

**PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER ROLES IN LITERACY
INSTRUCTION**

by

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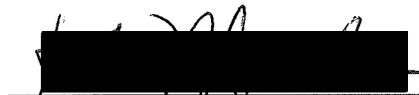
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CERTIFICATION OF THESIS/PROJECT CAPSTONE WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled Perceptions of Social Studies Teacher Roles in Literacy Instruction by Justin Hubbard, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Grades 5-12, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.


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PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER ROLES IN LITERACY INSTRUCTION

ABSTRACT

Research has found that Social Studies content teachers struggle implementing literacy into their content area. This study focused on the question, what are Secondary Social Studies teachers perceptions of their role in literacy instruction? The principal investigator of this study interviewed two experienced Secondary Social Studies teachers on their perceptions and implementation of literacy in the Social Studies content area. It was found by these interviews that these participants had been using higher level literacy instruction techniques as part of their daily instruction in the content area and that they perceive literacy instruction as the responsibility of the Social Studies teacher not only for the benefit of literacy ability, but for Social Studies content knowledge as well.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Chapter 1 Introduction | 7 |
| Chapter 2 Literature Review | 14 |
| Chapter 3 Overview | 22 |
| Chapter 4 Results | 27 |
| Chapter 5 Discussions and Conclusion | 32 |
| References | 38 |
| Appendix | 41 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The New York State Social Studies curriculum centers around the teaching of history, economics, civics, and geography. According to the New York State Department of Education (New York State K-12 Social-Studies Framework, 2017), Social Studies content area is intended to promote civic knowledge through the study of the social sciences with a focus on history. For Social Studies there are two major tests, the Global History and Geography and United States History and Geography Regents Exams. These assessments were designed to assess student knowledge and skill proficiency in this subject area.

Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, and Donovan (2015) described the difficulty of creating Social Studies curriculum that emphasizes literacy as well as content. They found that it was challenging for many content area teachers to implement literacy standards even when they saw it as a necessity. Monte-Sano, De La Paz, Felton, Piantedosi, Yee, and Carey (2017) also noted the importance of Social Studies teacher implementing literacy instruction into their curriculum based on the requirements of the New York State Social Studies Framework.

Teacher emphasis on specific literacy instruction in the Social Studies content area should be evaluated in order to assess if these literacy needs are being addressed. Findings may contribute to understanding the most effective ways for Social Studies content teachers to incorporate literacy into their curriculums. Research may also contribute to realizing if enough explicit literacy instruction is happening in the Social Studies content area and if not, why?

Therefore, this study will focus on the question, what are Secondary Social Studies Teachers' experiences and perceptions of literacy instruction?

Background

The issue of literacy integration into the Social Studies content area has great effects on my professional career. I am a certified Social Studies teacher and have been teaching at the Salamanca City Central School District for two years. My current position involves not only the teaching of Social Studies curriculum but also assessing the content reading level of our secondary students as well as the implementation of a more literacy focused curriculum and instruction strategies based on the needs of our remedial students. Through tracking and data analysis I have identified an area of need in literacy in our 8th-10th grade students. Many teachers have stated to myself and others that the readability of exams makes it so the common denominator for success is not knowledge of the content but in fact a student's ability to read.

In general, our students struggle with the identification and comprehension of tier 2 low frequency academic vocabulary. Many of the students I work with struggle with New York State Regents style multiple choice questions not because of a misunderstanding of the content, but instead a lack of knowledge of the before mentioned tier 2 low frequency academic vocabulary used in the question. This assessment has been being administered in New York State schools since 2001.

This upcoming June 2019, a new test will be administered by the State Department of Education. This assessment will feature specific literacy based questions that may reflect student literacy levels even more than on the past exams (Lent & Rasheed. 2018). With these changes

and an overall increase in the emphasis of literacy in secondary education, it is becoming more important for Social Studies teachers to incorporate specific literacy instruction into their curriculum. The intent of this research is to evaluate Secondary Social Studies teachers' perceptions of their roles in teaching literacy in order to gauge what literacy skills are being taught and if there is a need for more specific literacy based instruction in the Secondary Social Studies content area.

Terminology

There were key terms which were used in this proposal and may require clarification. There are terms that will be used throughout this thesis that require clarification for the understanding of the reader. The first term is "Social Studies," as defined by the New York State Education Department differs from the study of history. The New York State Education Department (New York State K-12 Social-Studies Framework, 2017) noted that "Social Studies" is a subject area that is intended to promote civic competence through the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities. In other words, Social Studies provided students with the skills they need to become well informed, voting citizens within our government. Within the school curriculum, Social Studies teachers draw upon anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, belief systems, and sociology (New York State K-12 Social-Studies Framework, 2017). While the study of history is the majority focus of this curriculum, the term clearly shows that there is a much larger focus when it comes to this subject area.

Another term that needs to be defined in order to understand this study is “literacy.” This term is understood by most as the ability to read and write. Macphee and Whitecotton (2011) defined “literacy” as a collection of practices that allow for communication across members of a particular group. The authors noted that literacy is an umbrella term that encompasses not only reading and writing but all forms of communicating and the tools needed to understand that communication. In the specific discipline of Social Studies, Macphee and Whitecotton (2011) found literacy skills were necessary to not only understanding primary and secondary sources but to also support the remembering of the facts of history in order to not only comprehend but to also analyze.

“Disciplinary Literacy” as defined by Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, and Donovan (2015) refers to ways of reading in order to understand the context of a specific discipline. In the case of Social Studies, these researchers found that whether primary or secondary texts, students need to pay attention to their origins, the authenticity or the source, and the bias and/or point of view of the author.

Theoretical Stance

The theoretical stance for this study lies in Critical Literacy Theory. Critical Literacy seeks to explain how education and literacy shape people’s lives and the ways in which people can use literacy to reshape society and culture (Toliver, 2018). He found the effect of different types of vocabulary on a standardized Social Studies exam. Literacy in Social Studies was important from a critical literacy lens because the subject is meant to promote a well-informed citizenry in our country. Without knowing how to support literacy practices within the social studies classroom, teachers will not be able to complete this goal.

This study is aligned with the 2010 International Literacy Association Standards (ILA, 2010) by fulfilling Element 2.2; “Candidates use appropriate and varied instructional approaches, including those that develop word recognition, language comprehension, strategic knowledge, and reading-writing connections.” For this standard, secondary literacy specialists are to help content area teacher select instructional practices for literacy education in multiple area including vocabulary meaning and comprehension. This study will find Secondary Social Studies Teachers’ experiences and perceptions of literacy instruction so that school literacy specialist know what is needed for Social Studies teachers to effectively integrate literacy instruction into their curriculum.

Rationale

Students have been required to take and receive a passing score on both the World History and Geography and United States History and Geography in order to graduate with a New York State diploma (New York State K-12 Social-Studies Framework, 2017). Therefore, it has been imperative that both teachers and students were aware of the literacy requirements and difficulty of these particular assessments. Specifically in Social Studies, it is critical that secondary teachers have an understanding of both the general literacy and more specifically the literacy requirements pertaining to the state assessments in order for teachers to develop literacy strategies that they should be implementing and integrating in their curriculum. At this moment there is no specific literacy training requirement for Social Studies content teachers in New York State. This means that many Social Studies teachers do not understand how to implement literacy

into their curriculum and instruction and may also not believe that it is an important part of their job.

Education standards throughout the county have been the driving force to not only instruction but also the assessment (Lent & Rasheed, 2018). Particularly in the New York State Social Studies Framework (New York State K-12 Social-Studies Framework, 2017), there has been an emphasis placed on literacy in not only traditional reading and English Language Arts classes, but across all subject areas. Monte-Sano and colleagues (2017) outlined the literacy practices required no matter what the subject area. In many states including New York State, it has been required for all teachers, including Social Studies, to adapt curriculum and pedagogy to support literacy development. Traditionally one of the most common forms of literacy emphasis in the Social Studies subject area is vocabulary instruction.

Ilhan (2017) found that the majority of the teachers involved in a survey did not employ strategies that supported an improvement in vocabulary learning skills. These findings showed the importance and need for research in this area. Nokes (2010) also found that Social Studies teachers were relying heavily on lower level vocabulary instruction such as worksheets and matching exercises. This may leave many students unprepared for the readability of the assessments and therefore unable to show their content skills and knowledge.

With a better understanding of Secondary Social Studies teachers' perceptions on their role in literacy instruction, more strategies and content can be developed and pushed out to these content area teachers in order to better inform them on how to implement literacy into their curriculum. The data collected and analyzed also shows the importance of literacy skills to apply

the content area knowledge of Social Studies outside of school. Issues such as document analysis including understanding acts of legislation, being able to understand reports on current events, and making political decisions are just a few of the Social Studies issues involving literacy that affect citizens in their adult post-high school lives. Social Studies teachers must see the importance literacy plays in their subject area and in order to better prepare their students for this assessment and their adult lives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The databases used for this research were ERIC or Education Research Information Center and EBSCOhost: Education Source. The descriptors used for this research were “Social Studies or history AND vocabulary” as well as “Social Studies or History or Geography AND Literacy” with limitations to peer reviewed articles. Articles were then selected based on the relevance to the inquiry question with emphasis being placed on vocabulary instruction strategies at the secondary level and disciplinary literacy as part of a Social Studies curriculum.

The themes of the literature review were based on the high frequency of results pertaining to those subjects as well as similar findings of the studies. The themes are New York State Grades 9-12 Social Studies Literacy Standards, Teacher Perceptions and Strategies in Incorporating Vocabulary Instruction into the Social Studies Content Area, Using Vocabulary Knowledge as an Indicator of Performance in the Social Studies Content Area, Disciplinary Literacy Implementation in the Social Studies Subject Area, and a summary. All of the themes guided the researcher to create a plan for research for this study.

New York State Grades 9-12 Social Studies Literacy Standards

The latest standards for the Social Studies content area in New York State known as the “K-12 Social Studies Framework”, were released in 2014 and revised in 2017 (New York State Education Department Social Studies Framework. 2017). They have been revised three total times with the latest coming out in February of 2017. This framework has been “designed to prepare students for college, careers, and civic life” and to guide curriculum and instruction of Social Studies classes (New York State Education Department Social Studies Framework. 2017). The additions to the framework that pertains most to this study are the reading and writing standards for literacy. These new standards place emphasis

on reading “Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity” (New York State Education Department, 2017). These literacy standards shows the necessity for specific literacy instruction in the Social Studies Classroom. In June 2019 New York State will release a new assessment using the latest framework (Lent & Rasheed. 2018). This new assessment introduces not only an entirely new weighting scale but also new question formats that place more of an emphasis on literacy skills. This new exam will feature “Stimulus-Based Multiple Choice Questions (2018) that will feature images, quotes, charts, and/or graphs that will be used to create multiple choice questions. This exam will also feature “Reliability Prompt Responses” (2018) which will require students to analyze the reliability and bias of a primary or secondary source. These types of assessment questions will require students to use complex literacy skills that have not been required in the past. This will mean that Social Studies teachers will need specific and in depth literacy instruction to take place in their classrooms in order for their students to be successful.

Teacher Perceptions and Strategies in Incorporating Vocabulary Instruction into the Social Studies Content Area

Ilhan (2017) described Social Studies teachers’ perceptions related to instruction and vocabulary development. He found that low-level practices such as word analogy, semantic mapping, and vocabulary self-collection were preferred by the teachers. Overall, most of the teachers were using low level instruction strategies and practices when teaching their content area as well not spending sufficient time on vocabulary or literacy instruction.

Nokes (2010) found similar results in the literacy instruction being done in social studies area classrooms. The purpose of this study was to observe and evaluate how Social Studies teachers made literacy based decisions about the type of texts they use and how students were

taught to learn from texts. He showed that teachers relied heavily on textbooks and general literacy instruction such as worksheets and vocabulary matching. History-specific literacy instruction such as the use of primary sources did not occur. This shows that both of the previously mentioned studies found that Social Studies teachers were relying on low level instruction to teach vocabulary within their classrooms.

Unlike the previously mentioned studies (Ilhan, 2017; Nokes, 2017) that found Social Studies teachers relying on lower level content and literacy/vocabulary teaching strategies, the Ilter (2016) researched the incorporation of graphic organizers into the Social Studies content area. The author investigated the effectiveness of three graphic organizers for teaching vocabulary and the development of emotions-related to achievement in the social studies curriculum. He found that the group that had access to the graphic organizer achieved more improvement than the group that did not have access.

Santoro, Chard, Howard, and Baker (2008) studied yet another strategy that could be used to incorporate more vocabulary instruction into the Social Studies content area, the use of read-alouds. The researchers evaluated the effectiveness of both Science and Social Studies books being used in read-alouds in a first grade classroom. The authors found that the effectiveness of reading aloud improved reading comprehension and vocabulary abilities in elementary school students. They indicated that enhancing read-alouds by integrating comprehension strategies and text-based discussions made a positive impact on student performance. It is reasonable to think that these results could be replicated at the Secondary Social Studies level and therefore these instructional practices would be useful at that level as

well. Like other researchers (Ilter, 2016), Santoro, et al. (2008) also found a relationship between higher level vocabulary instruction and an improvement in literacy ability.

Another research team of researchers (Reed & Petscher, 2003) evaluated the effectiveness of read-alouds in the social studies curriculum, but with a more non-traditional group. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of teacher read-alouds compared to silent reading on content area learning content. 1 week of high quality instruction in United States history and then accompanied by either teacher read-alouds or silent reading. There was no significant difference in the assessment results of either group however both groups exceeded expectations which similar to the previously mentioned studies (Ilter, 2016; Santoro et. al, 2008) could be a result of the high quality vocabulary instruction implementation along with the reading strategies.

Vaughn and colleagues (2015) found reading comprehension techniques can also be integrated into the Social Studies curriculum in order to both assess and improve student content reading ability. A replication research study of the Parent-mediated Communication-focused Treatment in Children with Autism or PACT intervention that demonstrated the impact in the areas of comprehension and content learning (Vaughn et al. 2013) sought to examine the effects of reading comprehension incorporation into the Social Studies content area as a way to enhance both vocabulary and content knowledge. This study replicated findings that demonstrated impact of reading comprehension and Social Studies content learning. The study used a randomized control trial, intervention, and outcome measures to replicate in 85 8th grade Social Studies classes with 19 teachers. Students were given a pre and post-test on reading comprehension

abilities to measure growth. The study found that students in the treatment condition outperformed students without treatment in vocabulary and knowledge acquisition.

Using Vocabulary Knowledge as an Indicator of Performance in the Social Studies Content Area

Espin (2001) examined the reliability and validity of two curriculum based measures as performance indicators in a 7th grade social studies classroom. The study was a portion of a longitudinal study in which students were tracked by performance over a certain time in the school year using two different vocabulary-matching measures. The criterion measures were content knowledge pre and post-tests, the social studies subtest of the Iowa Test of basic skills, and classroom grades across two testing sessions. Results of the research indicated that both of the vocabulary-matching measures were good indicators of student performance in the Social Studies classroom as well as their general content area knowledge and ability. In other words, the study found evidence that supports that vocabulary knowledge has an effect on the performance of students in the social studies content area.

Researchers in another study (Lembke, Allen, Cohen, Hubbuch, Landon, Bess, & Bruns, 2017) examined the effect of incorporating vocabulary matching curriculum into the Social Studies content area. Both of the aforementioned researchers(Espin, 2001; Lembke et al., 2017) discussed the correlation of vocabulary knowledge and performance in the Social Studies content area. Instead of using it as a performance indicator such as in Espin (2001), Lembke (2017) measured the effects of vocabulary matching instruction on its participants. Findings provided

mixed results that the curriculum based measurements helped students learn vocabulary while providing the teacher up to date feedback.

Disciplinary Literacy Implementation in the Social Studies Subject Area

Some researchers (Learned, 2018; Macphee & Whitecotton, 2011) conducted studies that evaluated the implementation of disciplinary literacy strategies into a Social Studies curriculum. Both research teams found that before implementation of these disciplinary literacy strategies, students were learning some literacy skills but not using them as a tool for learning Social Studies content or skills.

Macphee and Whitecotton (2011) also found at the conclusion of their study that students could construct deep understandings of history and other Social Studies skills when they were engaged in specific disciplinary literacy practices. This study also found that overall literacy skills grew after implementation of these specific disciplinary practices. Similarly, Learned (2018) found that before implementation of disciplinary literacy practices, educators were not implementing effective literacy strategies in their classrooms. Many of the teachers involved in this study saw textbook instruction as an effective way to implement literacy into their content. This study also found that teachers perceived that literacy instruction would take away from the depth of the Social Studies content and were resistant to integrating it for that reason.

Monte-Sano and colleagues (2017) also noted that textbook instruction as a literacy practices was ineffective in Social Studies classrooms. The authors difficulty that teachers were having according to this study was that before implementation of the National Common Core Standards, Social Studies teachers were accustomed to emphasizing only content knowledge

were now expected to shift their curriculum to also focus on literacy practices. Another difficulty found was that students were not reading primary sources, provided as literary devices from their teachers, like historians would (Monte-Sano, et al. 2017). This resulted in a loss of the depth of content as also mentioned by Learned (2018). Another team of researchers, Monte-Sano, et al., (2017) found that Social Studies teachers struggled with literacy implementation, especially in Social Studies disciplinary implementation, within their curriculum. This could show that these content area teachers had not yet received enough support or professional development in the area of literacy practices and were relying to heavily on low level literacy practices that did not actually support their curriculums.

Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, and Donovan (2015) stated that not enough time was being devoted to Social Studies in schools. Similar to the findings in the research conducted by Monte-Sano, et al., (2017), this lead teachers, who are now required to implement more literacy, to lessen the quality of their literacy instruction in order to cover the depth of content while also fulfilling the literacy requirements. The consequence to this was the loss of disciplinary literacy practices, which take explicit instruction to implement, as well as the ability to treat these topics with the depth that is emphasized by historians. All of these studies mentioned found that disciplinary literacy was difficult to implement in the Social Studies content area. Teacher difficulties in the implementation and instruction of these practices were found in each of these studies, which leads this researcher to assume the role of Social Studies teacher in literacy instruction may be perceived differently by each teacher and could have consequences in student literacy achievement. Stein and Prewett (2009) had similar findings to the previously mentioned studies (Duhaylongsod, Snow, Sleman, & Donovan. 2015; Monte-Sano, et al., 2017). Although

their focused on media literacy, similar to the other studies these researchers found that Social Studies teachers were using low level instruction techniques while incorporating literacy into their content. This study also found that teachers did not feel that they had enough training to incorporate literacy properly, similar to what was found by Monte-Sano, et al., (2017).

Summary

Through the review of literature the researcher discovered a problem in Social Studies teacher's literacy instruction methods as well as their perceptions of their roles in the literacy education process. Multiple researchers (Stein & Prewett. 2009; Monte-Sano, et al., 2017; Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, & Donovan. 2015) conducted studies that found that Social Studies teachers were relying too heavily on low level literacy instruction in their classrooms. Other researchers (Ilter. 2016; Vaughn et al. 2015) found that with incorporation of higher level literacy instruction and assessment, the implementation of literacy in the Social Studies classroom is more successful. This lead this researcher to identify the actually Social Studies teachers and their perceptions of the roles they play in literacy instruction as an area that could have major effect on the implementation of literacy within this content area. A gap was found in the research in the area of qualitative data in this problem area. The review of literature allowed to researcher to gain an understanding of literacy requirements in the Social Studies content area, teacher perceptions and strategies in incorporating vocabulary instruction, using vocabulary knowledge and other literacy skills as an indicator of student performance, and disciplinary literacy implementation in the content area.

Chapter 3: Overview

Overview of Methodology

Several researchers (Stein & Prewett. 2009; Monte-Sano, et al., 2017; Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, & Donovan. 2015) have analyzed the implementation of literacy practices into the Social Studies curriculum. These authors noted the difficulty content teachers have in its implementation. The methodology below will detail the planned research to collect qualitative data to support or refute the research question.

Design of Study

This study was aimed to gather data on teacher perceptions of their role and ability in literacy instruction to find if and how these literacy needs being addressed in the Social Studies classroom. This study consisted of interviews of Secondary Social Studies teachers to examine their perceptions of their role in literacy instruction as well as gather their experiences and comfortability in this form of instruction while also gathering data on instruction techniques that are being utilized.

The Principal Investigator conducted semi-structured interviews of Social Studies teachers on their perceptions of their roles in literacy instruction. The interview questions were adapted from a survey on media literacy instruction among Social Studies (Stein & Prewitt. 2009). The questions related to teacher perceptions of their roles in literacy instruction as well as their use of literacy instruction methods as part of their Social Studies curriculum and instruction.

The questions were broken down into themes of teachers' perceptions as well as the instruction techniques they use as a part of literacy instruction.

Subjects. The individuals who participated in this study all were employed Secondary Social Studies teachers in New York State with at least 5 years teaching experience in the Social Studies content area. The subjects were employed by a Western New York public school district. These individuals range in ages from 22-65 and have all obtained at least a Master's Degree in either Education or History. The subjects in this study teach or have taught Social Studies classes ranging from 7th and 8th Grade United States History and Geography, 9th and 10th Grade Global Studies, 11th grade US History Geography and Government, and 12th grade Government and Economics.

The subjects in the study had background knowledge on the subject of literacy instruction in the Social Studies content area as they have had more than five years experience teaching in that discipline. This experience and background knowledge make these teachers purposeful samples. The participants provided qualitative data that led to further insight into the actual perception of their role as well as the practical use and implementation of literacy instruction techniques in their classrooms. This is a purposeful sample because of the subjects background knowledge and experience. There will be a total of two teachers interviewed as part of this study. Each subject has a unique experience and professional opinion that contributes to this study.

Procedures. This research project using human subjects was approved by the SUNY Fredonia Human Subjects Review Committee as of January 4th, 2019. The approval is valid from January 4th through April 1st 2019. To protect the subjects, all information will be kept confidential. The principal investigator used pseudonyms (Teacher 1, Teacher 2) in order to maintain the anonymity of the subjects. The audio recordings were deleted at the end of the study. Each interview of the study was conducted at a neutral site. Exits are clearly marked and safety protocols are in place. The participants were made aware of their own perceptions on their roles in literacy instruction and main gain literacy instruction techniques and practices that they can utilize in their own classrooms. This in turn will hopefully benefit their students by gaining high quality literary skills that support a Social Studies curriculum.

The principal investigator sent an email to the building principals on February 1st, 2019 to request permission to conduct the study at their facilities with their employees. With the consent of the principal, the principal investigator contacted and explained the study to three Secondary Social Studies Teachers on March 1st, 2019 in person, in order to gather volunteers to participate in the study. Out of the three subjects initially contacted and invited, two consented to participate in the study. With the consent of teachers willing to participate in the study, the principal investigator set up dates and times with each teacher to conduct a semi-structured interview, face-to-face. The first interview was conducted on March 14th, and the second was conducted on March 28th.

Each interview took approximately thirty minutes each but times varied based on answers and elaboration of the participant. There were eight total questions as part of the interview while also allowing for follow up questions based on the answers given. The interviews were open ended encouraging the participants to not only answer in qualitative and unique ways but also allow for follow up questions from the interviewer. The remaining questions of the interview were designed to aligned with the themes of the literature review as well as adapted from a survey on media literacy instruction among Social Studies Teachers (Stein & Prewett. 2009).

Data Collection. Data was collected during semi-structured interviews questions with the teachers participating in the study. Recordings were transcribed and kept on a password protected computer that only the principal researcher had access to. The initial questions were designed to build a rapport with the participants while also gathering data on their teaching experiences. The questions related to teacher perceptions to their role in literacy instruction as well as their use of literacy instruction methods as part of their Social Studies curriculum and instruction. The questions were broken down into themes of teachers perceptions as well as the instruction techniques they use as a part of literacy instruction.

The data collected was coded, securely kept, and remained confidential throughout the study. The audio recordings were transcribed by the principal investigator at the conclusion of each interview. At the conclusion of the study all data was shredded and recordings were deleted in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Data Analysis

The research that was conducted as part of this study was a thematic analysis consisting of semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying and analyzing themes within data (Jonson, Markham, & Tortolero. 2017). The principal investigator sought out and reported on common themes found in the interviews that either support or refuted the research question. Best literacy practices were reported on in this study in order to provide effective literacy instruction methods for Social Studies teachers. Themes in the areas of support in the instruction or knowledge of literacy skills desired by the teacher were also reported on. The study collected qualitative data from experienced professionals in the field of Social Studies Education via the interview process. The data was coded and analyzed by the principal investigator. Themes and trends as well as insightful individual accounts were tracked by the researcher in terms of frequency as well as rate. The data collected was used to connect to the current literature regarding literacy instruction as part of the Social Studies curriculum. The principal investigator then completed a content thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews. The principal investigator found themes and patterns presented by the teachers participating in the study that relate to the findings of the literature review. Finally, the investigator highlighted responses that corresponded with the literature review and note any patterns that emerge during the semi-structured interviews. The Principal Investigator and second reader came to a consensus on the themes. The themes of the study were the role of social studies teachers in literacy instruction, the emphasis of literacy in social studies standardized testing, the importance of literacy comprehension and analysis skills in the social studies content area, and the application of real life social studies literacy skills.

Chapter 4: Results and Interpretation

Results

Through the review of literature the Principal Investigator discovered a problem in Social Studies teacher's literacy instruction methods as well as their perceptions of their roles in the literacy education process. The semi-structured interviews conducted by the principal investigator resulted in several findings including multiple themes. A total of two, thirty minute interviews of experienced Social Studies teachers were conducted, recorded, and transcribed in order to gather data that supported said themes and correlations. Themes found as part of the study were the role of Social Studies teachers in literacy instruction, emphasis of literacy in standardized testing, the importance of literacy comprehension and analysis skills in the Social Studies content area, and the importance of literacy in real life contemporary Social Studies skills.

Reliability of Data

Data for this study was consistently gathered and analyzed. Each interview was conducted in a neutral site and lasted around thirty minutes. The same standard interview questions were asked by the principal investigator to each subject with additional follow up questions being asked depending on the answers given by each subject. After both of the interviews concluded the recordings were transcribed by the primary investigator on a password secure device. Each transcription was reviewed by the subject in order to ensure that their views were reflected accurately and in a way that they were comfortable with. The transcriptions were then sent to a second reader in order to come to a consensus on the themes of the findings. The

investigators then held a conference where they compared themes to consistently match the results and findings of the study.

Interpretation of the Results

The interviews conducted as part of the study resulted in four themes. The themes of the study were the role of Social Studies teacher in literacy instruction, the emphasis of literacy in Social Studies standardized testing, the importance of literacy comprehension and analysis skills in the Social Studies content area, and the application of real life Social Studies literacy skills. The principal investigator used the assistance of a second reader to find these themes.

The Role of Social Studies Teachers in Literacy Instruction. The first theme found in this study was the role of Social Studies teachers in literacy instruction. Both subjects shared views throughout the interview that showed their stance that Social Studies teachers have an important role to play when it comes to literacy instruction. The subjects specifically shared this view when answering the same question from the principal investigator. One subject responded by stating

Social Studies teachers are some of the most crucial teachers in literacy instruction and in some schools the most critical. It is all Social Studies teacher's jobs to teach kids reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Social Studies teachers wear a different hat because of the set content but we are similar to ELA as far as literacy goes.

This statement shows that the subject places a high emphasis on themselves as not only a content instructor but also also an educator in literacy skills. The other subject stated

I would say other than English (ELA) we are the most important people in most schools when it comes to literacy because it's easier to do so in our curriculum. To be successful now, maybe not in the past, but now you have to also teach literacy. You don't necessarily have to be certified but you have to be competent in it.

Both subjects clearly express their views that Social Studies teachers have one of the most important roles to play in literacy instruction in the secondary school setting. They both also stated that this importance is second only to the ELA content area which is traditionally seen as the most important content area for areas of literacy instruction.

The Emphasis of Literacy in Social Studies Standardized Testing. The second theme found in this study was the emphasis of literacy in social studies standardized testing. Both subjects of the study expressed that there has been an emphasis placed on literacy in the most recent and future Social Studies standardized tests given by New York State Department of Education.

The current test is simply just memorization. With that test if you have a good memory it is very simple but that is not SS. This new test will not only assessed your knowledge of the content but your overall Social Studies skill which obviously includes literacy. So instead of memorizing who are the Kaisers of Germany, we will compare the Kaizers or make predictions about the next Kaisers. Or we could put them into the context into the greater monarchy scheme of Europe. It is back to the basics of skills.(Subject One)

Another subject stated in reference to the New York State Social Studies standardized tests

You have to be able to write a high level essay to be successful. When it comes to the multiple choice, you have to be able to read obviously but also have to be able to comprehend the vocabulary in order to understand what questions are asking.

Both of these subjects express that they view literacy as an integral focus of NYS Standardized testing and an understanding of literacy skills as a requirement for success on said testing.

The Importance of Literacy Comprehension and Analysis Skills in the Social Studies Content Area. Another theme found through the study was the importance of literacy comprehension and analysis skills in the social studies content area. Both subjects viewed literacy as an important skill in the Social Studies Content Area. Subject One stated

These sources tend to be college level reading and you need strong literacy skills to understand primary sources and that is the core to history. I think that overall in Social Studies, after high school understanding newspaper articles, economic skills, reading maps, trying to have an opinion of politics, you need not only the content knowledge but also literacy skills.

One of the participants stated “To get the kids to really understand documents and make connections the students have to be literate, maybe more than English (ELA) there.” Both of these viewpoints shows the perception of literacy skills being necessary for success not only in the Social Studies content area in k-12 education but for the application and comprehension of Social Studies in real life arenas.

The Application of Real Life Social Studies Literacy Skills. The final theme found through the study was the application of real life social studies literacy skills. Both subjects

expressed their motivation for teaching Social Studies as their students future application of the skills that they learned as part of the Social Studies content area. One subject stated

I don't think students struggle more with literacy now, it is just different. Texts, facebook, media, that is all literacy. It just comes a lot faster now and people don't see it as reading but it still is. I always think about literacy like when I travel. Imagine not being able to read road signs... That's terrifying.

Even though it is not explicit, this shows that the subject views the content area literacy skills of Social Studies as a key to survival in his student's future lives. The other subject stated

To be able to make informed decisions as a citizen. To be able to see all sides of a story and make informed decisions. To be able to read real life documents and listen to something and make informed decisions is lacking now. To be also able to connect to regular life skills. We have to teach this.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Overview of Study and Findings

The New York State Social Studies curriculum has centered around the teaching of history, economics, civics, and geography. According to the New York State Department of Education (New York State K-12 Social-Studies Framework, 2017), the Social Studies content area is intended to promote civic knowledge through the study of the social sciences with a focus on history. For Social Studies there are two major tests, the Global History and Geography and United States History and Geography Regents Exams. These assessments were designed to assess student knowledge and skill proficiency in this subject area. Based on this issue, this study was focused on the research question “what are Secondary Social Studies Teachers’ experiences and perceptions of literacy instruction?”

The study used two semi-structured interviews to address the research question. The research found that the Social Studies teachers interviewed believed that their content area and their knowledge and practice of literacy instruction was vital to the literacy ability of their students. The teachers also viewed literacy skills as an important element to the understanding of the Social Studies curriculum as well as necessary for the use of Social Studies practices in real life application outside of school. Each teacher used a multitude of literacy instruction techniques to not only teach literacy skill but to also enhance Social Studies practices and knowledge in their daily instruction. Therefore, it can be stated that the data found did address the research question. The data showed that the Social Studies teachers who participated in the study viewed themselves as having an important role in literacy instruction. They believed that while literacy

instruction is not their strength or primary concern, that the analysis skills and writing necessary to be successful in the content area makes Social Studies close if not equal of importance to literacy ability as English Language Arts. This actually contradicts the research found in the Literature Review that showed many Social Studies teachers not making literacy a priority. Researchers (Ilhan, 2017; Nokes, 2017) found that Social Studies teachers were relying on low level content and literacy teaching strategies. Monte-Sano and colleagues (2017) noted that Social Studies teachers were relying on low level literacy practices such as textbook instruction. The research conducted in this strategy however found that the two participants were incorporating high level literacy instruction in to their daily lessons.

Significance of Findings

The new Social Studies framework for New York State has been “designed to prepare students for college, careers, and civic life” (New York State Education Department Social Studies Framework, 2017) by placing an emphasis on literacy. Both subjects in the study expressed concern with the new standards but also addressed that these literacy standards have fueled their classroom instruction as well as enhanced their content. This study found that this new framework, while emphasizing literacy skills, also enhances the content discipline as well according to the subjects. The new state framework placing emphasis on integration of knowledge and ideas is reflected in the views of the subjects of the study with both of them stating that literacy skills in this content area can be used in real life application. One subject even stated that the integration of discipline literacy skills were more useful than past practices of assessment such as recall based multiple choice questions. This is significant because it shows

that Social Studies teachers may view literacy skills as an important if not vital part of their content area, instead of simply a requirement by state education that they view as unimportant.

The review of literature found that many Social Studies teachers were only using low level literacy techniques as a part of instruction (Ilhan, 2017; Nokes, 2017). This study however found that not only were the subjects using a varied array of literacy instruction techniques, they viewed these skills as vital to their instruction and to the student's comprehension of the content area. Literacy techniques were used by both subjects in instruction of primary document analysis which both subjects use to teach content while also incorporating literacy. This shows a significant finding because the subjects not only integrate these high level literacy techniques, they are using them as a gateway to content knowledge instead of merely practice after the knowledge is taught by a more teacher centered instruction such as lecture. This is a way that the subjects are teaching multiple skills simultaneously in their content area while not diminishing the Social Studies subject matter at all.

Also discussed in the literature review was the research of Macphee and Whitecotton (2011) that found that students could construct deep understandings of history and other Social Studies skills when they were engaged in specific disciplinary literacy practices. Both subjects views supported these findings. Both subjects used literacy practices not only as practice for the skills they had previous taught their students, but also as a way to teach the content. Both subjects viewed the vocabulary and other disciplinary literacy requirements of the Social Studies content area as a way to enhance their instruction and increase their students' understanding of Social Studies both for classroom material including state assessments and real life disciplinary application such as analyzing primary sources such as a newspaper or television news report.

Santoro, Chard, Howard, and Baker (2008) studied the use of incorporating vocabulary instruction into the Social Studies content area using the use of read-alouds. This study found that these practices had a positive influence on student performance. More research would be needed to find results, but both participants of this study would agree that the use of more literacy practices such as these would result in more success.

Limitation of Findings

There were multiple limitations to this study that require the reader approach the findings with caution. First of all, the study was limited to only two subjects participating. While the subjects met the requirements for experience in the Social Studies content area in the field of education, there were only two interviews conducted. This was a very limited sample size and therefore limited the scope of the findings. Another limitation for this study was the small area that subjects were drawn from. Both subjects teach at the same school in Western New York. To get a more representative pool, subjects could be taken from multiple schools in multiple areas in order to have more diverse and representative findings.

Conclusion: Answer to the Research Question

This study was focused on the research question “what are Secondary Social Studies Teachers’ experiences and perceptions of literacy instruction?” The answer to this research question based on the findings is that Secondary Social Studies teachers have a perception that they are vital to literacy instruction and that it is equally vital to their content area. Both subjects of this study incorporate literacy practices into each of their daily lessons. They also view literacy as a vital to the social studies and content area. When discussing their perceptions of

social studies teachers as a part of literacy instruction, both subjects seemed to view their role in their content area instruction as a vital to the student's acquisition of literacy skills. When discussing each subject's experience with literacy instruction the results were varied. Each of the subjects used multiple literacy instruction techniques and even used literacy as a gateway to content instruction instead of a simple worksheet and practice after content had already been taught through more teacher center means. These results show the social studies teachers may view themselves as an important part of literacy instruction, even though their content area is not traditionally emphasize this type of the discipline practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation for future research is a study focused on the literacy instruction techniques that Social Studies teachers are actually utilizing in the classroom and if they are effective in elevating student literacy ability, Social Studies skills and knowledge, or both. Both of the subjects in this study expressed they they focus on literacy skills in their classrooms and think they literacy ability is a vital requirement for success in the Social Studies content area. This recommended research would evaluate if these views can be proven to be successful. The first part of this study would observe and log how literacy is incorporated in Social Studies classrooms including what exact practices are being utilized, what skills are being focused on, and how much time on average is spent on literacy each day. The second part of this study would assess both the literacy skills and Social Studies content skills and knowledge students have both before and after these literary techniques are used in the Social Studies classroom. A pre and post test would be used to assess these skills. This would evaluate if the claims of the two participants

in the study, that literacy and Social Studies benefit from each other, are valid and if the techniques being used in classrooms are effective.

Another recommendation for future research is an evaluation and analysis of Social Studies standardized assessments based on the literacy requirements and difficulty of the exams. Each subject of this study mentioned that the standardized exams for Social Studies have numerous literacy requirements. This recommended research would evaluate if these views are factual. The exams could be broken down by reading level, amount of content vocabulary used versus academic vocabulary, the analysis of primary documents and the reading level of said documents, and many other areas. This recommended research would evaluate if these assessments are actually assessing Social Studies skills or are simply reading exams.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Hello and thank you for participating in this study. As we have discussed, my name is Justin Hubbard and I am conducting a study on Social Studies Teachers' perceptions of their role in literacy instruction for my thesis project required to receive my Master's Degree in Literacy Education Grades 5-12. All personally information gathered in this study will remain confidential. You have signed a form allowing me to conduct as well as record this interview.

- 1) How long have you been teaching Social Studies? What school districts have you worked for? What grade levels and subjects have you taught?
- 2) What is your experience teaching Social Studies?
- 3) What do you believe is the role of Social Studies teachers in literacy instruction?
- 4) What is the importance of literacy within the Social Studies content area?
- 5) What do you believe is the main objective for the Social Studies literacy standards outlined in the NYS Social Studies Framework? To enhance understanding of Social Studies or to enhance general literacy ability?
- 6) What is your confidence and or comfortability in teaching literacy as part of your curriculum?
- 7) What literacy instruction techniques do you focus on as part of your instruction?
- 8) What information or training would be the most helpful to you as far as literacy instruction?

Thank you for participating in this study. The data collected will now be compared to other interviews in an attempt to find themes and correlations. Any questions feel free to contact myself or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Magiera.

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