Since that time social studies classrooms and the use of primary sources have been discussed as a means to teach students critical thinking skills (Jones & Hebert, 2012; Lindquist, 2012; National Council for Social Studies, 2012; Neumann, 2012; Ormond, 2011; Padurano, 2011; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005; Waring & Robinson, 2010). Research indicates that the majority of social studies classrooms utilize the textbook as the main focus for instruction with rote memorization of facts the overall goal (Lavere, 2008; Mayer, 2006; Stern & Stern, 2011; Wiersma, 2008).

At the same time, gifted programs are being defunded. Many teachers believe gifted students will understand the information on their own and do not provide curriculum for their specific needs (Berman et al., 2012; McCoy & Radar, 2008; Moon, Callahan, Tomlinson & Miller, 2002). This study provides evidence of what middle school social studies teachers understand to be primary source usage and critical thinking skills compared to what is being

offered in current research. The information in this study provides direction as to what needs to be discussed between teachers in the field and current researchers.

The area in which the study was conducted has a well-developed pull-out gifted program with teachers trained in gifted education. However, as of 2013, the eighth-grade students in the district will no longer be serviced with the pull-out situation. Following the lead of surrounding districts, the pull-out program may be removed soon. If this happens, gifted students will be entirely provided an education by teachers, who as a majority have had no professional development or coursework in gifted education.

Research Questions

According to the State Department of Education, teachers must be highly qualified to teach a specific subject, including social studies, in middle school. To be highly qualified means a teacher has been educated in the subject matter, educated in middle level studies and has passed Praxis exams for the subject and level. However, the need to be highly qualified is a recent change and teachers were grandfathered into the qualification, or are working toward the qualification through an alternate program. Teachers of gifted students in the pull-out program are required to have completed an endorsement through the state, but it is not a requirement in the regular education classroom. Gifted students have specific characteristics with special needs for the classroom (American Mensa, 2012). According to Renzulli (2012), gifted education has several purposes, including providing society with problem solvers who will develop new ideas. This could be achieved most effectively in social studies if teachers were qualified to teach gifted students and social studies. This leads to the first research question:

1. What are the educational backgrounds of middle school social studies teachers qualifying them to teach social studies and gifted students?

Studies conducted by Salinas et al. (2011) and Stoddard (2010) indicate a discrepancy in how primary sources should be defined. The Library of Congress has a limited description of primary sources. The most comprehensive description can be found on a website maintained by the Department of Education, Teaching History. Because of this discrepancy in what a primary source can be, the third question will address primary sources in the classroom:

2. What do middle school social studies teachers understand to be primary sources and how do they use them in the classroom?

In 1991, Wineberg conducted and published a study on historical critical thinking skills. Since that time, he has continued pursuing this concept in studies specifically with the use of primary sources. Variations of this theme have been pursued, including studies by Fillpot, (2012), Salinas et al., (2011), and Wilcox et al., (2010). Within these studies, gifted students and their needs were not addressed and so this research question is provided in the context of this study to understand how the various concepts come together:

3. What are critical thinking skills and how can social studies and primary sources be used to enhance these skills in gifted students?

Research Plan

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological design. Ary, Jacobs and Sorenson (2010) explain phenomenological studies as asking the major question "What does this experience mean for the participants in the experience?" (p. 31). The purpose of this study was to understand how various teachers perceived aspects of the classroom specifically primary sources and critical thinking skills. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described, the purpose was not to find facts and causes, but instead to discover the perception of a phenomenon. This approach

allowed for the information to be gathered and to interpret how teachers define and use primary sources in the classroom, as well as their usefulness in critical thinking skills development in gifted students. It also provided a path for self-reflection for the participating teachers.

The study included nine participants in a smaller county in South Carolina. Data were collected through a survey, interview, and one class observation with field notes. All data were analyzed through the constant comparative method. Data were coded until themes were discovered.

Delimitations

Delimitations. The participants for this study were middle school social studies teachers in a medium sized school district in the central part of South Carolina. Traditionally in this area there are three grade levels in middle school, but this study used only seventh- and eighth- grade teachers. Sixth-grade students are 11 years old and are at a crossroads moving from, as Jean Piaget described, concrete to abstract cognitive thinking, and this time should be used as developing foundations for critical thinking (Waring & Robinson, 2010). Seventh- and eighth-grade students are at the beginning of the abstract cognitive thinking stage and should be able to employ deductive learning, an important aspect of historical critical thinking. The phenomenological approach was chosen in order to investigate perceptions of middle school teachers without starting with a clear defined belief.

Definitions

1. *Critical Thinking Skills* – thinking that involves problem solving, inferences and calculations for decisions (Facione, 2011).
2. *Gifted* - children who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership capacity, or specific academic fields, and who

require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities (South Carolina State Board of Education, 2004).

3. *Historical Thinking Skills* – critical thinking skills that have been facilitated by understanding history based evidence particularly through primary sources (Salinas et al., 2011; Stoddard, 2010).
4. *Primary Sources* **–** original documents and objects created during a particular time periods including photographs, music, and art (Library of Congress, n.d.; Department of Education, 2010-2012)

Summary

Gifted education has lost funding and importance throughout the past decade. Social studies classrooms continue to focus on rote memorization and not critical thinking. It has been proposed that social studies could provide gifted students with needed critical thinking skills through analysis of primary sources. What are the perceptions of this idea held by current middle school social studies teachers?

A phenomenological study with nine participants was conducted in a small South Carolina district. The study was framed with three research questions. The significance of this study is to provide information about what teachers' in the classroom know and utilize in the classroom on a day to day basis with regards to gifted education, critical thinking skills, and primary sources.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Social Sciences, including social studies and history, are considered an integral aspect of public education (Fallace, 2008). Today, academic achievement or lack thereof within the subject continues to cause discontent within the educational community. The effort to teach standardized test information has led to rote memorization taking the fore-front in the social studies classroom. At the same time, social studies has been given less importance as schools dedicate additional time, funds, and energy to the core subjects of reading and math in order to meet the No Child Left Behind goals for the previous decade and now the Common Core Standards (CCSS) of reading and math as they begin to be implemented.

One paradox in the current political climate is that great value is placed on "creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship" within the modern classroom in order to "provide for the citizenry of our country and achieve global status", but these are not consistently integrated into "the core of regular curriculum nor assessed to ensure they are being developed by our students" (Kaplan, 2012, p. 151). The group that receives the greatest disservice is gifted students, especially as gifted education is defunded and many teachers believe students identified as gifted will simply progress on their own. Teachers often fail to understand the need for gifted students to be challenged. This failure to understand the needs of these students can at times ultimately be the failure in their overall education.

The following chapter will first provide information on the theoretical aspect of the proposed qualitative study. This will be followed with literature and subtopics on gifted education history, the state of gifted education, the state of social studies courses, and studies on

the use of primary sources in the classroom, including what constitutes a primary source and how this evokes critical thinking skills.

Theoretical Framework

A 2008 national study of gifted education by Farkas and Duffett reported the survey results of 900 third- through twelfth-grade teachers. The study stated that gifted education was a top priority in only 23% of the public schools surveyed. The study went on to state that 50% of teachers' surveyed agreed students were often labeled gifted because "their parents are overzealous and know how to work the system" and only 9% believed the tests identified gifted students accurately (Farkas & Duffett, 2008, p. 50).

Identification of gifted students, as with the definition of gifted, varies within state and/or district. Carman (2013) conducted a study to determine the processes used to identify gifted students. Using a pre-determined guideline to choose empirical studies, 113 were chosen to discover what criteria are often used for identifying gifted students. The results reported nine categories for identification listed in descending order: intelligence measure, achievement test, academic achievement, teacher recommendation, additional sources (such as portfolios and interviews), parent recommendation, extracurricular activities, school recommendation, and counselor recommendation (Carman, 2013). After being identified, gifted students are not always provided with an education that allows them to grow as a student.

Educators and the general population often view gifted students as able to progress through the standards and curriculum with minimal assistance. Advancement is not given top priority. The newest drive in education is to implement and utilize Common Core Standards (CCSS). According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2015, para. 18-19), "The standards do not define the nature of advanced work for students who meet the standards. The

standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations." The CCSS goes on to state that advanced materials should be used for above level students. However, as Schroeder-Davis (2014) argues, it is based on the erroneous assumption that advanced materials are available and teachers' know how to advance students with such materials. Several gifted researchers have shown support for the common core state standards and have written two books to address how common core can be utilized for gifted students: *A Teacher's Guide to Using the Common Core State Standards with Gifted and Advanced Learning in the English Arts* (Hughes, Kettler, Shaunessey-Dedrik, & VanTassel-Baska, 2014) and *A Teacher's Guide to Using the Common Core State Standards with Mathematically Gifted and Advanced Learner* (Johnsen, Ryser, & Assouline, 2014). Schroeder-Davis (2014) views this as a red-flag because the standards cannot be utilized for gifted students without additional support. VanTassel-Baska (2015), when addressing arguments for and against common core standards, stated that a real concern is teachers' lack the knowledge of how to utilize the standards for gifted students and the standards are too ELA and math specific. This lack of knowledge could result in social studies becoming another ELA classroom, and not a classroom to develop problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills.

The theoretical framework for the use of primary sources to develop historical critical thinking skills in this study is found in five sources: Piaget's Cognitive Learning Theory, Paul and Elder's Critical Thinking Model, Erikson's Concept-Based Classroom, Wineburg's Historical Thinking concept, as well as Mayer's Multimedia Learning. Five theories are being presented because the study addresses an array of ideas including the need for differentiated gifted education for critical thinking skills development as well as the use of various types of

primary sources. The five sources also originated during various times over the past century providing a basis that this phenomenon is more than a mere passing fad.

Jean Piaget introduced the concept of intellectual development in stages in the early 20th century. Piaget's cognitive development theory states that the average child reaches the formal operational stage of cognitive development at the age of 11. It is within this framework that Lee and Shemilt (2003) proposed the concept of a "model of progression" for students gaining historical empathy in the classroom. Lee and Shemilt believe that the current system of high stakes testing for the sake of expediency should be removed. They state that progression models based on empirical research should be a replacement. Piaget once stated, "The principle goal of education in the schools should be creating men who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done" (as cited in Duckworth, 1968, p. 499).

The development of critical thinking skills can be likened to Piaget's cognitive development stages, as they are linked to intellectual potential (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011). The formal operation stage includes abstract reasoning as a necessary component for critical thinking skills and not rote memorization or repeating what others have done (McLeod, 2012). Piaget's philosophy has also been used by others as a basis for constructivism in education, particularly his concept of dynamic learning to construct meaningful order (Peterson, 2012).

With this in mind, middle school is an appropriate time to begin teaching with abstract thinking concepts in mind and progressive complex knowledge development as described by Piaget. However, with the high-stakes testing model used today, abstract thinking and critical thinking skills are often replaced with basic fact memorization in history and science classes. This is done in order to teach the vast amount of material that needs to be covered in one year. Being able to make a judgment means utilizing critical thinking skills - necessary skills for our

leaders of tomorrow. As Jefferson (1781) stated, "by apprising them [students] of the past history would enable them judge the future (p. 198)."

To teach critical thinking skills in the social studies classroom, history needs to be presented not just through the textbooks with rote memorization as the end result, but through primary sources. In the current age of technology, classrooms have access to an amazing amount of visual resources and information. This knowledge is readily available and has the potential to be used for primary source discernment.

Mayer (1998) developed a Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning to provide research and studies on the cognitive benefits and use of multimedia in the classroom. Primary sources are often displayed through multimedia because of its quick access to historical information. The theory contains five aspects, shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning Principles and Explanations

Principle	Explanation
Multiple Representation Principle	Explanations should be made in words and pictures allowing for two different mental representations: verbal and visual
Contiguity Principle	Multimedia presentations should include contiguous words and pictures explanations
Split-Attention Principle	Multimedia presentations should use auditory narration not on-screen text
Individual Differences Principle	The effects will depend on individual differences of the learner
Coherence Principle	It is more beneficial to use fewer words for a highlight of the summary

Note. Adapted from Mayer and Moreno (1998).

According to Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, middle school age is the beginning of abstract thought. Mayer's Multimedia Theory attests to the possible cognitive growth through visual representation including primary sources. Wineburg's (1991) concept of

historical thinking can be viewed as utilizing the two concepts. His theory places an emphasis on critical thinking skill development, an abstract concept, through analysis of primary sources, which are a visual representation. As an educational psychologist, Wineburg (1991) was interested in how people learn from written text, particularly primary sources found in history classes. Wineburg (1991) focused his research on the lack of historical critical thinking skills used by teachers and students. In his study, he presented eight texts (seven primary sources and one textbook) to use with the process of think aloud. Think aloud is a social studies-literacy strategy in which a person discusses a text aloud while reading it. In other words, a passage is read and the person says aloud everything he or she is thinking while reading (Wineburg, 1998). Several college-bound students were asked to think aloud through the texts and then determine which sources they found to be the most trustworthy. The students determined the textbook to be the most accurate and trustworthy. These results caused Wineburg (1991) to conclude that history class should move from basic information found through embedded questions to a place of inquiry and complex cognitive processes.

Wineburg's research has continued with several studies. One, in 1998, involved the use of two history professors with a think aloud process used on documents from the Civil War Era. Wineburg determined once again that primary sources can be used to enhance historical thinking skills. As a result of his research, Wineburg (2008) has developed a concept entitled Historical Thinking Matters that addresses how to develop student historical thinking through analysis of primary sources, particularly visual ones, through sourcing, conceptualizing, corroborating, and close readings. The analysis resulting from use of this approach has been found to produce historical critical thinking skills in students.

Paul and Elder (2010) presented the concept that critical thinking should be infused within all disciplines. They suggest that this infusion with a common approach and language will allow for critical skill development. The approach developed by Paul and Elder utilizes three basic concepts, shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Paul and Elder's Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills	Explanation
Analysis of Thinking	Focusing on the parts or structures of thinking
Evaluation of Thinking	Focusing on the quality
Improvement of Thinking	Using what you have learned

Note: Taken from Paul and Elder (2010).

Paul and Elder (2010) contend that with the habitual use of critical thinking skills particular traits will be produced. There are five overall traits for a well-cultivated critical thinker: (a) raise vital questions; (b) gather and access relevant information, specifically abstract ideas; (c) develop well-reasoned conclusions; (d) think open-mindedly; and (e) communicate effectively (Paul & Elder, 2010). These five traits are similar to traits presented for developing a successful historical critical thinker. They provide an additional framework for how social studies classrooms can be utilized in skill development.

In 2007, Erikson presented his concept of the "thinking classroom" (p. 7), an idea that is similar to Paul and Elder's later 2010 framework. This type of classroom utilizes concept-based curriculum and instructional design models that focus on intellectual development, as well as on gaining knowledge. Students should be "invited to bring their own thinking to the factual study" (Erikson, 2007, p. 11). This invitation makes the learning process personal and emotional with

the goal of increasing intrinsic motivation. This will also lead students to extend their thinking beyond learning facts to view patterns and connections that are an integral aspect of historical thinking skills. Students will do as Paul and Elder (2004) stated, "improve the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them" (p. 1).

These five theories (concepts) provide the framework for the purpose of this study. A student's development from concrete to abstract is an important part of middle school years (Piaget, 1973). The current global age of technology allows for a constant use of primary sources through the multimedia available in the classroom (Mayer, 1998). The two concepts are connected through Wineburg's (2008) historical thinking matters concept. Paul and Elder's (2010) critical thinking skills concept and Erikson's (2007) concept based curriculum for the thinking classroom give a more in-depth explanation of the specific skill set that is to be developed.

Related Literature

Literature reviews provide links for proposed studies as well as gaps. In recent years, studies have been conducted on the use of primary sources in the social studies classroom to evoke historical empathy and how it enhances students' knowledge and understanding of history and critical thinking skills. This has been done as part of an effort to create better historical understanding and knowledge in response to low test scores in the subject. In the literature, it has been discussed and proposed that gifted students could be serviced in a regular education heterogeneous group social studies classroom.

Social studies lost importance with the passage of the No Child Left Behind act. The coming implementation of the Common Core Standards appears to continue this trend, as it does

not address the needs of any specific populations, including gifted students. At the same time, some research has shown that many social studies classrooms are still utilizing textbook teaching for rote memorization during the majority of the teaching time. There is a lack of studies in the literature that address the gap between what is being discussed for gifted students, critical thinking skills and social studies classrooms, and what is actually occurring with teachers in the social studies classroom today.

The literature review provides information on gifted education history and gifted student characteristics. The history of social studies in the classroom is presented. It also encompasses a definition of historical critical thinking skills, as well as ways in which primary sources can be used to enhance such skills. Lastly, a review is presented on how gifted students, social studies, historical thinking skills, and primary sources are intertwined in educational studies.

Gifted Education History

Gifted education first began in the United States in 1868 in St. Louis, Missouri with the first systematic attempt in public schools to educate gifted students under Superintendent William Harris. Intelligence as a numerical number, with subjects being grouped by numerical scores, began in 1905 with the development of a series of tests to identify children with inferior intelligence by researchers Binet and Simon (1916). H. H. Goddard translated this scale into English in 1908. Jean Piaget, born in Switzerland, came to the Binet Institute in the United States in the 1920s to translate English intelligence tests into French, after which he wrote his cognitive theory (McLeod, 2012).

In 1913, Lewis Terman believed that validation of the Binet-Simon Scale of mental intelligence would enhance the education of gifted and talented students. In 1921 he began his famous study of gifted students by standardizing the scale through large sample testing of

American students. Gifted students were described as having "quick understanding, insatiable curiosity, extensive information, retentive memory, early speech, unusual vocabulary" with a score 40% higher on the achievement test than other children of their chronological age (Terman, 1925, p. 287).

During the same time period that Terman conducted his studies on gifted children, Leta Hollingworth also conducted studies on the nature of gifted students and published the first textbook for gifted education in 1926. Even with studies such as these, gifted education in the classroom did not become widespread until 1957 when substantial amounts of money began to be funneled to the education of gifted students after the Soviet Union launching of *Sputnik*. Gifted education did not begin as a statewide process until the early 1970s.

The Marland Report of 1972, a seminal report authored by then Commissioner of Education, Sydney Marland, encouraged "states to identify a minimum of three to five percent of the school population as gifted" (Mcclain & Pfeiffer, 2012, p. 60). Since then gifted education has evolved and changed through legislation and gifted definition modifications. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published and included policies and practices for gifted education, modification of curriculum, and how to raise academic standards. *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (2004) was published as a research based report on acceleration in American schools for gifted students, particularly how often acceleration was not done in the public school system to the detriment of the students. By the beginning of the 20th century, education authorities began to realize that utilizing only an IQ test score to identify gifted students was limited. A multiple criterion approach began to be utilized instead by those in the gifted field. However, school districts have been slow to change their own approach (Mcclain & Pfeiffer, 2012).

Throughout this time, a single consensus for a definition of gifted has not been agreed upon by all. *Conceptions of Giftedness*, edited by Sternberg and Davidson (2005), included 24 chapters of gifted education scholars' theories and aspects of giftedness and none were the exact same. McClain and Pfeiffer's study of 2012 also determined that one definition among the 50 states was not found, and in many cases varied by district. This lack of a consensus can be viewed as a blessing going beyond "cultural blindness" (Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005, p. 102), as it can facilitate various theories and models on how to identify giftedness and provide for such students. This approach may be sensitive to what is thought of as gifted throughout a wide range of cultures at home and abroad (Persson, 2012).

There are several well-known definitions of giftedness. One of the more well-known definitions was formed by Joseph Renzulli in 1978. He theorized gifted behavior contained three important components: specific abilities to perform above the general average, task commitment, and high level of creativity (Renzulli, 1978). The Jacob Javits Act, a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed in 1988, with giftedness defined as:

> children who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership capacity, or specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities. (p. 26)

The Jacob Javits Act was renewed in 2001 with additional support for projects for gifted students included, but one definition for all states was not included. One possible reason for lack of a synonymous definition could be due to the many dimensions and characteristics of giftedness.

Gifted characteristics and identification. Gifted characteristics are divided into a variety of subcategories. There are intellectual, learning, creativity, leadership, affective, and

cognitive characteristics, to list some of the more well-known (American Mensa, 2012; Manning, 2008; Seagoe, n.d.). Within the subcategories are characteristics for each along with special needs that should be met in the classroom for gifted students to truly succeed. Gifted students must first be identified based on a definition and the criteria.

As of 2012, a consensus for a definition of giftedness has not been found although many states have changed or modified their definition of gifted over the past 10 years. Out of 50 states, 48, including South Carolina, have their own established definitions of giftedness according to a study conducted by McClain and Pfeifer (2012).

For the purpose of this study, the definition of gifted education will be the one provided by the South Carolina State Board of Education in June 2004 since the study will be conducted in a South Carolina school district. According to Regulation 43-220, gifted education pertains to students:

> identified in grades one through twelve as demonstrating high performance ability or potential in academic and/or artistic areas and therefore require an educational program beyond that normally provided by the general school program in order to achieve their potential. Gifted and talented abilities for these regulations include: academic and intellectual ability: students who have the academic and/or intellectual potential to function at a high level in one or more academic areas and visual and performing arts: students who have the artistic potential to function at a high performance level in one or more fine arts. (p. 1)

Students are identified using both aptitude and achievement tests in South Carolina. Each district is given license to develop their own gifted program that must be submitted to the Department of Education every three years for review (SC Regulation 43-220, 2004). In recent

years, with the passage of No Child Left Behind's emphasis on reading and math, coupled with budget shortfalls across the state, many districts are choosing to reduce or eliminate gifted programs with the belief that the regular classroom can serve them. This includes the district that is the focus of this study.

The district that is the focus of this study has a multi-step process consisting of referral, screening, and assessment. The South Carolina Department of Education criteria for placement into the gifted program are based on three dimensions: Aptitude, Achievement, and Academic. All district students during second grade are initially screened. Screening following second grade is done based on recommendations made by teachers, administrators, counselors, or parents, with screening most often done when Advanced scores are received in math or reading on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) ([School District Name Withheld], 2013). Students must meet two of the three criteria listed in Appendix A. After identification, students receive services through a pull-out classroom in grades three through seven and honors/Advanced Placement tracked classes in grades eight through twelve.

State of gifted education. Gifted education, according to Renzulli (2012), has two purposes. The first is to allow students who possess a superior potential in an area to maximize their opportunities. The second is to further civilization while producing new ideas. To provide for the two purposes, Renzulli states that public education should provide optimal education based on student strengths and needs.

Instead, funding and staffing for public education, including gifted education, have faced many cuts throughout recent years, with gifted education still searching for an identity. Classrooms often fail to meet the needs of gifted students in spite of some evidence to the contrary (Van Tassel-Baska, 2008). Gifted students are valuable resources but are not being

challenged to maximize opportunities. Educators often mistakenly believe that gifted students will simply progress through information independent of outside help (McCoy & Rader, 2008). The general education teacher often lacks the training necessary to meet the needs of gifted students (Banger et al., 2010), or they may espouse a belief that gifted education is an elitist concept that should not be endorsed (O'Reilly & Matt, 2012).

Most gifted students, including the profoundly gifted, in the public education system are in an age-appropriate regular education classroom with little or no modification (Kearney, 1996; Troxclair, 2000) having to "endure unchallenging curriculum, a slow pace of instruction, and a state of ignorance by many of their general education teachers" (Berman et al., 2012, p. 19). A 2002 study conducted by Moon et al., showed that regular education teachers placed gifted learners fourth in importance behind the whole class as a single unit, average learners, and learners with disabilities. A similar study conducted in 1995 placed gifted learners second in importance within the classroom (Moon et al., 2002). In the Moon et al. study of 2002, curriculum standards and key concepts were considered the most important. This is lowered expectations compared to the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT) study in 1995 in which complex open-ended questions and student questions and choices were the most important aspects of the classroom.

This trend was not helped by the passage of NCLB in 2002, as demonstrated by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. In 2008, the Institute compared pre and post NCLB data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), as well as teachers' views toward gifted students. The results indicated that gifted students made minimal gains over the five-year span. Teachers indicated they believed all students should receive equal attention. In fact, 60% stated that the struggling students should receive the majority of the attention (Thomas B. Fordham Institute,

2008). Early assessments do not indicate this will change with the implementation of the CCSS, although studies have not been conducted at this point.

An overall reason for gifted students having a lack of attention in the classroom is often the erroneous view that gifted students are privileged and will understand and pass the information no matter the circumstances. Thus they are left to their own devices. In a study conducted in Montana, O'Reilly, and Matt (2012) attempted to address the problem presented in the mainstream media that students are oftentimes placed in gifted programs because of a belief that the student's birth date in relation to the start of the school year will increase their success in school. The findings, through use of a correlation coefficient, indicated that small districts did tend to reflect bias toward age in Montana public schools, whereas large districts did not. With the study taking place in Montana only, it cannot be generalized throughout the United States because the majority of the school districts sampled were rural and predominantly Caucasian. However, the researchers used these results to suggest that mainstream media, as well as educational journals, must be extremely careful in generalizations in order to represent the gifted population accurately.

A lack of cohesive and comprehensive policies for gifted students continues today (Stephens, 2011). Gifted students are the only exceptional children with no federal protection by law (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Kinney, 2008;) although the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008 does state that teachers must have skills and an understanding of how to effectively meet the needs of all students. This specifically includes gifted and talented students. This created the first federal mandate for how teachers should prepare to teach gifted students. The majority of the funding for gifted education comes from individual state budgets and not the federal government.

As budgets are cut, gifted school programs are caught between the "budget knife and current philosophical movements in education which emphasize heterogeneity" (Kearney, 2005, p. 2). In the 2011, 2012, and 2013 federal budgets, the Javits Act received zero funding for gifted education for the first time since its passage in 1988 (US DOE, 2014). The 2014 federal budget does provide five million dollars for gifted education, with one million earmarked for research and the other four million for discretionary grants. This amount is significantly lower than the 11.5 million dollars provided in 2002 (US DOE, 2014). As a result, gifted students continue to be placed in an "age-grade lockstep" in which gifted children waste a good portion of their time and energy (Kearney, 2005). This can lead students to become bored, disengaged in school, and become underachievers. They may be the "class clown" in an attempt to gain their peers' acceptance because they feel isolated for being gifted (Manning, 2006). Educators are tasked with providing for all students, however when students become bored and the class clown because they already have knowledge being discussed it can lead to teachers feeling frustrated with the gifted students in the classroom.

Today, Common Core Standards are the newest concept for education as a whole. Common Core will allow all students in the nation to learn the same standards in reading and math, with science and social studies to be added into the concept over the next several years. Gifted students are not given special differentiation because the standards are believed to be already at a high level of learning. However, if used rigidly, common core could possibly limit learning (Johnsen, 2012). As our nation continues on the path of full inclusion schools, the status of the gifted student will most likely not improve, particularly minority students who continue to be underrepresented in gifted identification (Ford, 2011) even though approximately half of the

states do mandate policies and procedures to identify minority gifted students (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012).

In a previous study presented in 2006 by Brown, Avery, Van Tassel-Baska, Worley, and Stambaugh, South Carolina was found to be the one state out of the five included with a gifted program that could stand on its own meaning it has developed a positive gifted program. According to the Constitution, education ultimately rests in the hands of the individual state. Because of gifted education requirements, content differs not just state to state, but also district to district. In 2003, the College of William and Mary in Virginia was contacted by the Ohio Department of Education to conduct a policy review of six states' policies and success rates in regard to their gifted students (Brown et al., 2006). The six states were chosen based on meeting preset criteria of having a state director, gifted education legislature, funding above five million dollars, similarities to the demographics of Ohio, as well as willingness to be a part of the study (Brown et al., 2006).

The researchers conducted five types of data analysis: document review of the states' regulations, guidelines and policies as provided by the gifted director, interviews with Department of Education personnel, focus groups with each states' advisory groups for gifted programs, and deductive analysis of each states' written policies compared to the NAGC's most recent program standards at the time of the study. The researchers determined that South Carolina had developed a comprehensive gifted policy to ensure that gifted students be identified and serviced. It was also determined that the policies implemented were "visible and viable" with involvement by university personnel, local districts and government to develop regulations and best practices for gifted programs leading to "much buy-in for the system used" (Brown et al., 2006, p. 15).

While this was a positive endorsement for the gifted education program in South Carolina, there were limitations. There was no plan of action to continually reevaluate and include the newest research for gifted identification. There was also a lack of connection between gifted education and content standards, particularly concerning middle school teachers. Due to the study's small sample size and similar subject demographics, the results could not be used as an accurate comparison to other states (Brown et al., 2006).

Case studies conducted by Swanson and Lord (2011) and Swanson (2007) specifically on South Carolina gifted education programs indicated a state program that is not stagnant. The state has shown growth with legislation such as the passage of the Education Improvement Act of 1984, mandating gifted education. Other examples of improvement have come from legal cases, standards and regulations that are reviewed and revised as needed. State funding has remained steady throughout this period (Swanson & Lord, 2011), although individual districts fund a large portion of the gifted programs. "The statute, regulations, and other state policies have provided clarity and consistency about who is academically gifted in SC, what qualifications are required for the teachers of academically gifted youngsters, and program model designs that are educationally sound" (Swanson, 2007, p. 134).

The case study was conducted by Swanson (2007) to determine how teachers were responding to gifted student needs in the standards-based environment of today's classrooms. The research grew to include minority and underrepresented students. While it cannot be generalized it does give significant insight into one state's gifted program. Through interviews, focus groups, and document review, researchers determined that South Carolina had increased the amount of students identified as gifted, but increased funding was regulated to teacher salaries and not to the gifted programs. Teachers are not fully prepared to teach gifted students

with only a six-hour endorsement requirement. This just scratches the surface of gifted students' needs and characteristics (Swanson, 2007).

In 1995, Tomlinson, Callahan, Moon, Tomchin, Landrum, Imbeau, Hunsaker, and Eiss, conducted a two-year study on pre-service teacher preparation to meet the needs of gifted students. The results indicated that pre-service teachers acknowledged students had diverse needs. When these teachers began student teaching they were interviewed, and discussed differentiation in the classroom as an overall goal; however, differentiation was not a focus. Instead, teacher-led classroom activities for all students were the norm. This approach was chosen in an attempt to keep the classroom effectively managed, oftentimes at the encouragement of the mentoring teacher or university representative (Tomlinson et al., 1995).

Bangor et al. (2010) and Berman et al. (2012) both conducted qualitative studies researching general teacher education candidates', or as each study stated pre-service teachers', knowledge and understanding of gifted students. Berman et al. (2012) discovered that pre-service teachers do not have knowledge of how gifted students learn differently and that they need additional instruction in order to be adequately prepared. Bangor et al. (2010) began their study with the premise that students in a teacher education program do not have knowledge of how to teach gifted students. The subjects participated in a course as well as a simulated classroom on Saturdays. The results indicated pre-service teachers gained knowledge of their own perceptions of gifted students, gifted characteristics, as well as how to best teach them in heterogeneous classroom (Bangor et al, 2010). Both studies were qualitative and cannot be generalized, but do add to the overall body of knowledge on the subject adding depth.

Drain (2008) conducted a dissertation study on elementary teachers' attitudes and practices of differentiation for gifted students. The results indicated none or infrequent differentiation and

the strategies used were often not in the best interest of gifted students. This information can lead one to the same question asked in 2003 by the director of the Center of Gifted Studies and Talent Development, Cheryll Adams: "Are we moving forward or spinning our wheels?" (p. 116). Gifted education teachers are mandated in some states, including South Carolina, to have an endorsement for gifted education before teaching. Regular education core teachers are not required to be gifted endorsed, although they will likely have gifted students in their classrooms (Swanson & Lord, 2011). There are indications that gifted students are not having needs met, as teachers maintain the use of textbook rote knowledge in order to prepare for standardized testing in all subjects, including social studies.

State of History Education

The United States is entrenched in a belief in civic duty and virtue as a part of the American identity. The Constitution and the passage of time have brought all men and women over the age of 18 the right to vote, historically considered a part of American civic duty. Today students are provided a civic education through Social Studies classes - a 20th century concept. Within social studies, students are taught history, geography, economics, anthropology, government, and civics. Teachers need to be up to date on history and current learning theories while contending with conflicting information from popular culture. Other disciplines such as math and English do not have to contend with these issues (Wineburg, 2001).

At the same time, a survey of students in 2002 at 45 American universities showed four out of five graduating seniors scored a D or F on a set of test questions taken from a high school history curriculum (Wilson, 2007). This survey followed the 1987 study conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress, which showed that 8,000 eleventh graders could only answer 54% of the questions on United States history correctly. Subsequently, the Bradley

Commission on History in Schools was a response to what was viewed as a quantity and quality inadequacy of history education (Yarema, 2002).

Studies indicate that the textbook has remained the central focus of most history classrooms. As Sewall wrote in 2000, "textbooks are the draft horse of the social studies curriculum. They are familiar efficient, portable, and relatively cheap. They provide an organized sequence of ideas and information. Textbooks structure teaching and learning" (as cited in Lavere, 2008, p. 3). This trend appears to continue in classrooms, despite efforts to turn teachers away from its use as the major component for history curriculum. Many history teachers, particularly middle school teachers, do not have and are not required to have a degree in history. This fact may lead many to utilize textbooks which synthesize and integrate the material because teachers are unsure of the material being taught (Yarema, 2002).

Since the inception of No Child Left Behind and standards based teaching for all students, middle school social studies teachers are now required to teach vast amounts of information in a small amount of time, thus leading teachers to give as much factual information as possible and not develop historical critical thinking (Conklin, 2011; Guidry et al., 2010; Kingsley & Boone, 2008). In one case study from the United States Midwest, it was discovered that social studies was being pre-empted in the primary grades. The same case study indicated that upper grades focused on using the textbook, particularly emphasizing literacy skills, with an average loss of 76 minutes for social studies instruction time (Boyle-Biase, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008). While it is not possible to generalize this study, as it is a qualitative case study with only 13 participants in the Midwest, according to a study by the Thomas Fordham Institute (2011), most United States history standards are mediocre at best and being placed on the back-burner in favor of subjects generally considered more important.

Through a national survey, in which 1,051 randomly selected elementary and middle school teachers were selected, it was discovered that teachers spent less than four hours a week on social studies in 70% of the classrooms, with half integrating social studies with the language arts program (Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006). The survey was self-reporting without actual classroom attendance of the researcher to observe and monitor the amount of time given to social studies instruction. It does continue to give credence to the belief that at this juncture students are being required to learn more historical facts in less class time, retaining less information overall and not developing critical thinking skills within historical concepts. They are instead learning textbook based facts. In essence, middle school students' cognitive abilities are increasing, while at the same time the demand for higher-order thinking skills in the classroom is decreasing (Conklin, 2008). Middle school gifted students are often not provided critical thinking lessons in the history classroom, although it could be accomplished through differentiating content and instruction, (Kaplan, 2002; Troxclair, 2000; Van Tassel-Baska, 2008) performance assessments, (Moon, 2002) project-based learning, (Diffily, 2002) and primary source based lessons for historical critical thinking skills (Bickford, 2010; Salinas et al., 2011; Stoddard, 2008; Wineburg, 2012).

Historical critical thinking skills. While social studies in the public school classroom has seemingly been losing importance throughout the past decade, particularly since the passage of NCLB, there has been increased research activity in the field discussing historical critical thinking skills through the use of primary sources with the increased access to sources via the Internet (Salinas et al., 2011). Driving this concept is the belief that history, the driving class of social studies, should not consist of rote memorization or simple answers to complex history (Lindquist, 2012), but analysis and interpretation of primary sources similar to historians' work

in an effort to engage "more humane and tolerant citizens who could also think critically" (Stoddard, 2008, p. 153). A study conducted by Martell and Hashimoto-Martell (2011) and presented at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), included 94 participants, from a diverse population, and results indicated that utilizing critical thinking of history will increase students' interest in history and non-White students' identification with historical figures.

Researchers are interested in knowing what critical thinking skills are and if they are introduced and cultivated in the classroom. Critical thinking is debated as a nature versus nurture concept, as well as subject specific versus general definition. It has been defined in a variety of ways, with the psychologist Glaser (1942) defining it as a specific thought-process and application of skills to solve problems (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011)

Facione began publishing information on critical thinking in 1992 and has continued to do so over the past two decades. According to his latest publication, critical thinking skills are "thinking that has a purpose (proving a point, interpreting what something means, solving a problem)" (Facione, 2011, p. 4). Rudd, in 2007, discussed the various definitions of critical thinking that were presented in the 1990s and determined that the American Philosophical Association in 1990 gave the most clarity through the following definition:

> We understand critical thinking (CT) to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. CT is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such, CT is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one's personal and civic life. While not synonymous with good

> thinking, CT is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon. The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. Thus educating strong critical thinkers means working toward this ideal. It combines developing CT skills with nurturing those dispositions which consistently yield useful insights and which are the basis of a rational and democratic society. (Facione, 2011, p. 26)

Rudd (2007) also determined that critical thinking skills and higher order thinking skills are not equivalent. There are particular traits of critical thinkers such as independent thinking, intellectual empathy, and intellectual responsibility that are utilized consciously to guide the thinking process. This definition should transition to historical thinking skills, particularly in the K-12 history classroom, as these are the formative times when critical thinking skills are established.

In 2000, Paul and Elder conducted a study of public and private universities in California and determined that professors listed critical thinking as a primary goal. They believed themselves to be teaching critical thinking; however, they could not define critical thinking, explain on what standards it was based, describe how to teach it, or discuss traits essential to its use. The study however was not presented in enough detail so that it could be replicated in any other area of the country. The authors indicated what they believed to be necessary to teach

critical thinking skills in reference to civic education; however, a clear definition of critical thinking skills was not provided.

Stoddard (2010) explored citizenship, critical thinking skills, and added the use of primary sources in his case study. Stoddard (2010) defined historical thinking as the "active engagement in meaningful sense-making from the traces of history (i.e. primary sources) and historical accounts (i.e. secondary or tertiary sources) that we encounter and should include asking why something happened versus the mere fact of its happening" (p. 154). He determined that teachers were limited in teaching citizenship, critical thinking skills, and primary sources because of a disconnection between pedagogical decision-making and their own ideological beliefs and goals for students. His study was a case study involving two teachers and thus cannot be generalized.

Phipps, (2010), through a qualitative dissertation study, found similar findings in that a teacher's personal beliefs about education and citizenship influence how and what he or she teaches. Stoddard (2010) discussed the use of primary sources for critical thinking skills, explaining that his study focused on historical media, placing primary and secondary sources, film, textbooks, and websites as one large group. This is problematic because primary and secondary sources are not often found together in the same grouping and they are seen as vastly different.

Salinas et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine how pre-service teachers utilized technology to enhance historical thinking and primary sources. The researchers wanted to determine if pre-service teachers understood new technology and how to create new practices within teaching, or if they would continue to replicate existing practices. Historical thinking was defined as the "ability to reflect, synthesize, and construct understandings of history based on

evidence" (Salinas et al., 2011, p. 186), which once again demonstrates a lack of consensus on the definition for historical thinking skills. The term primary source was not adequately defined. The authors only repeatedly indicated the use of a primary source website. The qualitative study results indicated that the pre-service teachers did have a good knowledge of both historical thinking and primary documents including how to utilize technology to find and use primary sources; however, this study did not include in-service teachers. Martell (2011) conducted a case study of first year teachers to investigate their use of historical thinking skills and determined that classroom discipline and content coverage were both barriers to engaging students in historical thinking - aspects the pre-service teachers from the study conducted by Salinas et al. (2011) may not have encountered.

Primary sources and usage. The studies conducted by Stoddard (2010) and Salinas et al. (2011) indicate there is discrepancy as to how to define primary sources, with Stoddard indicating primary and secondary sources to be placed in the same category or historical media, and Salinas et. al. providing no true definition. The Library of Congress website defines primary sources as original documents and objects created during a particular time period. The site goes on to describe how to utilize primary sources in the classroom including how to assess how students apply critical thinking and analysis skills to primary sources. The term primary sources, other than to state objects, is not well defined. Teaching History is a website maintained by the Department of Education and according to the site, primary sources include documents, maps, music, art, photography, and original video (2010-2012).

Primary sources have "untapped potential for expanding and deepening the reading experiences of elementary and middle grade students" (Morgan & Rasinski, 2012, p. 584). This idea began in the 1960s in an attempt to reform history education (Weber, 2012) and has

continued to grow within the social studies classroom, with Wineburg as one of the forerunners. In an attempt to address the low achievement in social studies, studies have been conducted on the use of primary sources and historical thinking skills. Martell presented a study at the AERA 2011 annual meeting in which results showed the expanded coverage of state standards as being a barrier to critical thinking skills through primary sources. The belief that students using primary sources will engage in historical analysis and this analysis will enhance critical thinking skills and bring about a better understanding of the subject of history (Gradwell, 2010), as well as support teachers trying to meet state standards overall has prevailed (Libresco, 2007; Morgan & Rasinski, 2012) .

Primary sources and historical critical thinking skills were approached from the students' perspective in a study conducted by Tally and Goldenberg (2005). Students in social studies classrooms with teachers who had a frequent use of primary sources were asked to analyze documents including photographs, maps, quilts, music, speeches, and cartoons provided through a computer based program. The results indicated an overall higher interest in history classes and student ability to apply historical thinking skills without prior direct teaching of an historical era, with students in Advanced Placement or Honors classes showing more aptitude than other students, although all students benefitted (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). Similar findings were found by Endacott (2010) in which qualitative data were gathered from students suggesting that primary source usage led to higher cognitive understanding.

Gradwell (2010) utilized an interpretive case study and approached the concept from the teacher's perspective. The teacher described in the study was chosen because of prior knowledge of her use of primary sources in what was believed to be an attempt to develop critical thinking skills in a heterogeneously grouped eighth-grade social studies classroom that

included gifted, regular education, and special education students. Documents, photographs, artwork, poetry, musical recordings, and firsthand accounts were all types of primary sources used by the teacher of the case study (Gradwell, 2010).

Gradwell (2010) discovered that primary sources were being used to help students think critically for the overall purpose of producing good citizens who can function well in a democratic society. The teacher in the study had both great knowledge of the subject taught as well as guiding purpose in the use of primary sources, leading Gradwell to conclude that perhaps this is what is needed for more social studies teachers to utilize primary sources effectively. The conclusion, however, cannot be generalized to other teachers and does not address a subset of the population in the schools, specifically gifted students. Gradwell's study was similar to qualitative studies conducted by Phipps (2010) and Swan and Hicks (2007) that presented continuing evidence that the teacher's own perception of citizenship does influence how and why a teacher teaches. In addition, a qualitative study conducted by Salinas et al. (2011) suggested that the greater the working knowledge of historical thinking that a teacher has will influence the degree of use of primary sources in the classroom.

Paradoxically to Salinas et al. (2011), Yarema (2002) discussed through a literature review, studies by Nash (1991) and Loewen (1995) that indicated history teachers used the textbook more often than primary sources because of the teachers' and students' lack of historical knowledge. The lack of historical achievement in middle and high school U.S. students was presented by a study conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress in 1987. In the review of the literature, Yarema (2002) determined that new approaches to teaching history were being encouraged to increase content knowledge and interest. The various approaches included current events, literary works, field trips, and utilizing primary sources such

as narratives, diaries, newspapers, photographs, songs, cartoons, and paintings. Primary sources have actually been recommended as far back as 1892 by the National Education Association's Committee of Ten to teach history more effectively in the K-12 classroom (Yarema, 2002).

The literature review conducted by Yarema (2002) coincided with the passing of No Child Left Behind (2001), the reason many cite for the rote memorization style of history classes found today. Teachers in a need to address hundreds of years of historical information in a short school year end up in a "breathless rush from point to point fatal to rigorous thinking" (Hampel, 1985, p. 364). Subsequent studies and papers have been published indicating the use of primary sources for critical thinking skills, with many considering Wineburg the leader on the pursuit of historical critical thinking skills.

In 1991, Wineburg published his qualitative study in which he wanted to determine what made the thinking skills of an expert historian different from a novice historian. In his study, Wineburg had history professors and students use the think aloud method with the same primary documents and then compared how the two groups thought through the information in order to formulate measurable historical critical thinking skills. His study has been referenced and is a basis for many subsequent ideas and beliefs that history can enhance the critical thinking of students.

Ensign (1997) stated advanced reading material (primary sources) can lead gifted learners into thinking critically about a subject area such as history. In 2008, Wooden utilized Wineburg's 2001 study of pre-service teachers to conduct a study of sixth graders' use of primary sources. The results of the study indicated a similar finding to Wineburg's, in that students need to be taught how to analyze primary sources instead of looking superficially.

Furthermore it was determined that teachers need to understand how to choose primary sources. The study did not address gifted students nor did it contain a large sample size.

Wilcox et al. (2010) published a qualitative study and inferred from the study that music as a primary source could be linked to academic achievement; however, no empirical evidence was provided. Little et al. (2007) published an article on the study of curriculum effectiveness in social studies, specifically looking at a curriculum project funded from the Javits Act. The study supports the idea that if higher level process and specific conceptual thinking activities with strong content, including primary sources, are integrated into the curriculum, then students will achieve stronger gains as a direct knowledge-based structure. Secondly, it showed that this type of curriculum can promote gains for students who are either gifted or non-gifted. However, the authors discussed a need for more research on gifted student learning in social studies, as the overall sample size of the study was large, but the sample of gifted students was quite small. There was also a discussion of the need to compare homogeneous to heterogeneous classes for gifted student learning.

The National Council for Social Studies has monthly lesson plans on the use of primary sources to enhance the classroom, particularly problem solving and critical thinking skills. Oftentimes teachers fail to utilize such information, relying solely on rote memorization. Although in a small qualitative study, Fillpot (2012) determined that students utilizing primary sources are only limited by the curriculum, not age, and gifted and talented students should be given greater attention with the use of primary sources for historical thinking. Gifted students need the primary source to make a connection to the past (Morris, 2008). In both studies by Fillpot (2012) and Morris (2008) the samples were elementary students and did not include gifted middle school students, nor did it include teachers.

Middle school students today have a greater knowledge and ability to use visual media than all past generations (Thaler, 2013). This visual media fluency can lend itself to the social studies classroom, particularly with the use of primary sources. Historical primary sources are most often visual, such as photographs, videos, documents, and personal letters. Bickford (2010) utilized this belief in his qualitative study of developing historical critical thinking skills in middle school students through studying and creating political cartoons, a visual primary source. By taking this approach, students were given the opportunity to engage in learning history's complex nature (Bickford, 2010).

Critical Thinking Skills in Social Studies Gifted Classrooms

Gifted students have been shown to enhance their higher order thinking skills through specific units of study in a content area, with inquiry being the most powerful form of teaching gifted students (Van Tassel-Baska, 2008). Critical thinking skills addressed in the gifted classroom are extremely important during the current era of standards-based teaching (Swanson & Lord, 2011). Erikson (2007) promotes a concept-based curriculum to develop a thinking classroom. One important curriculum concept in the history classroom is the use of primary sources. Primary sources are viewed by several researchers as a resource to enhance the social studies curriculum and increase critical thinking skills in the social studies classroom (Gradwell, 2010; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005; Van Tassel-Baska, 2008; Wineburg, 2001).

The Department of Education of South Carolina utilized the College of William and Mary Center for Gifted Education to develop research based curriculum in content areas for gifted students, including social studies (Swanson & Lord, 2011). The state Department of Education also developed *The South Carolina Best Practices Manual for Gifted Education* (2001) and the *Academically Gifted and Talented Curriculum and Instruction* (2004), providing

information on differentiated instruction and support services that provide teacher development with a common language around South Carolina gifted education (Swanson & Lord, 2011).

The College of William and Mary has developed a curriculum specifically for social studies and gifted students. Greater curriculum challenge is one of the most frequent and consistent needs expressed by experts in the field of gifted education (Little, 2012). A quasi-experimental research study was conducted through the university to determine if students who used the specific social studies curriculum intervention would outperform other students in concept and content knowledge, as well as critical thinking skills. The curriculum intervention included in-depth study of influential eras in history with an emphasis on primary sources. Teachers were also expected to show change toward critical thinking learning after being trained with the curriculum intervention (Van Tassel-Baska, 2008).

The personal beliefs that a teacher may possess about student cognitive ability has been shown to influence a student's outcome in the classroom. In a qualitative study conducted in conjunction with a teacher education course by Conklin, Hawley, Powell, and Ritter (2010), it was determined that given instruction on ability while learning to teach can enhance a teacher's expectations for a student, particularly in the middle school social studies classroom while using primary sources. While this was a qualitative study with only 17 participants in one geographic area of the US, it cannot be generalized, but does add to the body of information and literature on the subject.

The outcome of the study at The College of William and Mary indicated the hypothesis was correct with students and teachers using the curriculum intervention showing more gains than the control group. It was particularly successful with gifted students to develop critical thinking skills (Van Tassel-Baska, 2008). These skills are a major goal of American education

in an effort to help students learn how to form well-reasoned solutions to problems through analysis.

Summary

In the literature, research tends to focus on gifted students' needs for critical thinking skills and enhanced curriculum or the need to develop critical thinking skills in students in social studies through the use of primary sources. It is almost as if some studies are at cross-purposes and not viewing a link that should be a natural focus. This will need to be addressed as education turns from state standards to the Common Core State Standards. Standards that "do not define the nature of advanced work for students who meet the Standards prior to the end of high school" and "do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010b, p. 6).

The literature has provided qualitative studies on the use of primary sources in the history classroom for critical skill development, as well as a need for critical skill development in gifted students. A lack of use of primary sources in the classroom in deference to a textbook has also been a recurring theme throughout the literature. There is also a lack of research that dealt with the middle school social studies classroom. High school students were the focus of most of the research, although middle school is an appropriate age to begin the use of primary sources in-depth. There is also a lack of literature on middle school teachers' ideas on the three concepts as a whole: gifted students, primary sources, and critical thinking skills. Middle school is often the school-age in which gifted students are given the least amount of enhanced curriculum. This lack of focus and information is what was addressed in the current qualitative study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Social studies courses are considered an integral part in the collective effort to create a productive democratic society. Students' knowledge of history and social studies concepts has significantly diminished (Thomas Ford Institute, 2011, Wilson, 2007, Yarema, 2002). They also struggle with critical thinking skills development. Teachers and researchers are constantly trying to find the best way to convey historical information in a manner that will cause students to retain the information and become critical thinkers with regard to history. Primary sources are an effective tool in accomplishing this task. This study investigated perceptions of current teacher knowledge and usage of critical thinking skills, particularly with regard to gifted students. The chapter contains information on how and where the research questions involving primary sources and critical skills assessment were answered.

Design

The qualitative approach was chosen for this study in order to gain insight into the knowledge and practices of middle school social studies teachers. The use of a qualitative study allows openness, depth, and discovery without predetermined factors and categories. The depth of study provides rich meaning to the phenomenon researched (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Qualitative research describes the data in words and pictures, not numbers. The data are rich and examined through a lens that assumes all information is important. The theory presented in the study is determined from the bottom up and not the top down as analysis of the data and commonalities determined lead one to a theory. The perspectives of the participants are valued and seen from a holistic approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

According to Gall et al. (2007), a phenomenon is a process, event, person, or other item of interest. This qualitative study utilizes the phenomenological approach derived from the philosophy movement of the late 19th century with Husserl as its founder (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002). Husserl (1913) described phenomenology as "the science of the essence of consciousness" (para. 33). In the practice of phenomenology, a person will "classify, describe, interpret, and analyze structures of experiences in ways that answer to our own experience" (Smith, 2013, p. 19). The phenomenological inquiry begins with silence in order to grasp the phenomenon or what is being studied by bracketing the information. It involves the description of common meaning from several individuals' lived experiences. Phenomenology is used to gain entry to an understanding of the world of the informants, or participants, in which the researcher acts as if "they do not know what it means and study it to find out what is actually taken for granted" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). This is in order for the participants' voices to be heard. As Moustakas (1994) stated, the aim of phenomenological research is to determine what an experience means to a person and to have them provide a description of this experience.

For the purpose of this study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis is used to generate lower and higher order categories from the data (Barker et al., 2002). The interpretative approach includes symbolic interpretation. People develop common definitions to a situation when experiences and problems are similar. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interpretation is a distinct approach toward the study of human conduct, with the first premise being that human beings act toward things, such as physical objects, guiding ideals, schools, and activities, based on the meaning these said things have to them. This study investigated teachers' perceptions of critical thinking skills, gifted education, and primary sources. Within the theory of symbolic interpretation, the actions of the teachers in the classroom developed because of the

meaning they have given to critical thinking skills, gifted education, and primary sources, and the interaction that took place between the teachers and the gifted students.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide the study:

- What are the educational backgrounds of middle school social studies teachers qualifying them to teach social studies and gifted students?
- What do middle school social studies teachers understand to be primary sources and how do they use them in the classroom?
- What are critical thinking skills and how can social studies and primary sources be used to enhance these skills in gifted students?

Setting

The study took place at a mid-sized school district that encompasses a county with a population of 62,000 in the Midlands area of South Carolina. The ethnic breakdown for the county at the time of the study was 72% White, 25% African-American, and 4.6% Hispanic. The county has an 85% high school graduation rate with 19% of the population attaining a bachelor's degree or higher. The school district contains four middle schools with a varied population. The county is considered a rural county; however, it is in close proximity to the capital of South Carolina and the area has grown significantly in the past decade. This has resulted in two of the middle schools reflecting a suburban population. The county seat area contains one middle school with a higher minority population and more urban issues and the fourth school is mostly rural. This variation reflects many aspects of schools found throughout the country, and teachers and leaders most often reflect their organization.

This school district contains a pull-out gifted program that until the 2013-2014 school-year serviced third through eighth graders. The pull-out program for over a decade was housed at two of the middle schools, with teachers serving an average of two grade levels. Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, the pull-out program began servicing third through seventh graders, with eighth graders receiving either or both English I and Algebra I as enrichment for their gifted status. Instead of busing the students to two of the four middle schools as previously done, a minimum of one teacher is assigned to each school in the district to service gifted students in that school, and so oftentimes one teacher will service sixth and seventh graders in the pull-out gifted program. The eighth-grade students are required to complete a research project and presentation and if they do so, may take the long-standing trip to Washington, D.C. in the spring. These changes were made in order to save on budget needs. At the same time, changes were made in regards to the curriculum so that the gifted program aligned itself to the new Common Core Standards, as well as science and social studies standards for the state. Teachers who would like to teach within the program must be trained through two courses mandated by the state department of education. The courses are offered at various state institutes, and in some previous years through the district itself.

The two middle schools that housed the program until the 2013-2014 school-year have a distinctly higher percentage of participants in the program than the other two middle schools. There are also two to three elementary schools in the district that always have a higher percentage of students qualify for the program. However, in the past several years the district has made concerted efforts to include a diverse population more representative of the district's population.

One of the four middle schools for the area is the school in which special needs children are bused throughout the year. There are five self-contained special education classes and two resource pull-out classes for learning disabilities. All middle schools contain two to three administrators, one speech therapist, 20 to 25 support staff, one media specialists, two guidance counselors, one school nurse, one itinerant English as a second language (ESOL) teacher and one school psychologist. The ESOL teachers and school psychologists are assigned to several elementary schools throughout the year.

Participants

Sampling in qualitative research is generally purposive. In other words, participants are selected because they suit the needs of a study and will likely be "information-rich" (Gall et al., 2007). This is done in order to provide "maximum insight and understanding" to what is being studied (Ary et al., 2010, p 428). It is not done to achieve population validity (Gall et al., 2007). This study utilized purposive sampling with maximum variation sampling involving nine participants. Maximum variation sampling uses multiple cases that exhibit a range of characteristic variations for two purposes: The purposes were to document the range of variation as well as to determine common themes and patterns (Gall et al, 2007). The use of maximum variation sampling allowed the study to determine differences and commonalities among the participants studied (Ary et al., 2010).

The participants chosen through this process are seventh- and eighth-grade social studies teachers in the district. The majority of the teachers are from the regional area originally. Their education background is varied. Some of the participants taught elementary school prior to middle school and majored in elementary education, while other participants come from a secondary education background and majored in the subject area to be taught, such as history.

Procedures

Written permission was obtained from the school district to allow district personnel to participate in the study. This signed permission letter was attached to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application. The IRB process included an application with specifics on how participants and the information they provide was used in the study. Details were needed for the IRB application in order to ensure all regulations found in The Belmont Report were followed. This approval was imperative for a study that involved human subjects.

Institutional Review Board approval was given for the study in the spring of 2014 and can be found in Appendix B. Immediately following IRB approval, a letter via personal email was sent to all eligible participants (i.e. seventh- and eighth-grade social studies teachers) within the school district. Teachers were given information on how to contact the researcher for questions about the study. Nine teachers in the district were contacted and all agreed to participate in the study. A copy of the written letter of informed consent that was signed by participants may be found in Appendix C.

After participants agreed to be a part of the study they were given a pseudonym. There was one written record of which participant corresponded to each pseudonym, and it was locked in a file cabinet that only I have access. After participants were aligned with a pseudonym, an interview time was arranged with each participant. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed within the MaxQDA program. The digital recordings and documents were secured on the password protected program and each participant's pseudonym was used. After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, coding of the interviews was conducted through the MaxQDA software program in order to determine themes and topics before completing field observations. Coding is explained in more detail beginning in the "Data Analysis" section.

At the completion of the interview, a survey on Gifted Education (Appendix D) was emailed to the participants for completion, and a time was arranged for a field observation in the classroom. The survey was conducted through Survey Monkey and upon completion an email notification was sent. After interviews and surveys were completed, an observation of a lesson taught by each teacher was conducted in the classroom. The observations were conducted on the teachers only and did not involve direct observation, contact, or speaking with the students in the classroom, and as such did not require permission from the students' parents or guardians. The purpose of the classroom observation was to see how the teachers utilized primary sources in the classroom. After interviews were conducted, surveys gathered, and observations conducted, data were analyzed and triangulated. Through this process, a focus was formed through the data analysis and is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Personal Biography

From 2004-2008 and then 2011-2013, I taught middle school social studies, specifically seventh grade. In 2008, I completed the requirements for a gifted and talented endorsement. There is a three year lull during the time I stayed home with my two children. In the summer of 2013, I completed requirements to add Advanced Placement - Human Geography endorsement to my teaching license. Beginning in the 2013, I have taught ninth-grade social studies, specifically Honors World Geography and AP Human Geography at the high school that is not the feeder school for the middle school where I previously taught. The participants of the research study are potential former colleagues of mine; however, I was not nor will be in any type of leadership role with any of the participants.

I chose this study and the use of a qualitative research design to understand how teachers use and view primary sources and their knowledge of gifted students. In my experience, primary

sources are a necessary aspect of teaching history, but too often textbook teaching is all that is being utilized, with the development of critical thinking skills not seen as a viable objective in the middle school classroom. I have observed that gifted students are also often being left in a lock-step concept without teachers trying to increase their critical thinking skills, and I see this potentially becoming more so as we transition to the Common Core Standards. I am interested in teachers' perceptions of how historical critical thinking can be taught to the gifted students in the classroom and if primary sources are a part of that process. This interest has increased as I now teach Advanced Placement coursework to ninth graders and many of these students have great difficulty with the curriculum framework particularly the need to critically think about an aspect and not just present a basic factual answer.

Data Collection

After IRB approval and participant agreement, data collection was done through three methods: survey, interviews, and teacher observations. Three methods were chosen to ensure quality and rigor of the information, as well as data triangulation. According to Gall et al., (2007), data should be collected through various methods so that findings can be corroborated across the variants to achieve data triangulation. If they are not consistent results it provides a framework in which to reconcile the data.

In this study, interviews were first conducted with participants and digitally recorded for accuracy. The interviews provided a way to ask multiple questions on the subjects: gifted education, social studies education, use of primary sources, and critical thinking skills. To further discover opinions on gifted education, a survey was sent for all participants to complete. This survey was provided by Dr. Betsy McCoach and may be found in Appendix D. Surveys were sent via email to participants. Lastly, classroom observations were conducted in order to

observe how the teacher implemented primary sources as discussed in the interview. Video and audio recordings were not utilized in the observations, but merely researcher observations of the teacher.

Interviews

The goal of the phenomenological researcher is to describe things as they are. The goal is not to describe how they understand the phenomenon from their own past experiences (Gall et al., 2007). To accomplish this goal a semi-structured approach to the interviews is best because it allows for an interview guide to be used while maintaining latitude to pursue various topics determined during the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This approach includes one long interview in order to gain a comprehensive description of the phenomenon studied (Gall et al., 2007). The guiding questions for the interview follow as well as Appendix E.

Guided interview questions.

1. Share your experiences you have had teaching middle school social studies to gifted students.

   Possible probes: What are some of the challenges and rewards of teaching gifted students? How do you address the needs of middle school gifted students? How do you perceive yourself as a social studies teacher for gifted students? How does your school provide gifted education services?

2. What do you feel qualifies you to teach middle school social studies as well as gifted students?

   Possible probes: What coursework have you had on teaching gifted and talented students? Do you have any personal experience outside of the classroom with gifted students? Was your major in school in one of the social studies disciplines?

3. What are your beliefs about how gifted students learn?

   Possible probes: How do you teach gifted students and is it different than the non-gifted? What is the reasoning for teaching gifted students differently?

4. How would you describe a primary source and its use in the classroom?

   Possible Probes: What do you consider to be a primary source? Where do you find primary sources? Why do you think primary sources are important for the social studies classroom? When making a lesson where do you find the information you use?

5. Describe critical thinking skills in the social studies classroom.

   Possible probes: How would you define critical thinking skills? Do you think using primary sources in the social studies classroom could be used to develop critical thinking skills in middle school students? As a middle school social studies teacher, have you thought about a link between primary sources and critical thinking skills in the classroom?

Research has shown there is discrepancy across the country and within states as to what gifted education is and how teachers are prepared to teach gifted students (Burney, 2008; McCain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Interview questions one, two and three were used to determine the teachers' knowledge of what it means to be gifted, as well as how gifted students' needs should be addressed in the regular education classroom. Current research indicates a discrepancy on how teachers address the needs of gifted students in the classroom (Kearney, 2005; McCoy & Rader, 2008; O'Reilly & Matt, 2012; Troxclair, 2000). Interview questions four and five were used to determine what the classroom teachers understand and know about primary sources, their usage, and critical thinking skills. These concepts are all addressed in the literature, but studies are not often specific with middle school students,

particularly gifted (Lindquist, 2012; Morgan & Rasinski, 2012; Salinas et. al., 2011; Stoddard, 2010; & Tally & Goldenberg, 2005).

The interviews were not piloted before beginning the study. There was a limited amount of possible participants in the district, and to pilot would have led to a lack of participants for the study. All participants were interviewed over a three-week period. Notes were not used during the interview in order to maintain more of a conversation; however, thoughts were written down immediately after each interview occurred. One interview was conducted in a local restaurant at the request of the participant. All others were conducted in the school setting afterschool or during participants' planning periods. Each interview was recorded through the program MaxQDA app on a personal, password-protected iPad. After each interview was concluded, it was uploaded to the program on a password-protected personal computer and subsequently deleted from the iPad.

Survey

Surveys have a variety of uses in qualitative research. Surveys can be utilized to choose participants for a research study, as exemplified by King (2012). Surveys can be used to determine a person's perspective on a subject. Most often this is done through Likert-type surveys allowing participants to select statements based on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree, measuring people's beliefs on a subject via a scale (Ary et al., 2010). McCoach and Seigel (2007) utilized a Likert survey to determine predictions of teachers' attitudes toward gifted students. A survey to determine the perceptions teachers have about gifted students was used in this study.

The Perception of Gifted Education Instrument was developed by Dr. Betsy McCoach and Kelly O'Shea. Through correspondence with Dr. Betsy McCoach, I was given a copy and

permission to use the survey she and Kelly O'Shea produced in which the Gagne and Nadeau instrument Opinions about the Gifted and their Education (1991) was streamlined. Based on results of an exploratory factor analysis and reliability analyses, McCoach and O'Shea (2010) created three subscales within the Instrument. The instrument was analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis, and based on the scores three subscales were created for further analysis. The first subscale, support, has a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .76. The second subscale, elitism, has a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .80. The third subscale, school acceleration, has a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .71 (McCoach & Siegle, 2007).

All participants were provided a link to the survey on the website SurveyMonkey after agreeing to participate. The link for the survey was provided via email. The survey is a Likert-type survey and the answers provided by the participants were analyzed qualitatively to determine pre-conceived perceptions about gifted education. Each question was analyzed to determine the percentage of people who chose each choice. This qualitative information provided more in-depth knowledge of the participants' views about gifted education, in particular comparing them to other special needs programs. A copy of the instrument can be found in Appendix D.

Observations

The goal of observations in qualitative research is to "understand complex interactions in natural settings" using words and narratives to describe the setting and behaviors (Ary et al., 2010, p. 431). One observation of each participant was conducted. Events were recorded as they occurred without an attempt to alter the situation in any way, or nonparticipant observations (Ary et al., 2010). Field notes, the most common method to record data collected, were used during observations. There are two components to field notes: descriptive, or a description of the

setting, people, and account of events, and reflective, or the observer's personal feelings and impressions of events (Ary et al., 2010; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Observers should include verbal portraits of research participants and physical settings that are detailed and concrete (Gall et al., 2007). Boyle-Baise et al. (2008) and Gradwell (2010) both conducted research in the social studies classroom in which observations of teacher lessons in the classrooms were conducted where field notes were collected and followed by an interview. The current study utilized a similar format with an observation in the classroom with field notes containing data that were then analyzed. The template for field notes may be viewed in Appendix F. The field notes did not use a recording device, but only detailed written notes of the lesson observed. Within the detailed written notes the descriptive aspects of what was observed, as well as observer comments for my different thoughts were included (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The data collected were descriptions of lessons taught by a middle school social studies teacher in which primary sources are included in the lesson with an attempt to have gifted students engage in critical thinking skills.

Data Analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), beginning researchers should approach data analysis by borrowing parts of analysis-in-the-field strategy as well as formal analysis and interpretation strategy when the data have all been collected. With this in mind, analysis and interpretation in the field was utilized so that the study was focused and narrowed during the data collection, as well as including observer's comments during data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The constant comparative method involves inductive category coding through constant comparison of all data for a theme (Ary et al., 2010). Data are examined for distinct

characteristics and grouped with similar other concepts. Each time there are no other similar categories a new one is generated. This process is constant and categories change, merge, or are omitted until all data have been analyzed and categorized and themes have emerged (Ary et al., 2010).

This study analyzed data through the constant comparative method, which is designed for multi-data sources. With this method, after each form of data collection (i.e. survey, interviews and observations) the data were analyzed with a theory developed until all research had been completed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This provided a multi-level form of analysis as described by Moustakas (1994). Level one is the original data or interview questions that is given at a face-value level, and level two is the reflective analysis and interpretation through constant comparative coding in which the theory was developed for the phenomenon that is being studied (Moustakas, 1994). With each type of data collected, key issues and themes were discovered and coded until a clear focus was formed. Constant comparative method is most often used with a multiple-site, participant observations studies according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and so this makes it an appropriate method to be used in the proposed study.

Coding, Evaluation, and Interpretation

First, familiarization of the data was done through transcribing the interviews personally as well as writing field notes during classroom observations. Throughout the process a reflective journal was maintained, as well as back-up copies of all information in a locked file cabinet. All computer based information was kept on a password-protected personal computer.

After transcribing each interview, coding was done. Coding provides researchers a way to organize and group data with similar characteristics into a data piece, then a category and used to form a theme (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For example, during the interviews of this study,

several of the participants discussed and used original photographs of a time period as a consistent form of primary sources utilized in the classroom, and so photographs were classified under a category of Primary Source Usage. The interviews were all recorded and coded using the MaxQDA program. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. After each transcription was completed the interviews were listened to and read. Each interview was coded and recoded utilizing the MaxQDA program with colors, phrases, and symbols, ultimately leading to the themes that developed.

The survey completed by the participants using a Likert scale was also coded to determine similar themes held by social studies teachers toward gifted students in the classroom. Each survey completed was analyzed in terms of how the answers seemed to enhance or change the answers previously given during the interviews. Observations were done without any sort of recording and involved observation of the teacher only. Field notes were taken that were both descriptive and reflective and then coded and analyzed as well.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has been addressed in the study in several ways.

Credibility

Credibility, or internal validity and structural corroboration are addressed through triangulation. The use of multiple sources of data to investigate the consistency and confirmation of data is the basic premise of triangulation (Ary et al., 2010). This study utilized triangulation through the use of data source combinations of interviews, surveys, and observations. This method has been used to determine if the data collected are consistent within three sources with the various subjects. Completed surveys were analyzed for themes and shared ideas to help focus interviews. An initial interview was conducted with each participant that was

recorded and reviewed for accuracy to ensure miscommunication had not occurred on the subject (Ary et al., 2006). A survey was then completed by all participants. Lastly, an observation was made of a teacher's lesson in the classroom with a short conversation following. Observations were not recorded and students were not the subject of the observations.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree in which the results can be transferred (Anney, 2014). This occurs through thick descriptions and purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to focus on participants that are particularly knowledgeable about a subject (Anney, 2014). Thick description refers to detailed descriptions that would allow another researcher to replicate the study. The district and participants chosen for this study were selected because of access to multi-sited middle schools with various population demographics and varied backgrounds of possible participants.

Conformability

Authenticity of the completed research and researcher bias were controlled through reflexivity or self-reflection. Qualitative research does not assume all meanings are fixed and stable. Instead, meanings were built and categorized through data collection. The findings need to be derived from the data (Anney, 2014). Reflexivity provided an approach to data collection that included the researchers' pre-conceptions being known in the study, as well as personal experiences and reactions in the field (Ary et al., 2010). Limitations of the study, as well as an ethical safe-guard are acknowledged and provided through reflexivity. This process allowed me a way to include a description of my personal experiences and reactions in the field, as well as describe how my approach to data collection affected the findings of the research study (Gall et al., 2007). To help control through reflexivity, I kept a reflective journal throughout the study to

understand and maintain my perspective. The reflective journal provided a place to write my thoughts as I compiled data (Ary et al., 2010), exemplified by Ross in his 2012 dissertation. Reflective journaling was also a place in which to write frustrations, ideas, feelings, and discussion for the rationale behind decisions made during the research study (Krefting, 1991), a process utilized by Buhl in his 2010 dissertation. I utilized both concepts in reflective journaling to maintain trustworthiness.

Dependability

To ensure the quality and rigor of the study, documentation through an audit trail was utilized by keeping all raw data, as well as decisions made throughout the study (Ary et. al, 2006). The audit trail was used to document the research process, including the source and method of raw data recording, field notes, and information about survey development and use (Ary et al., 2010). Clear and meaningful links were built through the research questions, raw data, and findings through the use of an audit trail.

When presenting the findings a question I asked myself was, "Have I accurately understood and portrayed my participants' viewpoints, thoughts, and experiences?" Simply put, do the participants agree with what I have said about them? To answer this question accurately, member checks, or participant feedback, has been included. Member checks also ensure quality and rigor in qualitative research by reflecting sound research design (Ary et al., 2010). Member checks ensure the participants' perspectives have been included in the study (Ary et al., 2010). The member checks help provide a safe-guard for accuracy as well as a courtesy to participants, perhaps allowing them to feel more comfortable with the idea of being involved in the study.

Ethical Considerations

The nine participants in this study all volunteered to participate after receiving an email explaining the study. The participants used in the study were made thoroughly aware of the purpose of the study and signed their consent to participate with the knowledge that they could withdraw at any time. All data, including names of participants, were kept on a password-protected laptop computer that is a personal device not owned by the school district. Hard copies of all information were placed in a locked filing cabinet in a home office. All participants were given pseudonyms throughout the research process, including in the written dissertation. Transcribed interviews and interpretations were provided for all teacher participants to read and determine if something was missed by the researcher.

Summary

This study used phenomenological qualitative research to determine the perspectives of middle school social studies teachers toward using primary sources for critical thinking skills development. Data from nine participants were collected using interviews, surveys, and field observations. Constant comparative method was used for data analysis. All interviews were recorded using MaxQDA and transcribed and coded within the program. Coding was also completed for the surveys and field observations. Trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation, reflexivity, audit checks, as well as member checks.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter contains qualitative analysis results of data gathered from this phenomenological qualitative study. The study was conducted to determine teacher perceptions toward using primary sources in middle school social studies classrooms to teach and enhance critical thinking skills to identified gifted students. Some studies in the literature address the importance of using primary sources in the classroom to teach critical thinking skills (Jones & Hebert, 2012; Lindquist, 2012; National Council for Social Studies, 2012; Neumann, 2012; Ormond, 2011; Padurano, 2011; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005; Waring & Robinson, 2010), as well as the lack of gifted education and a need for critical skill development while teaching gifted students (Bangor et al., 2010; Berman et al., 2012; Drain, 2008; Ford, 2011; Stephens, 2011; Swanson & Lord, 2011). However, there is a lack of research bridging these two concepts. This study was conducted to help bridge this gap. Nine participants agreed to be a part of the study. Each participant is a middle school social studies teacher. Data on their perceptions toward the concepts of primary sources, critical thinking skills, and gifted education were collected through interviews, field notes, and a survey.

A phenomenological study was chosen so that the research would reflect the voice of the participants. The interviews with each participant were transcribed and then analyzed to develop categories and themes. The findings on the phenomenological data are described in this chapter.

Research Questions

The study was designed as a phenomenological study in order to learn teacher perceptions and form themes. Following are the research questions used to frame the study:

1. What are the educational backgrounds of middle school social studies teachers qualifying them to teach social studies and gifted students?
2. What do middle school social studies teachers understand to be primary sources and how do they use them in the classroom?
3. What are critical thinking skills and how can social studies and primary sources be used to enhance these skills in gifted students?

Participants

The participants in this study were all middle school social studies teachers in the same South Carolina school district. The study utilized purposeful sampling with maximum variation sampling involving nine participants. Maximum variation sampling uses multiple cases that exhibit a range of characteristic variations for two purposes: to document the range of variation as well as to determine common themes and patterns (Gall et al, 2007). The use of maximum variation sampling allowed the study to determine differences and commonalities of the participants studied (Ary et al., 2010). All seventh- and eighth-grade middle school social studies teachers were identified through each school's website. An initial email was sent to potential participants that resulted in one participant agreeing to be a part of the study. After waiting a week a second individual email was sent to potential participants that resulted in eight participants agreeing to be a part, providing a total of nine participants. All participants were given a pseudonym for the purpose of this study. The table below provides information on the nine participants: gender, years teaching, gifted certification status, national board certification status, and educational background.

Table 3

Participant Background Information

Name	Gender	Gifted Certified	Years Teaching	Educational Background	National Board Certified in Social Studies
Erica	F	No	15-20 years	BA M ED	Yes
Renee	F	No	10-15 years	BA MA	Yes
Fred	M	No	1-5 years	BA	No
Celia	F	No	5-10 years	BS MAT	No
Nina	F	No	5-10 years	BS	No
Marie	F	Yes	10-15 years	BA	No
Pam	F	Yes	10-15 years	BA M ED	Yes
Carl	M	No	10-15 years	BS MA	No
Jeff	M	No	10-15 years	BA MA	No

Note: All information is based on participant self-reports

All participants returned their signed agreement to be a part of the study. After receiving the signed paper, interviews were scheduled with each participant with all but one occurring in a school setting. The one outside of a school setting took place at a restaurant at the request of the participant. After each interview, surveys were emailed through Survey Monkey for participants to complete and a time was scheduled for a classroom observation.

Results

Survey

As part of the triangulation process, and to enrich the data, a survey was utilized entitled the Educator's Perception of Gifted Education Instrument (O'Shea & McCoach, 2010). The survey was obtained from Dr. Betsy McCoach from the University of Connecticut in December 2012. The survey used a Likert scale of 8 so that educators can rate their thoughts and feelings

on the statements involving gifted education. Because this study dealt with the perceptions of gifted education, the survey provided in-depth information on a subject and allowed data to be obtained easily.

After each interview, the participating teachers were sent an email link to the survey. The survey was uploaded onto Survey Monkey to simplify the collection of answers. When each participant accessed the survey and finished, an email was returned to the associated email.

The survey was based on eight categories for each statement: completely disagree, mostly disagree, moderately disagree, neither agree nor disagree, moderately agree, mostly agree, and completely agree. The results indicate that while most participating teachers believe in the importance of gifted identification there are mixed beliefs on how and if gifted education should be funded compared to regular education and special education services. The specific results of the survey are compiled in Table 4 and are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Table 4

Educator's Perception of Gifted Education Instrument (2010) Results

	Completely Disagree	**Mostly Disagree**	**Moderately Disagree**	**Neither Agree Nor Disagree**	**Moderately Agree**	**Mostly Agree**	**Completely Agree**
1. Students identified as gifted should become future leaders.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	22.22% 2	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	11.11% 1
2. Students identified as gifted need more resources compared to average students.	0.00% 0	11.11 % 1	11.11% 1	0.00% 0	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	11.11% 1
3. Special curriculum is necessary to meet the academic needs of students identified as gifted.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	44.44% 4	11.11% 1

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
4. Students identified as gifted should provide society with many benefits.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	22.22% 2	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	11.11% 1
5. Students identified as gifted will be important resources to society.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	22.22% 2
6. The way that students identified as gifted learn greatly differs from other students.	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	0.00% 0	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	0.00% 0
7. Students identified as gifted will develop new ideas to further society.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	66.67% 6	22.22% 2	0.00% 0
8. Teachers must look for ways to meet the special academic needs of students identified as gifted in the classroom.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	66.67% 6	22.22% 2
9. We invest in future productivity by providing additional resources to students identified as gifted.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	44.44% 4	11.11% 1
10. Students identified as gifted need more funding than general education students.	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	0.00% 0
11. Funding for gifted programs should be a lower priority than	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	11.11% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
funding for other education programs							
12. Students identified as gifted are natural leaders.	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	0.00% 0
13. Students with learning disabilities need more resources than students identified as gifted.	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	33.33% 3	0.00% 0
14. Students identified as gifted have unique skills that will benefit society.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	33.33% 3	11.11% 1
15. Students identified as gifted have different learning needs that require special curriculum.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	0.00% 0	55.56% 5	22.22% 2	11.11% 1
16. Gifted programs do not deserve as many resources as special education programs.	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	0.00% 0
17. Teachers need to receive training on how to teach gifted students.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	33.33% 3
18. General education programs should be the focus of resources and funding, not gifted education.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	44.44% 4	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	11.11% 1
19. Students identified as gifted require special	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	0.00% 0	11.11% 1

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
books and materials to meet their academic needs.							
20. Gifted programs take too many resources away from other students and programs	33.33% 3	0.00% 0	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
21. Students identified as gifted require special curriculum to learn new things at school.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	11.11% 1	11.11% 1
22. Funds for gifted programs are contributions toward the future of society.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	22.22% 2	0.00% 0	22.22% 2
23. Students identified as gifted should make outstanding contributions to society.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	44.44% 4	0.00% 0	11.11% 1
24. Funding for gifted programs should be higher priority than funding for other academic programs.	0.00% 0	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1
25. Students identified as gifted need just as many academic resources as students with learning disabilities.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	11.11% 1	22.22% 2
26. Students identified as gifted need to go beyond the general	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	44.44% 4	33.33% 3	22.22% 2

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
education curriculum to achieve at their highest possible level.							
27. Students with disabilities deserve funding more than students identified as gifted.	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	0.00% 0
28. Students identified as gifted are more likely than other students to become leaders.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	44.44% 4	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	11.11% 1
29. All states should mandate and fund gifted programming.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	22.22% 2	22.22% 2
30. We need to provide resources to the top students to keep up with other countries.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	22.22% 2	44.44% 4	11.11% 1	22.22% 2
31. Gifted programs should be one of the first programs to be cut when a school needs to make budget cuts.	33.33% 3	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
32. We need the top performing students to become leaders in their fields.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	55.56% 5	0.00% 0	33.33% 3

Note: Used with permission from McCoach & O'Shea (2010)

Selected and Coded Answers to Research Questions

The following were the guiding research questions along with what appeared to be the overall answer based on the data gathered. Following the brief answers to the research questions a more thorough discussion of the themes that emerged will be presented.

1. What is the educational background of middle school social studies teachers qualifying them to teach social studies and gifted students?

The participating teachers had various backgrounds for teaching middle school social studies. Six of the teachers, Renee, Celia, Marie, Pam, Carl, and Jeff, have Bachelor of Arts degrees in a social studies related subjects. Fred has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and is currently working toward certification through the PACE program of South Carolina, an alternative teaching certification program. Nina began her teaching career in Reading and added on a Social Studies certification. Erica has a major in a non Social Studies field and went through the alternative certification many years prior. Of the nine participants, four were National Board certified in middle school social studies, Erica, Renee, Marie, and Pam. All the teachers but Fred, who is working through PACE, are considered Highly Qualified Social Studies Middle School teachers by the state Department of Education.

The vast majority of the participating teachers were not gifted certified. Three of the teachers expressed interest in becoming certified, but because the classes are not currently offered through the district, have not done so. One teacher, Pam, recently took the classes required in South Carolina but has not submitted the paperwork to the Education Department. A second teacher was certified several years prior. Overall, there was a lack of gifted certification considering every middle school social studies teacher will have gifted students in the classroom each year.

2. How qualified does the middle school social studies teacher perceive him or herself in order to teach gifted students in the regular classroom?

Although the majority of the teachers have not completed coursework toward gifted education endorsement, the participating teachers, overall, personally felt qualified to teach gifted students. Each teacher discussed and presented his or her beliefs of how gifted students learn and within the discussion appeared to have confidence in their knowledge and ability. There was a desire of two teachers, Erica and Renee, to take the two required courses to become endorsed in gifted education through the Education Department. According to the survey results, being certified in gifted education was not a necessity to teach gifted students.

3. What do middle school social studies teachers understand to be primary sources?

First-hand documents, such as diaries, treaties, and government papers, were the first response given by all participants as a primary source. Several teachers mentioned video, pictures, and art as a possible primary source, but were unsure if they were considered one by others outside of a classroom. Marie stated she thought only of written information when identifying primary sources.

4. How can middle school social studies teachers teach gifted students to develop historical critical thinking skills in history?

When asked about teaching gifted students effectively the answers tended to be connected to a type of product or production by the gifted student. The participants held some knowledge of critical thinking skills, but it was not something they could easily describe. Nor were they able to describe effectively how social studies were connected to critical thinking skills, only that they were connected. While the concepts were not easily

described, many stated confidently that they knew the concepts were connected, but were not ideas they consciously thought about often and did not have a ready description.

Themes

To arrive at the following themes, the data were first coded through open coding. According to Saldana (2013), coding in qualitative research is often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a word or phrase to a passage. This type of coding leads to categorized inventory or index of the data's contents. This results in a large number of codes.

After the initial coding of the information, reorganizing and condensing the codes into smaller, more manageable sets of codes was necessary. Saldana (2013) refers to this coding through various cycles as a way of "reorganizing and condensing the vast array of initial analytic details into a main dish" (p. 208). Each initially coded interview was read through and listened to again to determine similar ideas and codes. This was done several times in order to develop themes. The coding process resulted in six overall themes. Table 8 outlines the overall themes and subcategories. Within each subcategory, the table indicates what codes were first used in the open coding.

Table 5

Coding Table: Themes. Subcategories and Codes

Theme	Subcategories	Code for each subcategory
Social studies importance for society as a whole	1 - Civil Education	Code 1 - Need SS to vote Code 2 - Current events
	2 - Common Core	Code 1 – State Standards Code 2 - CCSS
	3 - Others lack of importance placed on social studies (SS)	Code 1 – SS in classroom Code 2 – Importance of SS

Educators description of gifted education	1 - Educational background of teachers	Code 1 - Gifted endorsed Code 2 - No formal training for gifted endorsement
	2 - District provisions	Code 1 - Pull-out program Code 2 – Grouping and identification through math and language arts
	3 – What do gifted students need in the classroom	Code 1 – Learn globally Code 2 – Scaffolding for critical thinking skills Code 3 – Homogeneous grouping important Code 4 – Challenging material
Gifted students in the social studies classroom	1 – Social studies services gifted students	Code 1 – Gifted and SS
	2 – What can one expect from students	Code 1 – Deeper understanding/in-depth Code 2 – Presentations and projects
	3 – Instructional methods	Code 1 – Hands – on Code 2 – Learning centered - Groups Code 3 – Lecture and Discussion Code 4 – Technology based
Description of critical thinking skills within social studies	1 – Definition of critical thinking skills in social studies	Code 1 – Critical Thinking skills Code 2 – Strategies for skills
	2 – How can view CTS in gifted students in SS classroom	Code 1 – Thinking outside the box Code 2 – Drawing conclusions Code 3 – Finding Patterns Code 4 – Creating knowledge not given knowledge Code 5 – Evaluate information

		Code 6 – Move beyond yes/no questions Code 7 – Multiple perspectives
	3 – CTS not actively pursued in classroom	Code 1 – Uncertainty toward CTS Code 2 – Testing Code 3 – Lack of time
Importance of primary sources	1 –Primary sources examples?	Code 1 – Photographs Code 2 – Videos Code 3 – Documents Code 4 – Music Code 5 – Government documents
	2 – How primary sources are used?	Code 1 – Examples Code 2 – Enhance interest
	3 – Current state of using primary sources?	Code 1 – Common Core Code 2 – Teacher common planning
Primary sources and critical thinking skills for gifted students share a link	1 – Primary sources provides link between CTS and GT learning	Code 1 – Point of view discussion Code 2 – Discussion of bias Code 3 – Abstract thought

Table 5

Social Studies Importance for Society as a Whole

Social studies came to be in its modern inception at the beginning of the 20th century with the progressive movement wanting to bring about better citizenship among American students. Social studies today includes subjects such as history, geography, sociology, and psychology, but most people think primarily of history. The teacher participants in this study believed in the importance of social studies, particularly for citizenship development. Marie stated:

> You know history just has so much bearing on the lives that they live and I think history is the place where they can all form opinions. You know you gotta vote. . .It makes them expand their minds outside of what they actually

> experience outside of their lives everyday (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014).

Erica stated:

> Why wouldn't anybody need to learn social studies? I mean they are only going to vote for whoever is going to lead our country or be leaders themselves. Anybody can add. They have calculators. They need social studies. It gives you a basis for values and how things should work in a society so we don't let somebody come in and mess it up (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014).

Marie and Renee both discussed how all students are not math and science oriented and social studies provides another great way to learn and succeed in the learning environment. In social studies, there is not a textbook answer every time and students are able to look for evidence, discuss with others and come to a different and new conclusion. Historical interpretation is not absolute. Jeff also saw social studies as important, but its importance came from how it leads students to think outside of their cultural bias. He stated, "it forces you to break out of your cultural bias because you have to look at it through the perspective of someone else" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014).

Even though social studies teachers feel their subject is very important for a student's education, Marie, Jeff, and Erica expressed a feeling of lack of importance by others. Marie wondered why social studies could not be homogeneously grouped, unlike math and science so that students could study the subject more in-depth. Jeff stated:

> I think social studies does get a bad rap. They always put us at the end for some reason - have you noticed that? You get your math and you get your language

> arts up top and then they flip a coin either science or social studies (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014).

Erica felt the strongest on the way social studies is viewed by many within the education system stating:

> WE ARE LIKE RELATED ARTS TEACHERS! We are considered. We're considered. We're the last one on the totem pole as far as importance. I almost wish they would make us related arts and not test us. Then we could actually enjoy what we do.
>
> (Personal Communication from Participant, May 23, 2014).

Educators Description of Gifted Education

Gifted education refers to services provided for students who qualify based on preset criteria.

District provisions. Gifted education is not the same across states. It is not even the same within a state. Districts are most often allowed to set the criteria to identify gifted students as well as how to service them as long as the criteria stay within a state framework. In the participants' district, gifted students are tested and identified starting in the second grade. Students are then placed in a pull-out program that meets once a week through seventh grade. This information is well known by teachers throughout the district and can be found on the district website.

As of last year, eighth-grade students no longer will be in the pull-out program. Instead they will be serviced through English 1 or Algebra 1 and Spanish 1. All participants are aware of the pull-out program. When asked how students are serviced in the district, this program is what they described. Celia, Jeff, and Renee also explained that because students are grouped for English 1 and Algebra 1 this provides at least one class that for the majority have been identified

as gifted. However, these students are not identified as gifted for social studies. Renee also expressed an interested in teaching an Honors eight grade social studies class, but stated she did not see it occurring any time soon. Marie stated that the middle school she works in purposefully makes sure there is not a social studies class that is majority identified gifted students. All classes she has are heterogeneously grouped by ability

Nina stated that she did not see the pull-out program as beneficial and believed it needs to be changed. Erica believes the pull-out program for middle school will change to alternating Honors classes for science and social studies in middle school because surrounding districts have changed to this method. She also believes it would be beneficial for the gifted student to do this stating, "I think it would be something they strive real hard for and work a little harder to keep [grades up]" (Personal Communication from Participant, May 23, 2014).

Endorsement for gifted education. Although all participants teach gifted students throughout the day, it is not a requirement to be endorsed in gifted education in the state. Interestingly, when Fred, the one teacher currently going through alternative certification, was asked what type of coursework he has had to teach gifted students, he replied that he had read one article about minority gifted students. His only knowledge of the subject from an academic standpoint was from this one article. Everything else was based on his own opinion. The endorsement requires two classes to be taken: Nature and Needs of Gifted and Talented Students and Curriculum for Gifted and Talented Classes. Only two of the nine participants have completed the required coursework and only one, Marie, has the endorsement through the education department. Pam stated she completed the coursework, but has not sent the information to the state department to add to her certificate.

Gifted needs in the classroom. The participants in the study overall are not endorsed by the state to teach gifted classes. The opinion appears to be that endorsement is only needed for the teachers who are involved in the pull-out program; however, they do have gifted students every day to teach. When asked about gifted education the participants were confident in their knowledge of what gifted students needed in the classroom as well as the challenges and rewards of having such students in the classroom. There were several overall concepts the participants viewed as necessary for gifted students. First the need to homogeneously group gifted students in the classroom. Secondly, gifted students need challenging material, as Fred stated, "they [gifted students] learn faster and they soak in more information at a higher rate" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 5, 2014). The third concept was the need to encourage gifted students in engagement with the material. The need for creativity was the fourth. As Fred stated "they are creating knowledge instead of given knowledge" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 5, 2014). Lastly, scaffolding the higher critical thinking skills was given: "Scaffold their lessons a bit higher (but) not too much that you kind of stray from the main objective of each lesson" (Jeff) (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014).

Challenges. When asked if there were challenges within gifted education, there were many challenges discussed by the participants. While there were a few consistencies about challenges, many had a different interpretation of the challenge. One challenge discussed was the lack of time to slow down and explore what the students are interested in or "go down the rabbit trail" as Jeff stated (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014). Marie gave this scenario: "I've had some kids who were really, really interested in the atomic bomb and the atomic bomb is about one line in the 1,000s of standards we have" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014).

Nina views the challenge as having enough knowledge on a subject to not be "stumped" by the students as the challenge with gifted students. The observation of her classroom showed Nina using primary sources to effectively engage the students as well as enhance the subject knowledge. Carl and Jeff viewed the challenge to be how students were identified as gifted in the social studies classroom. Carl explained it as:

> The reason students (sic) have been identified as gifted is usually because of math aptitude or a language arts aptitude which is fine. But social studies is about certain mental process skills, and even if you have students that are labeled gifted not all of them have that same level of the mental process skill.
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, May 13, 2014).

Fred, Celia, Marie, Pam, and Erica all discussed the challenge of keeping the gifted students engaged. Student engagement is believed to be linked to motivation. Fred and Celia discussed wanting to keep gifted students from being bored in the classroom. From Celia's perspective, gifted students learn the material much more quickly and the classroom needs to be utilized for valuable information and not extra rote memorization. In both Fred and Celia's classrooms, primary sources were being used to encourage students to think critically through synthesis and analysis of information.

Marie spoke of the difficulties in differentiating in the heterogeneous classroom. While observing her classroom it was evident that Marie was attempting to differentiate while trying to engage all students in the lesson. Pam echoed this difficulty in heterogeneous classrooms, including the need to not give students bookwork on a subject if the students already understand the material. She continued explaining how that differentiation of the classroom mainly refers to

an end product and setting higher unspoken standards. Renee also presented this idea when discussing challenges, as well as what was observed in her classroom.

Rewards. When asked if there were rewards teaching gifted students, each participant visibly relaxed and smiled during the interview process. Teaching gifted students was overwhelmingly viewed as rewarding. The rewards ranged from lack of discipline issues in a majority gifted class, as Jeff stated, "I can be more historian and less disciplinarian" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014). This is in regards to creative questions asked by the students, but most often for the growth and excitement that can be seen in students.

Creative questioning was an interesting reward that several participants expressed. Marie explained the reward this way:

> I think the best thing about teaching gifted students is the questions - when you are a history teacher you really want somebody to have thought about something you said and say I wonder? or Why has someone? That's the greatest thing! (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014).

Pam saw questioning as a form of conversation between the teacher and students as a reward instead of just feeding information. Jeff viewed it similarly, stating the students use questions to explore a subject more thoroughly:

> We rabbit trail so often that I never even get to the full objective of the lesson because we've gone from one A and we've skipped down to Z because they've asked one question and then they bounce off of one another. One question can usually eat up 30 seconds with your regular education classes. One question can take up the entire class period (in gifted class), because each kid will feed off of one another.

(Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014).

With these questions the students can grow in knowledge and as an historian, ultimately leading to becoming a better citizen. The majority reward was viewed as the growth and excitement seen in students. Fred stated, "the reward is seeing them grow- as a student and an individual" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 5, 2014). Renee and Erica both viewed this growth as seeing students take on a challenge academically and succeed beyond expectation. The classroom observation with Renee was an example of this type of growth.

Gifted Students in the Social Studies Classroom

While social studies has not often been used as a vehicle to test and promote gifted students, research has presented evidence that it has the potential to enhance critical thinking skills among gifted students. Through discussion with the participants, three subcategories emerged on the topic of gifted students in the social studies classroom: social studies can service gifted students, what teachers can expect from gifted students in the classroom, and instructional methods used for gifted students in social studies.

Social studies can service gifted students. Participants were asked to describe if and how social studies can service gifted students. The responses given by all participants involved the need for social studies to develop citizenship and global awareness. When asked if social studies could service gifted and talented students, Marie stated the following:

> It seems like the most logical to me because it has the most effect on their lives now. You know not everybody is going to be a scientist. You know history just has so much bearing on the lives that they live and I think history is the place where they can all form opinions…I think it's the most logical place to put an accelerated or enriched curriculum. (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014).

Erica shared a similar opinion on the importance of social studies. "Why wouldn't gifted and talented? …They need social studies. It gives you a basis for values and how things should work in a society so we don't let somebody come in and mess it up" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014). Jeff believes it forces you to break out of your cultural bias because you have to look at it through the perspective of someone else.

Renee stated:

> There's not a textbook correct answer for every question you have. There are always new points of view - ways to look at documents and that shows real critical thinking skills when a student is able to back up their thoughts with evidence and do it correctly. You don't necessarily have that with math. You don't necessarily have that all the time with reading a book or science. But here if I ask them a question they've got to be able to back it up with evidence. Why do you think the way you do? What is it with what you are doing that lets you think that way? What's the evidence?
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014).

This line of thought led to the second subcategory of what teachers expect from their gifted students in the social studies classroom.

Expectations for gifted students in social studies classroom. When questioned about gifted learning in the classroom, most responded with what they expected and found their gifted students could do. The responses were varied, but ultimately there were two basic concepts. First, gifted students think more critically or deeply about a subject. This deeper thought leads to more exploration of a subject. Gifted students possess a desire to research a topic of interest on their own more thoroughly than typical peers. One interesting finding was that the majority of

the field observations showed the participants engaging in primary sources utilizing the ideas of their own preconceptions.

Nina simply stated the students dive deeper into the information. Carl was similar in saying gifted students were more in-depth at their studies, but he went on to say gifted students "really explore the who, what and why …of a situation so they can see perhaps patterns and how it applies to other events" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 13, 2014). He gave an example of having students read John Locke's *Treatise of Government* and then analyzing and debating the readings. His classroom lesson involved an exploration of the students' personal "who" using ancestral research.

Celia explained that gifted students do not just regurgitate facts, but they take time to gather information and see how things change. In Celia's classroom during an end of the year observation, the lesson demonstrated her belief in this concept by having the students analyze a will through the use of background knowledge they acquired throughout the year. Jeff described gifted students' ability to see history as a "grand story" and they can "weave the pieces together" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014). His classroom lesson involved having students analyze a packet of primary sources to understand a historical event more clearly. Erica believes that gifted students are able to make connections to the real world, and that they are able to understand information from multiple perspectives for deeper understanding. Fred stated that gifted students are able to see patterns. An idea he was using was to have students research a historical time period previously studied more in-depth.

Pam takes a different perspective. She discussed gifted students as being able to possibly answer how and why questions. She views gifted students as visual learners and being able to

research a subject more in-depth on their own after learning basic information through textbooks. Then, after taking the various pieces of information, they form an opinion or answer a question.

Secondly, gifted students are believed to be capable of presenting information learned in various forms such as in-depth projects. Pam and Marie presented the idea that gifted students should turn in more work because they will have gone more in-depth. Pam stated:

> I think that what they need is to be challenged and whether if that's by, you know, making presentations or giving them more work - you know - challenging them I think is what when they get bored that's when they just don't perform as well.
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, April 30, 2014).

Renee and Erica both stated that gifted students are expected to present in-depth presentations in their classroom. Renee recently completed a project for all her classes. The assignment was the same for each class, but for the class that was dominantly filled with gifted identified students the expectation was a more in-depth project and presentation. Projects should be a part of a social studies class for gifted students according to Carl and Renee. Projects by some students "can blow a teacher away" (Renee) (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014).

Instructional methods for gifted in social studies. The instructional methods used and needed varied a great deal by teacher. Even if they stated a similar concept when asked to explain more in-depth, it varied. An example of this is the instructional method of using technology. Fred, Nina, and Marie all stated they thought utilizing technology was effective in the social studies classroom. How they used it was different.

Fred uses technology in terms of research for more in-depth study or interaction for explanation. His classroom observation showed that Fred used technology to explain how they were going to analyze a primary document from the Cold War.

Marie uses technology differently in the classroom. For each chapter, Marie makes a packet for students to complete. The computer is used and she explains the process.

> I have packets for each chapter that we do and each unit and then I use kind of a self-paced (lesson where they are) on the computer taking notes and my voice is on the computer and they watch videos and then we talk about it in very small chunks throughout the sections um and then reviews - interesting videos, but just lecturing does not work and its funny because they - that's the way they get the least amount of information but that's what they think of as teaching if you don't do that.
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014)

Nina explains her use of technology, as well as why she chooses to use it:

> I use a lot of technology, both - as much as possible in the hands of the students and very interactively on the smart board because I find that with this era of digital natives that's what they respond to. So I find if I can catch their attention with the technology and then - and so I try to vary my instruction according to the learning styles in the room and I do a learning styles inventory in the beginning, but I find that nothing keeps their attention like something that is technology driven, so I try to rely on it.
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, April 30, 2014).

In the classroom observation with Nina, she played a geography game, but used the SmartBoard interactively for students to determine what place was being described using primary documents studied throughout the year.

Renee was seen using technology for a project based assignment during a classroom observation. When asked to describe what types of methods used she stated using lecture and Socratic Seminar, and hands-on activities:

> Anytime I can get them outside and show them how it was done without you know putting life and limb to risk I will do to get them involved in history just so they can realize it wasn't that easy. We preserved food one year - I think it was last year - I actually preserved eggs in dirt for 6 months. I couldn't believe it - now we didn't eat them - but we did crack them and the majority of them were still good. I could not believe it, but yet I had read the method in how they did it so we tried it. (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014).

Group work was another type of instructional method used, but again the concept was not viewed exactly the same. Pam stated she likes to use what she calls "learning-centered concepts" in her classroom instead of teacher directed concepts. Fred discussed using group work for analysis of information. Erica stated she uses group work to present information in a new format, and gave examples of making up raps, songs and acting out political cartoons.

There were several additional types of instructional methods discussed that varied among the participants. Erica stated she finds showing video clips of historical events effective in the classroom. Hands-on activities are very effective for history according to Renee, and she finds creative ways to incorporate them into lessons. What Marie has

found to be most effective are self-paced unit packets that include worksheets, videos, and notes that she has pre-recorded. Marie does not think lecture is effective at all, whereas Fred and Renee both use lecture to present new information. Celia and Renee both find the Socratic method of topic discussion effective.

Description of Critical Thinking Skills within Social Studies

Participants were asked to describe or define critical thinking skills. Most, when prompted, said that critical thinking was not a concept that they actively thought about when planning for the classroom. Each participant did define critical thinking skills; however, they defined the idea in terms of what students would be able to do within the classroom; specifically how the participants described what the social studies classroom for gifted students would be in theory.

Definition of critical thinking skills. Jeff and Renee both described critical thinking skills as including group work; specifically being able to effectively work within a team or group. Jeff described critical thinking skills as:

> Critical thinking skills need to be more of a team game - team work of sorts - because that's what they are really pushing nowadays. So I guess Critical thinking skills in my class when I am not up at the board going over a PowerPoint um they are breaking up, they are Think Pair Sharing and.... their answers are being derived not only from their own personal belief of what is right and wrong, but they have to draw on the aspects of what do you think why do you think it that way.
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014).

Critical thinking skills were also described as being able to see multiple perspectives of an argument and analyzing the information into a type of synthesis. As Nina stated, "allowing them to see all sides of the argument and allowing them to see the value in all sides of the argument" (Personal Communication with Participant, April 30, 2014). Within this idea, the participants described critical thinking skills in terms of what the classroom would have.

The skills seen through critical thinking. The overall skills described for critical thinking skills in social studies was deeper understanding and in-depth thinking of a subject, using multiple sources. Also, as Nina stated, "thinking from both sides of the argument" describes critical thinking skills (Personal Communication with Participant, April 30, 2014). Each participant described the concept a little differently, but ultimately it goes back to what is referred to as deeper understanding.

Fred described critical thinking as being able to see patterns in the world, and by finding these patterns you are beginning to create knowledge and not just repeat information. Celia and Pam had similar comments, saying that critical thinking would be sifting information and comparing and contrasting the information to draw a conclusion. Critical thinking skills were described by each of the participants. Pam described them as:

> Critical thinking skills - the kind of an activity or ability (that) moves beyond your general yes or no style questions. It asks students to possibly compare and contrast - to evaluate - to form an opinion based on a situation that's a critical thinking skills. Maybe it does involve a primary source and asking a student to decide what point of view it's from? (And to) decide if the author has a bias towards a particular situation - that is an example of a critical thinking skill.

(Personal Communication with Participant, May 2, 2014).

Carl described critical thinking skills with an example of what he would want to see in the classroom:

> Piecing of information. Piecing it together. And many times the pieces of information don't seem to fit, but they do and students who can do that who can bring that together (are using critical thinking skills). Also can they take the little bit of information and create a roadmap for it. Where are we going with this? What kind of results? What kind of outcomes may result because of this this and this. Ok if we changed this where does you result go. Stuff like that. Again what if? What could we have done differently? If we break apart allied appeasement strategy Hitler before World War II and stuff like that. Why didn't it work? What else may have worked? Here is where the Allies drew the line in the sand and said enough is enough could it have been drawn differently. Things like that. Again kind of looking at history from dfferent angles. Analyzing it and picking it apart putting it back together putting it back together in different ways. Critical thinking things like that.
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, May 13, 2014).

Jeff views critical thinking skills as being able to think outside the box or being able to view from various perspectives and coming to a conclusion. While Erica has a similar view she states that it is using your background knowledge to be able to evaluate and come to a conclusion. Marie views critical thinking skills as being able to "interact with whatever your reading or talking about and to say is this true do I believe this what do I already know that goes along with this" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014). Renee viewed

critical thinking skills in the form of what sort of product the students would create to present the information. No one person had the same description for critical thinking.

Critical thinking skills in the classroom today. Each participant described what they believed to be critical thinking skills; however, many admitted they had never thought about it before they were asked. Critical thinking skills are seen as being pushed to the background because of current standardized testing that requires students to answer approximately 50 multiple choice questions about a predetermined aspect of history. As Carl stated:

> Critical thinking skills and activities are getting pushed to the wayside. We are kind of teaching the way the test will be asking and I think are losing something with that. We are not diving as deep into because of the number of standards we have to cover and things like that.
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, May 13, 2014).

The amount of standards that must be covered before the state testing date is viewed as the reason behind the lack of critical thinking. A seventh-grade social studies class must cover a little over 600 years of world history in just one year. Participants viewed the need to cover this much information as why critical thinking is not an integral part of class each day, including a class that is majority gifted identified students.

Importance of Primary Sources

Primary sources, according to all participants, are vital to a social studies classroom. Within the importance of primary sources there are three subthemes: defining primary sources, how primary sources will be used, and the current state of using primary sources.

What are primary sources? The overall definition for a primary source was a first-hand account of anything that takes place. Pam described it particularly well, stating, “Primary

sources are primarily the eyewitness account or documentation from that particular time period" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 2, 2014). The participants were then asked to give specific examples of what they use and consider a primary source. Each participant immediately said a document. When asked to specify what type of document or additional types of primary sources there were various answers. Table 6 shows each type of primary source according to the Library of Congress, with each participant and what they consider to be a primary source.

Table 6

Primary Source Identification

Participant	Documents	Photos	Art including political cartoons	Propaganda	Original video footage	Original Maps	Music from time period
Erica	√ Ex. Arrest Warrants from Civil Rights Movement	√			√		
Renee	√ Ex. Letters written by John C. Calhoun	√				√	
Fred	√ Ex. Truman Doctrine						
Celia	√ Ex. Will	√	√		√		√
Nina	√ Ex. Letters sent home by WWII soldiers	√	√	√	√		
Marie	√ Ex. Newspapers	√	√				√

Pam	√ Ex. Eyewitness Account						
Carl	√ Ex. Magna Carta	√	√		√		√
Jeff	√ Ex. Zimmerman Note	√	√		√		√

Table 5 *Note*: Based on participant self-reports

How primary sources are used. Participating teachers were asked not only to identify what a primary source was, but also how they used primary sources in the classroom. Each gave examples of how they used primary sources, and during field observations several lessons were observed utilizing primary sources. The reason given for why primary sources were used was twofold: to more thoroughly explain what was being studied and also to enhance interest in the time period or event that was being studied. Each participant named a famous historical document that is used for analysis in the classroom such as the Magna Carta, the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. In some instances, primary sources were described in the simplest of terms: what they were and how they were used for analysis. Field observations provided a chance to view how primary sources were utilized in the classroom.

During the field observation in Celia's classroom, the students were reading and analyzing the will of a South Carolina politician. They analyzed through class discussion using background knowledge of what they studied throughout the year. The observation came at the end of the year. This observation gave a good representation of how Celia described how she uses primary sources in the classroom.

Nina's classroom observation took place at the end of the year after standardized testing was complete. Students were working on geography skills in a unique fashion using primary

sources. All students were in a group of four with a globe. In previous class periods, students identified nations through latitude and longitude, as well as by physical descriptions. Students were using primary sources including documents, photos, maps, and art displayed on the SmartBoard, and students used what they learned previously to determine what nation was being described.

> Carl described using photographs for primary source analysis through a project:
>
> I selected a host of great depression photographs and had students analyze those. What do you see as going on? Then of course they are able to provide opinions of stuff to explore what kind of feelings were evoked through the photographs. What do you think the photographer...was he just snapping away.... do you think he was trying to let people know (something in particular)?
>
> (Personal Communication with Participant, May 13, 2014).

He continued with primary source use at the end of the year by having students use Ancestry.com and census information to trace their own family roots.

Fred has a political science background and is going through an alternate certification program. He views mainly documents as primary sources. The field observation showed his class reading Cold War documents such as the Truman Document. Students read the document, answered questions about the document, and then wrote an essay with the analysis.

Renee had students making movie trailers on iPads using primary source information to present an aspect of South Carolina history. The students interpreted the source into a synthesis to be presented through a fictional movie.

Jeff gave the most in-depth description of how he uses primary sources throughout the year within each unit. This description shows in-depth thought into the use of primary sources and well planned out lessons that use them:

> For each unit, everything's broken down into units. For each unit I at least like to do one primary source study, there are – there's actually little boxes that I've gotten they're self-contained and they contain primary sources through literature, pictures and that and they cover... areas like civil war, slavery, Native Americans. So that's a good start I introduce those at the beginning of the year to the classes and they're already planned out and they already have the instructions *there* to know what to be looking for in the picture - what to underline in bold in the handouts. But as we get further in the school year we'll do round robin tables in which they travel from one group to another. For example, when we hit World War I, the Zimmermann address. We'll have that handed out and then we'll have the newspaper (reports) of the sinking of the *Lusitania*. They will have to pull out and draw the aspects. What were the emotions? How would this propel a nation to raise up as one to a total war against one common enemy? How did the yellow journalism work in the favor of it? By this point after going through each stage of history, they now know what to look for because there are a lot of patterns in history and you can draw those from the first Declaration of Independence going up to why South Carolina seceded - the Ordinance of Secession - and they can draw those parallels. And I will have each of those in my PPT and then a hard copy to pass around...there are just so many you can pull from, but I have to be careful not to overdo it. Sometimes you can give too much that they don't focus

on it and see the importance of one because they have too many primary source. And so we like to dissect only the most important. Usually that's the ones that have been most overplayed in history, but the point is they're overplayed because they have such a major impact or implication on the lesson and then on the events in history. I like to play it to give them the full notion of why those are the ones that are always in the history book always getting reruns on the history channel stuff like that.

ME: What do you do for the round robin?

Oh uh they'll have like a scavenger hunt sheet of what to look for with some hard facts and then they will have like what is the title of the newspaper. What title stands out the most? Then there will be a subjective question – Why do you believe the title was worded this way? What was the emotion the author was trying to capture from the reading audience? And they'll take 3 minutes, the buzzer will go off, whistle will go off, my voice will go off then they will rotate to the next session, and they will click down to the next part of the sheet. It's simple, but it keeps them moving - keeps them active and they know there's a time restraint on it and it doesn't give them time to talk about what they did last night. (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014).

Current state of using primary sources, Participants all described what primary sources are as well as how they used the sources. There were several complaints of not having enough time to utilize the sources in the classroom as much as they would like because of current standards. Fred spoke of not having enough time to determine what would work with various units. Nina discussed how it would be beneficial to have common planning time with other

social studies teachers to talk about primary sources to discuss what to use for different units and learn what types of lessons each teacher has used successfully in the classroom.

Common Core Standards were also discussed and how it would affect the use of primary sources. Pam believes Common Core Standards will bring about the use of more primary sources in the classroom because of the analysis being required by the new standards. Celia echoed a similar thought with the type of exercises Common Core requires such as CLOSE readings. CLOSE reading is a reading strategy being used in conjunction with Common Core Standards. Essentially, students read short passages several times with a series of questions that will lead students to uncover layers of meaning and deep comprehension of a subject (Boyles, 2014).

Link(s) Between, Social Studies, Primary Sources, and Critical Thinking Skills for Gifted Students

Middle school students, ages twelve to fourteen, are when abstract thought begins to develop, according to Erikson (2007). Several participants did state that critical thinking skills were more difficult because students have not fully developed abstract thought capability. At the same time, critical thinking skills are a goal in lesson planning. Primary sources are the link the participants find between social studies and critical thinking skills. As Renee stated, "A textbook is not history. Those primary sources are!" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014).

Primary sources are used to discuss points of view of historical events and understanding biases. This could be achieved by asking students what point of view a primary source is from and to decide if the author has a particular bias toward a certain situation. Pam employs this method in the classroom. Marie gave a specific example of doing just that. "I love to do the

Boston Massacre, the Paul Revere engraving that's really inaccurate . . . (something) like that to get them to think 'Well it's obviously not accurate!' - so why did he do that? Well who was he?" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014). Nina takes a different approach. She stated she likes to play devil's advocate with the students. The example she gave was to use propaganda from World War II and then ask the students to answer "What if?" questions to encourage critical thinking skills.

Fred explained the link with an example of having students read a portion of a document such as the U.S. Constitution and then discussing the emotions it evokes and what it is trying to convey to others. Carl views using primary sources as a way to help students understand the era from which they derive. Sources such as photographs are a moment in time to be analyzed and discussed. Jeff provided an interesting point of view on the concept:

> They (students) only know what they hear on TV, but to give them first-hand accounts and force them to go back in time and understand that things weren't always this way and that you aren't inventing this. It's already been around just kind of morphed into something different. Using primary sources connects them back to a time when whatever you are going over, people were almost exactly the same - the same human thoughts you can see within the papers, you can see in the paintings, you can hear in the music. All that changes is the style here and there. We try to be unique, but we all fall back into the same rhythm of life. That's the cool thing about seeing kids be like 'Oh they were worried about this back then?'. Yeah they were still worried about being popular back then, they just showed it a little bit differently. It was just a matter of what hierarchy you were in. Were you a plebe at the bottom or aristocrat at the top everyone had the same social needs

and metaphysical needs and stuff like that so that's the one connection that I've seen using primary source more so than just the standards.

(Personal Communication from Participant, May 16, 2014).

Participants have different ways of using the primary sources to develop critical thinking skills. Overall, participants want to develop these skills and see primary sources as a way to achieve this goal. At the same time, many are hesitant in these endeavors because of what is believed to be a lack of maturity in students and a lack of time with current standards.

Summary

This chapter contained the resulting themes that were developed following interviews, observations and a survey with nine middle school social studies teacher participants. The interviews were transcribed and then coded into categories. Coding of the interviews led to themes being developed to explain the perceptions held by the teachers. The participants were from four middle schools within one district. The district has a program in place for gifted students. However, each school is different in the manner in which regular social studies class time reflects gifted education. The data and themes were used to answer the guiding research questions.

Six themes emerged through the data coding: social studies importance for society as a whole, educators' descriptions of gifted education, gifted students in the social studies classroom, critical thinking skills within social studies, importance of primary sources, and primary sources and critical thinking skills for gifted students share a link. There was one interesting aspect within the themes discovered. When asked to describe various concepts such as gifted education, primary sources, or critical thinking skills, there was a lack of cohesion in

the definitions; however, the participants who taught at the same schools had the same basic descriptions the majority of the time.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover the perceptions of middle school social studies teachers on using primary sources to teach gifted students to develop critical thinking skills. No attempt has been made to generalize the results of the study. There were a total of nine participants. As with all qualitative studies, this study was conducted to provide a rich, in-depth presentation of the phenomenon. The nine participants provided their point of view on the concept and generously opened their classrooms for an observation by the researcher.

The research method used triangulation from three types of data: survey, interviews, and field observations. The survey was answered through Survey Monkey and provided perceptions on gifted education, including its usefulness, as well as how much funding should be allotted. Interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience and included research questions for the researcher to use; however, the questions were open ended and allowed for questioning to change based on the direction of the conversation. The third type of data was taken in the form of a field observation of one class per participant.

All recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, and recoded. The coded data led to the discovery of six themes and subthemes within each. This chapter presents the findings along with the researcher's interpretation of the data. Limitations of the study are addressed, as well as recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Findings

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), data analysis and interpretation can be difficult to separate within qualitative research. Analysis involves working with the data through coding

and patterns for themes. Interpreting data refers to developing ideas and relating them to the literature and overall concerns and concepts. The discussion of the findings was conducted within this frame.

Six major themes emerged from the data which are discussed in more detail in a subsequent section of theoretical implications. Within the six themes, the participants appeared to be the most comfortable discussing gifted education as a stand-alone subject, and primary sources also as a stand-alone subject. All participants addressed questions on the various concepts: social studies, gifted education, primary sources, and critical thinking skills. However, answers were less in-depth when asked to link the concepts together, especially when addressing critical thinking skills. This finding appears consistent with Wineburg's previous studies in 1991 and 1998, which indicate teachers' lack knowledge of how historical critical thinking skills should be defined.

Discussion of the Findings

The research and results of this study are one piece of the puzzle for the concept studied. The findings of this study cannot be generalized for all middle school social studies teachers. Researchers have previously discussed the concepts of critical thinking skills, primary sources, and gifted education, but a review of the literature revealed a lack of research within the classroom. This qualitative study adds to the body of research and provides real experiences within the terms of research concepts and will be discussed in the framework of the theoretical background in detail in a subsequent section.

One of the most conclusive aspects of this study is that even among only nine participants within the same school district, there was not one singular idea that emerged for defining gifted education, primary sources, and critical thinking skills. However, each of the participants was

confident in their interpretation of the ideas. The lack of a consensus could be contributed to the various educational backgrounds, both through majors and education institutions attended. Among the nine participants, attained Bachelor of Arts degrees included history, political science, and restaurant/tourism management. All will be discussed more in-depth within each subtopic below.

Gifted Education

Participants presented with much enthusiasm a belief in teaching gifted students and a need for them to have lessons and classes differentiated to their needs. All participants discussed the need or desire for classes that are made up of students all identified as gifted, specifically gifted in language arts, since the state only identifies gifted students through math or language arts. In a qualitative study conducted by Misset et al., 2014, the research found that having homogenous grouping of gifted students lead teachers to have higher expectations as well as best practices. However, of the nine participants, only two have completed the coursework necessary for gifted endorsement on their teaching certificate. This lack of coursework is consistent with what Bangel et al. presented in 2010. The participants' lack of gifted endorsement may influence the various ideas of what would be rewarding and challenging for teaching gifted students.

Rewards and challenges. Each participant found the rewards of teaching gifted students an easy topic, with the reward of seeing the excitement and growth in students given most often as the reward. Two participants referred to the gifted students' willingness to take on challenges and succeed as a reward. Renzulli (2012) stated that public schools should provide an optimal education for gifted students and providing challenging material is a part of the optimal education. Interestingly, three participants stated the creative questioning asked by gifted

students as a reward for them as teachers. The questions were viewed as a reward because it indicated active engagement in mastering and understanding motivation in history and not just rote memorization of facts.

Challenges varied among the participants and ranged from time constraints for pursuing what the students wanted to know more about in-depth, to having enough knowledge on a subject of interest, to keeping students engaged. Interestingly, the three challenges noted have all been found as problems in the gifted classroom in previous studies. The need to challenge gifted students has been presented in studies and literature on gifted education from Renzulli (2012), Van Tassel-Baska (2008), and McCoy and Radar (2008). Student engagement, specifically lack of gifted student engagement, was presented and discussed in studies conducted by Kearney (2005) and Manning (2006). All the participants in the current study found time constraints from the standards as a challenge because they were not able to provide time to pursue subjects more in-depth.

Berman et al. (2012), Troxclair (2000), and Kearney (1996) all discussed time constraints in the classroom. Each of the participants also discussed the time constraints within the classroom. The issue presented was a need to teach such a large amount of history in a short amount of time for the standardized testing in the spring. All teachers stated they wished they had more time with the gifted students to do more in-depth study because the students want to, as Jeff stated, follow the "rabbit trail." Time constraints make this impossible.

Two additional challenges mentioned were more district oriented, one being how gifted students are identified and another that gifted social studies classes in middle school are not provided. Studies by Swanson and Lord (2011), Swanson (2007) and Brown et al. (2006) previously indicated gifted education in South Carolina as able to stand on its own and not at all

stagnant. Each district in South Carolina is expected to develop its own gifted program and this is a work in progress, including the district in this study.

Gifted education qualifications. Bangor et al. (2010) and Drain (2008) presented research indicating regular education teachers were not adequately prepared for teaching gifted students. Each participant in this study stated they were interested in gifted education and agreed that teachers should receive training to teach gifted students. Only two have pursued and received their gifted endorsement even though they all have gifted students in the classroom each year. While they are interested in gifted education, and have an idea of the type of work gifted students should be required to do in the classroom. Participants were lacking in knowledge of gifted characteristics. The survey conducted that addressed these educators' perspectives toward gifted students indicated discrepancies with this information.

One question on the survey asked if special curriculum is necessary to meet the academic needs of gifted students. All teachers agreed that special curriculum is needed; however, when asked if gifted students should be provided with additional resources, two teachers were against this. The belief in the need for special curriculum could be an indicator that the state of South Carolina has developed a comprehensive gifted program that has led to much buy-in by the teachers, as indicated by Brown et al. (2006). Three participating teachers do not believe gifted students learn differently than other students, although research over the past century conducted by Terman (1925), Hollingsworth (1926), Renzulli (1978), and the American Mensa Society (2012) has refuted this.

The survey asked about funding for gifted and resources for learning disability students. The majority of the participants indicated that they believed gifted students did not need additional funding, agreeing with the statements that gifted education does not deserve as many

resources as special education programs. This finding is similar to that of the Thomas Ford Institute (2008), which stated that 60% of struggling students receive the majority of the attention, and the Moon et al. (2002) study that discovered gifted students were placed in fourth place for importance. Even though from 2011 to 2013 the federal government has not given any money toward gifted programs and a limited amount allocated for the current fiscal year of 2014, and many states have significantly slashed the funding for gifted programs, all participants agreed with the statement that gifted programs take too many resources away from other students and programs.

Paradoxically, each participant agreed that gifted students need to go beyond the general curriculum to achieve their highest potential. The participants were not consistent in their beliefs toward gifted education and this could be for reasons such as lack of knowledge on the subject because the majority have not been endorsed, or standardized testing that has led to gifted education being given the least amount of importance among the core classes in an effort to ensure all students pass at a favorable rate (Berman et al., 2012; Moon et al., 2002; Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2008).

History Education

Three aspects were discussed during this study in reference to social studies education: the use of textbooks, the purpose of social studies, and the importance of social studies. At the turn of the twentieth century, history morphed into social studies education with its primary objective to educate better American citizens. The findings indicate that this purpose is still upheld by teachers. As Marie stated, “I think history is the place where they can all form opinions. You know you gotta vote” (Personal Communication with Participant, May 19, 2014). Erica echoed this by stating, “Why wouldn't anybody need to learn social studies? I mean they

are only going to vote for whoever is going to lead or country or be leaders themselves" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014).

The second aspect of social studies education deals with textbooks. Sewall wrote in 2000, "Textbooks are the draft horse of the social studies curriculum." The participants of this study indicated that textbooks are not being used as much as they have been in the past. Only about half of the participants discussed using a textbook, and each time it was referred to as a reference. Individuals discussed using textbooks as background information but utilizing other sources such as primary documents, video, and photographs to really explain the history. This lack of textbook use could be due to a lack of trust in the textbook source, or because textbooks are so often viewed as a way to synthesize information. Perhaps the participants feel as if they are prepared enough without using textbooks and already possess adequate information to teach the curriculum.

The Thomas Fordham Institute (2011), Boyle-Biase et al. (2008), and Leming et al. (2006), all conducted studies that showed the results of social studies losing importance and instructional time in the curriculum. The current study indicated that the participants felt a lack of respect and importance regarding the subject of social studies. Erica felt the strongest on the matter stating, "WE ARE LIKE RELATED ARTS TEACHERS! We're the last one on the totem pole as far as importance" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014). Jeff and Marie both discussed how social studies is placed on the bottom of importance in favor of language arts and math. Celia and Marie discussed the change to Common Core Standards, and wondered how that will affect social studies importance. Both believe the emphasis will stay on language arts and math within the Common Core curriculum. As Conklin (2008) discussed

previously, students are becoming more able to handle abstract thought better, but higher-order thinking skills are decreasing.

Primary sources. Primary sources have "untapped potential for expanding and deepening the reading experiences of elementary and middle grade students" (Morgan & Rasinski, 2012). The definition of a primary source, according to the Library of Congress, is an original document or artifact from a time period. According to the U.S. Department of Education website, primary sources include documents, maps, music, art, photography, and original video. Stoddard (2010) and Salinas et al. (2011) discovered that there is a discrepancy in how to define primary sources, as the lack of consensus between the Library of Congress and the U.S. Department of Education indicates.

Participants for this study indicated a similar finding. Each participant gave the definition of primary sources as original documents or artifacts from a time period. This is the same definition for primary sources as found on the Library of Congress website. When asked for specific examples of what could be a primary source, answers were not as consistent as their definitions. All participants indicated a document as a source, but it varied beyond that among the different participants as to who would include photos, video, art, maps, and music, which are all listed as primary sources by the U.S. Department of Education. All participants indicated a lack of time to utilize primary sources to their best advantage due to emphasis on standardized testing. This lack of time will be discussed more in-depth when discussing the interconnectedness of historical critical thinking skills, primary sources, gifted education, and social studies.

Critical thinking skills and their place in teaching history or social studies. Social studies should not consist of rote memorization or simple answers to complex history; instead it

should be analysis and interpretation of primary sources (Lindquist, 2012; Stoddard, 2008; Wineberg, 1991). Facione began publishing information on critical thinking skills in 1992. He currently defines critical thinking skills as "thinking that has a purpose (proving a point, interpreting what something means, solving a problem)" (Facione, 2011, p. 4).

When participants were asked to define critical thinking skills, several stated it was not something they had previously ever defined. Several times participants indicated a question after stating a definition, as shown in Jeff and Celia's answers: "thinking outside the box?" (Jeff) (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014) and "not just regurgitating facts it's actually taking information from maybe different time periods and see how things have changed um making/drawing conclusions. Um I don't know" (Celia) (Personal Communication with Participant, May 14, 2014).

The definitions that were given by participants were short, mainly focusing on how they would observe critical thinking in students. The two observations most commonly given were considering multiple perspectives and engaging in in-depth thinking. Pam stated critical thinking skills would be "to evaluate, to form an opinion . . . asking a student to decide what point of view it's from" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 2, 2014). Fred described critical thinking skills in a similar way, but through a lesson example of having students analyze two sides of a situation and form an opinion. Nina maintained this same description by defining the concept as multiple perspectives and in-depth thought toward historical events.

This finding is similar to Paul and Elder's study in 2000 in which university professors listed critical thinking as a primary goal and believed they were teaching critical thinking, but could not accurately describe critical thinking or describe how to teach it. Primary sources were not specifically mentioned as a necessity for critical thinking skills by any of the participants in

the current study. Knowledge of critical thinking skills was the area where participating teachers were most unsure of their own knowledge.

Critical thinking, primary sources, gifted education and social studies. When asked about the four different concepts, participants were able to briefly discuss each one; however, it was more difficult for participants to put into words how the various concepts worked together. Primary sources were used by each participant, but without much deliberate thought with reference to critical thinking and gifted education, more so because their use is an aspect for curriculum development in a history class. This is similar to Gradwell's (2010) findings in which primary sources were used to help students think critically with an overall purpose to produce good citizens.

Participants of the study all indicated a desire to do analysis and interpretation of primary sources; however, at the same time all participants stated there was a lack of time to do a great deal of primary source analysis. Three of the comments made were: "We are (sic) shoving those standards down their throats" (Erica) (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014); "The standards become overwhelming – it's a running game" (Renee) (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014); and "Those concrete facts we have to drill in because of those standardized tests – that's the problem I've seen – since we have to narrow everything into such a narrow avenue of information that it takes away the whole point in being gifted and talented sometimes" (Jeff) (Personal Communication with Participant, May 16, 2014). This finding also agrees with findings from studies by Conklin (2011), Guidry et al. (2010), and Kingsley and Boone (2008). Each of those studies showed evidence that middle school social studies teachers are now required to teach vast amounts of information in a small amount of time thus leading

teachers to give as much factual information as possible while neglecting to develop historical critical thinking.

Participants did not feel they had a lack of knowledge about critical thinking skills or gifted education overall. However, the inconsistencies in how to define the various concepts indicate that there is a lack of knowledge for each participant. This is consistent with Van Tassel-Baska's (2008) findings, where teachers who were given training on critical thinking skills and gifted education had students with higher gains in critical thinking skills of gifted students.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for this study involved five theories. Each is discussed separately. A student's development from concrete to abstract is an important part of middle school years (Piaget, 1973). The development of critical thinking skills can be likened to Piaget's cognitive development stages as they are linked to intellectual potential (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011). The formal operation stage includes abstract reasoning as a necessary component for critical thinking skills and not simply rote memorization or repeating what others have done (McLeod, 2012). Several participants discussed this issue throughout the interview. Instead of viewing the growth from concrete to abstract in middle school as a potential positive time to introduce abstract thought, the participants viewed this time of growth as the reason for why it was difficult to use primary sources in the classroom.

The current global age of technology allows for a constant use of primary sources through the multimedia available in the classroom (Mayer & Moreno, 1998). Mayer's Multimedia Theory attests to the possible cognitive growth through visual representation, including primary sources. Interestingly, only two of the participants discussed technology, Nina and Pam. Nina stated that she uses technology as often as possible, including making short

videos of information in which she records herself speaking because her students are digital natives. This use of recording is what Mayer calls Split-Attention Principle, which says multimedia presentations should use auditory narration, as well as what is called the Multiple Representation Principle, which is the idea that information should be presented with both visuals and verbally. Pam utilizes this concept through packets of information that include video and readings that she records and puts together and this is the only way she presents information. While the study did not include viewing student test scores, Pam stated her test scores were the best for her grade in the district.

The two concepts are connected through Wineburg's historical thinking matters concept. Wineburg began researching the concepts of historical critical thinking skills and primary sources in the social studies classroom in 1991. His studies have led to his development of a concept entitled Historical Thinking Matters specifically to address primary sources and critical thinking. The participants stated in the interviews and demonstrated in field observations that they use primary sources and wanted to have students demonstrate higher thinking skills, but they were not aware of what Wineberg has studied and brought together for teachers to use in this pursuit.

Paul and Elder's (2010) critical thinking skills concept and Erikson's (2007) concept based curriculum for the thinking classroom give a more in-depth explanation of the specific skill set that is to be developed. For both Paul and Elder (2010) and Erikson (2007), developing successful critical thinkers and a thinking classroom can be done through modeling a design of thinking and having students use it repeatedly until it becomes a habit. For the participants, this modeling is difficult to do because of time constraints as a result of the high stakes standardized testing and the amount of standards that must be covered each year.

Wineburg (1991) has consistently attempted to bring awareness to historical critical thinking skills for the social studies classroom, particularly how effective they could be. The current study indicated that while there was some knowledge of the concept there was much more that could be learned. In classroom observations, teachers were trying to utilize critical thinking skills in lessons and with project requirements. This is true especially with regard to critical thinking skills as presented by Paul and Elder (2010) and Erikson's (2007) thinking classroom. The theories presented were not being utilized to their potential in the classroom of each participant, which may be attributed to the lack of training and understanding of these theories.

Implication for Stakeholders

Participants in this study generally stated a lack of time in the classroom to develop lessons for critical thinking skills. Although they would like to include critical thinking skills and primary sources in their lessons, they discussed a lack of definitive knowledge on the subjects. This indicates for teachers a need to have professional development to help develop a concrete view of critical thinking skills. For administrators, this provides information on how social studies can help develop needed skills in students if teachers are given the proper support through professional development and time.

Knowledge of the needs of gifted students was also addressed in this study, and findings indicate that although teachers perceive themselves to be very knowledgeable on the subject and possess a belief in the importance of teaching gifted students, there is a disconnect between what they state and what they agree to when provided with written statements. This disconnect may indicate that gifted education needs to be addressed because every middle school teacher will likely have gifted students in their classroom. Teachers need to know and understand what to

expect with gifted students, and how to provide the best education for them. This could be accomplished through either offering the coursework for gifted certification for middle school social studies teachers, or providing professional development for these teachers.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation is in the very nature of the qualitative study - a small amount of participants. The information gathered is valid and meaningful. The number of participants was only nine and this means it cannot be generalized to the population at large.

A second limitation is that all participants are teachers within the same district, giving a smaller diverse group of teachers. Each teacher volunteered to be a participant and gave self-reports of information. The field observations were done on a pre-determined day in which primary sources and higher order thinking skills were known as the concept the researcher intended to look for in the classroom. This knowledge could have translated into the participant teaching the best lesson of the month, and may not have been an everyday occurrence.

Recommendations for Future Research

In light of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Many states will begin implementing Common Core Standards this year. There are currently no CCSS for social studies; however, language arts CCSS include being able to conduct analysis and evaluate primary documents. With the change in standards it would be prudent to see if social studies will be utilized effectively to help teach this idea, or will it remain strictly within language arts classrooms.
2. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) professional development standards recommends multiple modes of delivery of curriculum including technology for critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are able to be developed with the use of

primary sources. Primary sources are easily accessible today because of technology. Many districts are beginning to or have implemented technology initiatives. With the easy access to primary sources, discovering how well middle school social studies are taking advantage of this information would be worthwhile.

3. As the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) states in its professional development standards, educators should identify and address areas for personal growth for teaching gifted students. The participants were able to describe critical thinking skills in terms of what they do in the classroom, but did not have a definition name for the concept. School districts should be made aware of the potential of how critical thinking skills could be fostered in social studies, and the class should not rely on rote facts and memorization. Training should be given to teachers on concepts such as Historical Thinking Matters along with common planning times provided for middle school teachers to collaborate. Research can be conducted to determine if this additional knowledge helps teachers help students increase their understanding and knowledge of the subject.
4. Middle school social studies classrooms are currently heterogeneously grouped. As a result, it is likely that every social studies middle school teacher will have students that have been identified as gifted in their classroom. Training for all social studies teachers should be provided so that teachers understand the needs and characteristics of a gifted student. Research can be conducted to determine if this helps increase teacher planning for gifted students, specifically how even within the current standards gifted students can be challenged through primary source usage. This training aligns with the NAGC

professional standard 6, which recommends that educators participate in ongoing, research-supported professional development.

Conclusion

The findings in the study, drawn from the literature review, interviews of nine middle school social studies teachers, field observations of the participants' classrooms, and survey results, suggest that teachers do have a working knowledge of the concepts of gifted education, primary sources, and historical critical thinking skills, but they have not thought about it enough to fully conceptualize how the ideas work together in the social studies classroom. Middle school social studies teachers have gifted students in the classrooms every day, but are not given or required to attain training on how to best teach the gifted student. Nor are they given sufficient training on primary sources and critical thinking skills; instead they must rely on their own background knowledge to understand these concepts.

Gifted students are an important and essential asset to our nation and teachers should be given the training and knowledge to lead to their development at the highest potential. Teachers should also be made aware of how primary sources in social studies can provide a tool to help develop the critical thinking skills needed as students move on to high school, college, and beyond.

Final Thoughts and Summary

Dr. James Gallagher stated in 1976:

> Failure to help the gifted child is a societal tragedy, the extent of which is difficult to measure, but which is surely great. How can we measure the sonata unwritten, the curative drug undiscovered, the absence of political

> insight? They are the difference between what we are and what we could be as a society. (p. 4)

As a former middle school social studies teacher and a current Advanced Placement teacher of ninth graders, I am extremely interested in gifted students; particularly in ensuring students are developing critical thinking skills throughout middle school. Students identified as gifted are arriving in high school with the belief that they are prepared to take an AP class and many are woefully unprepared for the critical thinking and writing they must be able to do. I learned that the participating teachers in the study had some knowledge of the concepts asked, but there was not a consensus within nine people in one district regarding primary sources, gifted education, and critical thinking skills. This lack of clear defined concepts has led to a lack of knowledge on teaching gifted students and critical thinking skills development.

Most teachers are not endorsed by the state to teach gifted students even while acknowledging this is important for the classroom. In the state of South Carolina, the endorsement could be achieved by taking two classes. Whereas in most states, gifted endorsement requires four to five courses. At the same time, gifted education has continued to find less funding and importance, including the district in which the study took place. Social studies has increasingly become less important in the public education classroom and the earlier grades seem locked into rote memorization with time constraints for critical thinking skill development.

Students each year in my classroom start the semester with no worries. They have, for the most part, passed social studies easily through the memorization of basic facts, and believe the subject is the least important and easiest. As Erica said during her interview, "We are (thought of) (sic) as related arts" (Personal Communication with Participant, May 23, 2014).

When I give students the first test for ninth-grade social studies in preparation for the Advanced Placement exam, their grade almost always has students wondering how to study and think critically to be better prepared the next time. Critical thinking skills can be fostered by middle school social studies teachers, the foundation is there; however, time constraints and lack of professional learning time have become real issues. We must provide for our gifted students to the best of our ability and social studies and primary sources are a fantastic vehicle to do so.

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APPENDIX A

Eligibility Criteria for Placement in the Academically Gifted Program

A student must meet the criteria in two of the three dimensions below to qualify for the gifted program.

Student Grade Level	Dimension A Aptitude	Dimension B Achievement Test	Dimension C Academic Performance
Rising 3rd grade Students (current 2nd grade students)	Score on CogAT- administered to all state 2nd graders in the fall must be 93% on verbal, nonverbal, or composite. OR Score on Raven test is 93% A score of 96% (national age percentile) on either of the above results in automatic placement without dimension B or C requirement.	Fall or Spring MAP test score of 94% in reading comprehension or mathematical problem solving/concepts OR Score of 94% on Iowa Test of Basic Skills in reading or math	STAR performance tasks (spring) score of 16 or better on the verbal or non-verbal portions.
Rising 4th grade students (current 3rd grade students)	Raven score of 94% for referred students A score of 96% (national age percentile) composite	PASS score of "advanced" in math or reading OR Fall MAP (or other nationally norm-referenced test) score of 94% in reading comprehension of mathematical problem solving	STAR Performance Tasks (Spring) score of 18 on verbal or non-verbal portions
	Raven score of 94% for referred students A score of 96%	PASS score of "advanced" in math or reading	STAR Performance Tasks (Spring) score of 16 on verbal or 22 on non-verbal

5th grade Students (current 4th grade students)	(national age percentile) composite	OR Fall MAP (or other nationally norm-referenced test) score of 94% in reading comprehension or mathematical problem solving	portions
Rising 6th Grade Students (Current 5th Grade students)	Raven score of 94% for referred students A score of 96% (national age percentile) composite	PASS score of "advanced" in math or reading OR Fall MAP (or other nationally norm-referenced test) score of 94% in reading comprehension or mathematical problem solving	STAR Performance Tasks (Spring) score of 16 on verbal or 25 on non-verbal portions
Rising 7th and 8th grade students (current 6th and 7th grade students	Raven score of 94% for referred students A score of 96% (national age percentile) composite	Fall MAP (or other nationally norm-referenced test) score of 94% in reading comprehension or math problem solving	3.75 final Grade Point Average in core courses using a 4 point scale. GPA is used only for rising 7th and 8th graders

([School District Name Withheld], 2013)

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 7, 2014

Lara Henry
IRB Approval 1838.040714: The Teachers' Perspective of Critical Thinking Skills Development in Middle School Gifted Students in the Social Studies Classroom through the Use of Primary Sources

Dear Lara,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

(434) 592-4054

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UNIVERSITY.

APPENDIX C

Guided Interview Questions

1) Share your experiences you have had teaching middle school social studies to gifted students.

   Possible probes: What are some of the challenges and rewards of teaching gifted students? How do you address the needs of middle school gifted students? How do you perceive yourself as a social studies teacher for gifted students? How does your school provide gifted education services?

2) What do you feel qualifies you to teach middle school social studies as well as gifted students?

   Possible probes: What coursework have you had on teaching gifted and talented students? Do you have any personal experience outside of the classroom with gifted students? Was your major in school in one of the social studies disciplines?

3) What are your beliefs about how gifted students learn?

   Possible probes: How do you teach gifted students and is it different than the non-gifted? What is the reasoning for teaching gifted students differently?

4) How would you describe a primary source and its use in the classroom?

   Possible Probes: What do you consider to be a primary source? Where do you find primary sources? Why do you think primary sources are important for the social studies classroom? When making a lesson where do you find the information you use?

5) Describe critical thinking skills in the social studies classroom.

   Possible probes: How would you define critical thinking skills? Do you think using primary sources in the social studies classroom could be used to develop critical thinking

skills in middle school students? As a middle school social studies teacher, have you thought about a link between primary sources and critical thinking skills in the classroom?

APPENDIX D

Field Notes Template

Description	Interpretation	Concepts/Themes/Musings
Field Note No: Location: Occasion: Date:	Time Start: Time Stop:	

APPENDIX E

Informed consent letter for dissertation participant

Dear Middle School Social Studies Teachers,

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in a Curriculum and Instruction program. I am undertaking research for my doctoral dissertation and I would like you to participate in my study.

My dissertation subject centers around gifted students needs, critical thinking skills development, and primary source usage in the middle school social studies classroom. I would like to include local middle school teachers in the study because it is a good representation of various settings.

Your participation would include completing a survey on perceptions of gifted education, two recorded interview sessions approximately 30 – 45 minutes as well as allowing me to observe one classroom lesson that will not be recorded. During the interview sessions, your background and beliefs regarding gifted education, critical thinking skills and primary source usage will be discussed.

All information will be kept confidential and in all dissertation discussion a pseudonym will be used including for quotations. Your participation would be completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You may also review all interview transcripts.

This study will shared with my dissertation committee as well as other appropriate faculty at Liberty University. The results will be included in the dissertation as well as possible manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Thank you so much for your time and your valuable participation. Please sign below if you are willing to participate in this dissertation research.

_____

Lara E. Henry (Researcher)

_____

Participant's signature, name and position

_____

Date