ABSTRACT


AP social studies courses are viewed as beacons for rigorous and demanding coursework in secondary classroom settings. Recent curricular revisions and enrollment initiatives made by the College Board have led to further discourse concerning instructional and curricular tensions that still need to be addressed. Moreover, reform made in AP social studies courses suggests that traditional and teacher-centered methods of instruction also need to be reconsidered in order to meet the goals of newly revised courses. Traditional and teacher-centered methods of instruction used in AP social studies courses might actually be causing students to learn with varying degrees of passivity and subordination. In turn, this has the potential to cause discord in the rhetoric and reality of the objectives of both AP courses and social studies education.

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how implementing discussion pedagogy, based predominantly on the use of seminars, could support and promote student autonomy while also meeting the objectives of AP courses and social studies education. Additionally, I was guided by three sub-questions. How do students experience discussion pedagogy? Do students perceive a difference in the learning climate, specifically, teacher-student interaction when discussion pedagogy is implemented? How does discussion pedagogy affect students’ experience relative to the content? Discussion pedagogy was implemented over a four-week period in two, AP European History courses in an urban high school (grades 9-12) in the southeastern region of the United States. The action research study, with its five stages of “initial reflection-planning-action-observation-reflection,”
rooted in self-determination theory, collected data through the use of Learning Climate Questionnaires (Williams & Deci, 1996), semi-structured interviews, classroom recordings, field notes, and student artifacts.

Three major findings emerged from the data analyzed. The first major finding demonstrated that student preparation for, and involvement in, the course was impacted through their participation with discussion pedagogy. The second major finding demonstrated that students experienced a sense of relatedness within the learning environment. The third major finding demonstrated that students experienced engagement with regard to historical thinking skills and the historical content, most notably in the areas of historical argumentation and historical interpretation. These three major findings, in conjunction with the existing research, have implications for teachers of AP social studies courses as well as pre-services teachers. Additionally, the results of this action research study have implications for future research on the intersections of self-determination theory in a critical context.
An Action Research Study Exploring the Implementation of Discussion Pedagogy in Support of Student Autonomy in Advanced Placement Courses

by

Christopher Thomas Dague

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Curriculum and Instruction

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APPROVED BY:

_______________________________  _______________________________
Dr. John Lee, Ph. D.                  Dr. Heather Davis-Bauer, Ph. D.
Committee Chair

_______________________________  _______________________________
Dr. Meghan Manfra, Ph. D.             Dr. Susan Barcinas, Ph. D.
DEDICATION

I have waited a long time to write this dedication, knowing that it signifies the culmination of much work toward a goal that could not have been achieved without the love and support of many.

I want to start my dedicating this to the strongest and most rightly guided person I know, my mother Karen Dague-Wallick. Your tireless efforts and your unconditional love have made this all possible. I can never thank you enough for the positive example you set for me. I hope that one day I can find a way to truly express how much you mean to me. I love you.

I want to also dedicate this to my late father Jim Dague. I look back at our time together so fondly and hope that I continue to make you proud as you smile down on me from heaven. I can never thank you enough for always knowing the right thing to say to guide me in the proper direction. I wish that you could be here today to share in this exciting moment with me. I love you.
BIOGRAPHY

A native of Copley, Ohio, Christopher graduated from The University of Akron in 2004 with his Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Studies Education. After graduation, he began his teaching career at Jack Britt High School in Fayetteville, North Carolina, teaching courses such as AP European History, AP World History, and World History. While at Jack Britt, he also served as the head baseball coach.

Christopher earned his Master of Education degree in curriculum and instruction from Campbell University. During this time, Christopher also served as a faculty member at the University of Richmond’s Governors’ School for the Humanities and Visual and Performing Arts. He co-created and co-taught two courses dealing with the history of global revolutions from a kaleidoscope of lenses. He was awarded the Joseph B. Whitehead Educator of Distinction (2009) and the Claes Nobel Educator of Distinction (2010) as well as being named a 2010 Fellow for the Goethe Institut Trans-Atlantic Outreach Program.

Christopher began his doctoral studies in 2010 at North Carolina State University where his interests in motivational theory and AP curricular design coalesced into a study that sought to integrate authentic educational practices to support the needs of students in social studies classrooms. He finished his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Curriculum and Instruction in 2015.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

While citizenship education is likely the most popularly stated mission of public education, there exists an apparent disconnect between the rhetoric and reality of this mission (Parker, 1996; Steinberg, 2010). While preparation for civic life is the most commonly accepted objective for social studies education, many students experience classroom settings that are predicated on the use of controlling methods of instruction that run counter to this civic life preparation. AP social studies courses are viewed as a beacon for what rigorous academic courses should be, but recent revisions and increased enrollment in AP courses have led some to question whether AP social studies classes are providing students with authentic experiences that are congruent to civic life preparation.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of social studies education, which is to prepare students for civic life, is being hindered by the disparity that exists between AP social studies courses and its curricula (Parker et al., 2011). Teacher-centered, controlling methods of instruction utilized in AP social studies courses have created learning environments in which students experience varying degrees of passivity and subordination. Essentially, students are being “socialized for adult civic life…in ways that are anything but democratic” (McQuillan, 2005, p. 639). Alternative approaches to AP social studies courses must be further explored to help avoid the ostensible disparity between purpose and praxis. As a result of this disparity, I aimed to
explore how modifying a standard AP social studies course, through the use of discussion pedagogy, could promote and support students’ autonomy.

The implementation of discussion pedagogy supports both the purpose of social studies education and the goals of AP courses as well as the need for satisfaction of student autonomy in learning environments. The use of discussion pedagogy, via seminars and deliberations, has the potential to democratically enlighten and politically engage students while also creating a learning environment that promotes active participation over transmission (Engle, 2003; Parker, 2004, 2006, 2010; Parker et al., 2013). Discussion pedagogy also has the potential to promote deeper and more conceptual student learning and engagement. Additionally, it has the potential to create a learning environment that shifts from an overreliance on the controlling methods of instruction often implemented in AP social studies courses to a learning environment where student autonomy can be manifested (Boss et al., 2011; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). A supportive, student-centered learning environment will create active student engagement and strong motivation toward meaningful learning (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, Ryan, 1991; Reeve, 2002, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The Advanced Placement Program

The College Board, a not-for-profit organization, is charged with governing the Advanced Placement (AP) Program as well as other programs, such as the SAT and the PSAT/NMSQT. AP courses are viewed as the curricular standard for rigor and academic challenge. They are designed to serve motivated and intellectually gifted students in an effort
to increase college readiness (Sadler, 2010). The popularity and proliferation of courses taken by students in recent years is noteworthy with an annual growth rate of over 9% since 1989 (Sadler, 2010). The College Board released a report showing that nearly four million exams were taken in 2013 by over 2.2 million students across the United States, an increase of nearly six percent from the previous year (College Board, 2013). One of the factors leading to this dramatic rise is a result of new course offerings in the social studies, with such courses as Government and Politics (Comparative and United States), Micro- and Macroeconomics, Psychology, and World History, being created and offered within the last 25 years (Lacy, 2010; Rothschild, 1999).

**Curricular revisions in AP courses.** Recent and impending curricular revisions to AP social studies courses signal the College Board’s recognition that instructional changes need to be addressed. AP curricula and courses are intended to emphasize the intellectual demand of students (Sadler, 2010). The primary goal, according to Parker et al. (2011), is to build “students’ transferable conceptual understanding and inquiry skills” (p. 534). While the rhetoric of AP courses speaks to increased intellectual demand, the reality may be more intellectually draining with its “broad coverage combined with a fast pace and high-stakes summative exam” (Parker et al., 2013, p. 1424). Based on the work of Schwartz and Bransford (1998), Parker et al. (2013) engaging instructional methods (e.g. project work) should be used before students learn from textbook readings and lectures. Oftentimes, the reverse order is predominantly used in AP courses to meet curricular and temporal demands. When traditional methods and sequencing takes place where students are told information
followed by students taking action, Schwartz and Bransford (1998) posit that “the primary recourse for students is to treat the new information as ends to be memorized rather than tools to help them perceive and think” (p. 477). Thus, opportunities for engagement and readiness must be considered and allowed in instructional methods in order to create meaningful learning opportunities for students in AP social studies courses.

The College Board has initiated revisions to AP social studies courses, in part, to alleviate the pressures that AP teachers experience to cover content. As a result of depth-breadth tensions as well as the lack of pedagogical flexibility, teachers are oftentimes forced to utilize content-intensive, teacher-centered and controlling methods of instruction (Parker et al., 2011, p. 534). By reducing the focus on coverage, the College Board (2010) intends to afford teachers the ability to make decisions about how best to promote the historical thinking skills of students in their classes. An increase in the choice of texts and topics as well as educational practices would allow AP courses to experience the same curricular freedoms of most honors courses (Herr, 1992a; Sadler, 2010). Historically, AP courses have been viewed as the standard for secondary schools even while teachers of AP have often been more restricted in their educational practices than teachers of standard and honors courses (Boss et al., 2011; Byrd, Ellington, Gross, Jago, & Stern, 2007). This, in part, has led to teacher overreliance on controlling and authoritarian methods of instruction (Boss et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2013; Reeve, 2009).

Further, revisions have also been made to address a lack of representation of marginalized populations in the curriculum which can lead to a sense of historical alienation
(Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). With an increase in access, AP social studies courses have made attempts to revise and build the curriculum from the knowledge of those being taught (Yosso, 2002). These AP curricular revisions include the development of new curriculum frameworks for all social studies courses. The new AP United States History framework has generated considerable controversy even causing a 2014 resolution from the Republican National Committee condemning the revisions (Republican National Committee, 2014).

In 2015-2016, a new curriculum framework was launched in AP European History. Included in this revised framework is a new thematic learning objective referred to as “Poverty and Prosperity (PP)” (College Board, 2013, pp. 18-21). The sixteen learning objectives within this theme attempt to address topics such as the cause and consequences of economic and social inequality and the reasons for the mal-distribution of wealth, as well as the role that capitalism played in subordination of particular groups of people (College Board, 2013). This recognition of historically-marginalized populations in the curriculum may have positive impacts on students who are typically underrepresented.

The use of teacher-centered, controlling methods of instruction, coupled with increased access to AP courses, raises questions about what alternative methods and styles might be used teach AP courses – alternative methods that could create empowerment in students, particularly those historically-marginalized – all while preparing students for civic life.
Issues of access and equity in AP courses. With its increasing popularity, questions regarding social equity and access to AP courses are of concern, particularly when taking into consideration AP’s desire to maintain its “gold-star status” (Byrd et al., 2007, p. 7). Historically, AP courses were reserved and designed for the privileged and the elite. Santoli (2002) posits that educational and elitist policies, such as those historically modeled in AP, have been detrimental to the school community as a whole. Policies were initiated in an effort to increase access as well as to eradicate discriminatory barriers imposed on historically-marginalized populations (i.e. diverse geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds), evidenced by the types of students traditionally enrolled in AP courses (College Board, 2014; Lacy, 2010; Moore & Slate, 2008). The curriculum framework for AP European History that launched in 2015-2016 asserts AP’s policy on equity and access:

The College Board strongly encourages educators to make equitable access a guiding principle for their AP programs by giving all willing and academically prepared students the opportunity to participate in AP. We encourage the elimination of barriers that restrict access to AP for students from ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups that have been traditionally underserved. Schools should make every effort to ensure their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population. The College Board also believes that all students should have access to academically challenging course work before they enroll in AP classes, which can prepare them for AP
success. It is only through a commitment to equitable preparation and access
that true equity and excellence can be achieved (College Board, 2013, p. ii).
While the number of students gaining access to AP courses is increasing, there is still a
perceived opportunity gap between the enrollments of African American students by
comparison to that of white students. Further, minority students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, struggle to gain academic representation in the school setting. This
suggests that many parents are blindly entrusting the future of their children to school
officials who may feel that they do not belong in AP courses (VanSciver, 2006).
As a result, historically marginalized students enter AP courses where they are often
viewed through a deficiency orientation with teachers holding lower standards for these
students when, in fact, just the opposite needs to occur for increased student success. Delpit
(2012) posits that all children can be educated if their inherent qualities are considered and
not simply their characteristics that are quantifiable. Further improvements need to be made
to the quality of coursework and teaching competency in the urban schools where AP courses
are offered. This needs to be done in an effort to maintain a level of rigor traditionally
accepted of AP courses while also increasing minority student college readiness (Hallett &
Venegas, 2011).

**Citizenship Education and the Social Studies**

Conceptually, democratic citizenship, as a defining characteristic for social studies,
brings a palpable tension that exists in part because of the difficulty in clearly articulating
what democratic citizenship means. Much like social studies, *democratic citizenship* can be
considered an essentially contested concept (ECCs) (Gallie, as cited in Parker, 1996). ECCs are “marked by continual debate” because their meaning and the development of their meaning are enveloped in socio-cultural and political contexts (Parker, 1996, pp. 108-109). In this case, democratic citizenship is positioned along two ideological extremes – from that of a revisionist perspective which challenges and resists every aspect of oppression that is antithetical to democratic ideals to that of a conservative perspective which accepts and supports the socio-political status quo (McKnight & Chandler, 2009).

Genuine praxis of democratic citizenship, as a result of its positioning, requires students to understand both sides of the continuum. According to Parker (2001), they must understand aspects such as liberty and pluralism as well as rule of law and citizen rights; in addition, they must also “abhor demagoguery, discrimination, oppression, and military rule” (p. 6). Given the conservative nature of educational settings, the ability for teachers and students to actually challenge democratic ideals is difficult. Conservative, extant pressures also make it difficult for schools to do anything more than transmit what is deemed to be the norm (Giroux, 1988, 2001; Stanley, 2005). Thus, topics such as cultural diversity and oppression as well as multi-cultural education are usually avoided and relegated to mere sound bites and slogans (Ayers, Kumashiro, Meiners, Quinn, & Stovall, 2010; Parker, 1997). This significant divide in democratic citizenship creates educational practices that hinder the “proper education of children” (Parker, 1997, p. 12).
Influences on Instruction and Learning

Teaching and learning in formal educational settings is filled with various dynamic factors for both teachers and students. While teachers come to the classroom filled with preconceived ideas and biases regarding pedagogy and instructional methods, it is imperative to recognize the impacting effects that the influences outside of the classroom also have on instructional delivery and student learning. These influences range from formalized outcome pressures and applied educational policy to community values and parent groups.

In addition, teachers’ job responsibilities and expectations are changing as a result of outside influences, leading to the adoption of instructional plans that are predicated on standardized testing and reductive behaviorally-based curricula as well as pre-specified teaching competencies (Apple, 2009). The overwhelming use of standardized, evaluative measures to quantify and assess how students are performing in classrooms has consequences for teachers if performance expectations are not met to the degree prescribed. This intensification of the teaching process, as Apple (2009) describes, has led to outside influences gaining increasing control over daily classroom experiences (p. 199).

Controlling-motivating methods of instruction. Pressures imposed on educational practices have forced their way into the decisions made by teachers and have, in part, led teachers to utilize more controlling-motivating methods of instruction (Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner, & Kauffman, 1982; Deci et al., 1991; Reeve, 2009; Ryan & Brown, 2005). As outlined by Reeve (2009), the use of any one of the following approaches to motivate students makes it controlling-motivating in nature: 1) adopt only the teacher’s perspective; 2)
intrude into students’ thoughts, feelings, or actions; and 3) pressure students to think, feel, or behave in particular ways. When utilized, controlling-motivating methods of instruction can negatively impact the climate of the learning environment, resulting in the frustration of students’ intrinsic motivation and self-esteem (Deci et al., 1982). Moreover, controlling-motivating methods of instruction lead teachers themselves to utilize external controls, such as rewards and punishments as well as evaluative measures in an attempt to ensure that learning is taking place (Niemec & Ryan, 2009). Unfortunately, the use of controlling-motivating methods elicits responses of boredom while also alienating students (Niemec & Ryan, 2009; Reeve, 2009).

**Discord in civic life and belief-practice congruence.** According to Hess (2009), democratic education is a “form of civic education that purposely teaches young people how to do democracy [which] stands at the crossroads of authenticity and transformation” (p. 15). If the purpose of social studies education is civic life preparation in a democratic society, then it is plausible to suggest that belief and practice are not congruent. Further, the goal of character development and good citizenship is being lost to information transmission for the sake of simple knowledge acquisition (Engle, 2003).

The presence of outside pressures on classrooms is creating educational environments dominated by teachers with students primarily being skilled with the ability to commit to memory information that may need to be recalled; this is done with lesser time being given “to speculate [sic] the meaning or significance of the material, or to consider its relevance…or to consider its applicability to any problem or issue past or present” (Engle,
2003, p. 8). Additionally, factors such as class sizes and insufficient time as well as the omnipresence of test-prep curriculum further constrain teachers (Parker, 2001). In order for citizen development in social studies classes to more regularly occur, students need to be afforded the time and the latitude to interpret topics and information as well as make decisions in the classroom setting (Parker, 2006). While schools throughout the country promulgate their commitment to preparing students to be active participants in their future democratic lives, many are experiencing their current educational lives with varying degrees of passivity and subordination as well as indoctrination (McQuillan, 2005).

**Discussion Pedagogy**

Many social studies teachers attempt to utilize discussions as a method for instruction in an effort to engage their students (Parker, 2001). Student engagement in discussions, however, is often thwarted by teachers who have conceptually misconstrued recitation as discussion (Alvermann, O’Brien, & Dillon, 1990; Parker, 2001; Parker, 2006; Stodolsky, Ferguson, & Wimpelberg, 1981). Classroom discussion “must involve a purposeful exchange of views—a dialogue—among the participants themselves” (Parker, 2001, p. 111).

Discussion in the classroom can have a powerful impact on students. The use of purposeful classroom discussion can authentically promote civic life where students can experience a “culture of listening and speaking” to others who are similar and different than them which is a fundamental underpinning of democratic life (Parker, 2006, p. 13).

Purposeful classroom discussion can be supported by the utilization of seminars and deliberations. Seminars afford students opportunities to dive meaningfully into challenging
texts and centralizing questions. When seminars are utilized for the purpose of democratic enlightenment, or knowing, students are active discussants as well as active listeners (Parker, 2004, 2006, 2010; Parker & Hess, 2001). Deliberations can be utilized for the purpose of political engagement, or doing. As Parker (2006) suggests, deliberations are opportunities for “discussants to think, speak, listen, and learn together” (p. 12). While seminars and deliberations characteristically overlap, deliberations are not intended for learning but rather for decisions to be made regarding a shared problem (Parker, 2006). Essentially, the overlap and use of each discourse has the potential to create enlightened political engagement (italics in original, Parker, 2006; Parker, 2003; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996).

**Discussion pedagogy and autonomy support.** While the use of seminars and deliberations will likely promote experiences characterized as “knowledge-deepening, evidence-oriented [and] horizon-broadening,” discussion pedagogy also has the potential to reduce authoritarian and teacher-centered classroom dynamics (Parker, 2006, p. 13). Authoritarian learning environments show a strong relationship to lower student achievement as well as increased student anxiety and dependence (Stefanou et al., 2004). Conversely, more democratic or autonomy supportive environments enable students to seek out more challenging work and increase student enjoyment as well as supporting students who strive toward deeper conceptual understanding (Harter, 1978; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stefanou et al., 2004). Student characteristics such as these align with the objectives of AP social studies courses as well as with discussion pedagogy (Parker, 2006; Parker et al., 2011). The freedom to express thought and opinion can produce learning
environments where students’ engagement and interests can be fostered while also attempting to create a student-centered atmosphere, encourage student initiative, nurture competence, and use non-controlling communication (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007; Parker, 2001; Stefanou, et al., 2004).

Discussion pedagogy demonstrates a strong correlation to strategies associated with features of autonomy support. According to Stefanou et al. (2004), there are three distinct features of autonomy support classified as organizational, procedural, and cognitive. Discussion pedagogy strongly associates with the support of students’ cognitive autonomy in its encouragement for students to take ownership of their learning in addition to “asking students to evaluate their own and others’ solutions or ideas” (Logan, DiCintio, Cox, & Turner, 1995; Stefanou et al., 2004). Essentially, it promotes a democratic learning environment where students are encouraged to learn with others while also providing students opportunities to:

- Discuss multiple approaches and strategies
- Find multiple solutions to problems
- Debate ideas freely
- Have less teacher talk time and more teacher listening time
- Ask questions (Stefanou et al., 2004, p. 101)

**Stipulation for pedagogical modification.** The design of AP courses and curricula has resulted in constraints on the most effective educational practices that could be utilized by teachers. As Hammond (2009) posits, AP courses are designed with the intent to cover
“large bodies of facts and concepts that students must retain long enough to take a three-hour exam” (p. 30). As a result of such professional and pedagogical constraints, many teachers rely heavily on educational practices best described as controlling and teacher-centered as well as authoritarian (Byrd et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2013; Oxtoby, 2007; Schneider, 2009). Additionally, the formal, standardized design of AP exams intensifies the process of teaching while also having potentially negative implications for student learning (Apple, 2009; Apple, 1990; Deci et al., 1982).

As a teacher of both AP European History and AP World History, I am professionally constrained by design and curricular expectations of the courses. The ready-made design of AP courses not only reduces my ability to challenge or trouble the curriculum, but it also treats my role as a professional educator as something more akin to that of a “dutiful technician” (Apple, 1990; Giroux, 1985; Giroux, 2001). In my AP courses, stand-and-deliver methods of instruction are often utilized in an effort to meet the required coverage of prescribed curricular material in a given semester. While the information is “covered” through these methods, providing students with adequate opportunities to develop deeper, conceptual meaning is diminished, creating ostensible breadth-depth tensions.

Recent revisions to AP courses have encouraged me to explore how modifying my methods of instruction may create more opportunities for students to deeply and meaningfully engage in my AP European history course. Through the utilization of a more authentic method of instruction such as discussion pedagogy, I expected students to
experience greater autonomy and agency as well as empowerment in my AP European History course.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study is, “How does modifying a standard AP social studies course, through the use of discussion pedagogy, promote and support student autonomy?” Additionally, the study seeks to address three sub-questions:

1. How do students experience discussion pedagogy?
2. Do students perceive a difference in the learning climate, specifically, teacher-student interaction when discussion pedagogy is implemented?
3. How does discussion pedagogy affect students’ experience relative to the content?

**Outline of Dissertation**

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of Advanced Placement social studies, the rationale for the study, a statement of the problem, and the research questions. Chapter 2 captures a review of the scholarship. Chapter 3 presents the research methods being utilized to include the design of the study, the subjectivity and background of the researcher, how data for the study was collected, the handling of data, how the data was analyzed, the strengths and the limitations of the study, as well as validation strategies implemented. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the research study; it presents themes that emerged during the course of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the substantive findings and conclusions of the study. Moreover, it discusses the potential of future research in the field and will include all of the references used throughout the dissertation.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

While preparing students for civic life is commonly accepted as a purpose for the teaching and learning of social studies, the rhetoric of civic preparation and the reality of the classroom diverge. Examples of this divergence can be found in Advanced Placement (AP) social studies courses. AP social studies courses are often lauded for rigorous curricular standards that seek to better prepare students for college, but little attention is given to preparation for civic life. Recent revisions to AP social studies courses recognize these problems and suggest that instructional modifications need to also be considered. A brief overview of the contested purposes and practices of social studies helps to situate the research literature related to this problem.

The term social studies first gained prominence as a result of the report presented by the Committee on Social Studies in 1916. Since then, the history of social studies has been filled with opposing interest groups (i.e. traditional historians, advocates of social studies as social science, social efficiency educators, social meliorists, and social reconstructionists/critical pedagogues) who sought to leave their respective mark on the field while also shaping and directing its future (Evans, 2004, 2006). Much of the debate that exists in these competitive turf wars, as described by Evans (2004), is a direct result of the “leaders, philosophy, beliefs, and pedagogical practices” of particular camps which are often influenced and impacted by outside factors such as the economy, war, and funding, as well as reform movements of the time (pp. 1-2).
The definition of social studies has evolved over the last century with much of its change reflecting the political and economic as well as social climate of that period. Traditionally, the objective of creating a definition is to “capture the essence of an object” by its relation to other similar classes as well as to those that are different (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt, 2002, p. 126). Although the exclusion of aspects and particular phenomena are a concern, the need for a definition is necessary since, in its absence, “any curriculum taught in a classroom and anything labeled social studies automatically becomes social studies” (Barth & Shermis, 1970, p. 743).

The continuum of definitional tensions for social studies has ranged from those who believe social studies should be a version of the social sciences reduced to serve the pedagogical need of a school to those who advocate discounting disciplinary boundaries while systematically focusing on the needs of the students and society (Allen, 1996; Wesley & Wronski, 1958). While philosophical differences and tensions are evident, utilizing social studies as a vehicle of civic life preparation remains a commonly accepted objective (Allen, 1996; Bair, 2006; Barth, 1991; Barth & Shermis, 1970; Engle, 2003).

The purpose of this review of the literature is to contextualize the research problem while also giving reference to the most appropriate literature regarding the research problem (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 336). The primary research question for this study concerns how a standard AP social studies course can be modified to promote student empowerment. Additionally, this research also seeks to answer how the modifications promote empowerment in historically marginalized students. The review of literature begins by
introducing the critical theoretical lens from which the study will be framed. The review presents relevant scholarship regarding issues that exist in AP courses and continues by discussing motivation and self-determination theory as well as autonomy-supportive motivating styles that could be utilized in AP courses to promote student empowerment. In total, the review of literature seeks to identify and discuss literature that is already known while positioning the need for additional research that can be answered through this proposed study.

**Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy**

This research study used interpretative qualitative methods, thus it is important to stipulate the theoretical framework—specifically *critical pedagogy*—guiding the research and review of literature. Critical pedagogy was born out of the Marxist ideology of the 19th century. Marxist ideology developed as a response to the social and economic changes as well as the perceived inequalities resulting from nearly a century of revolutionary and industrial upheaval. During the 19th century, European culture and society was comprised of inequalities where a person’s positioning within the social strata was limited and lacked the ability for upward social mobility. As industrialization proliferated, it created two separate and distinct classes of people, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

If the writings of Karl Marx are viewed as seminal to critical pedagogy, it is important to recognize that Marx believed that the application of his ideas had the ability to eradicate hegemonic tendencies in several types of social relationships. This included relationships that were geographically diverse (i.e. rural, urban, suburban), among the
“subject races,” between the sexes, and among the social classes (Herwig, 1993). The potential eradication would lead to individual empowerment through a reduction of traditionally accepted barriers and impediments.

Marxist ideology was later manifested through the work of theorists at the Frankfurt School. From the Frankfurt School, theorists continued to position that the industrialized world was filled with inequality as a result of modernization and the oppressive and mutating mechanics of free-market and capitalist structures (Steinberg, 2010, pp. 141-142). This manifestation led to the development of what is commonly accepted as critical theory.

Critical theory and by relation critical pedagogy, in large part, are concerned with the empowerment of human beings in an effort to transcend the constraints placed on them as a result of factors such as race and class as well as gender (Fay, 1987; Kincheloe, 2008). Critical theory has been in a near constant state of evolution and has been re-conceptualized for increased relevant application for the 21st century including applications to schooling through critical pedagogy. The re-conceptualized critical theory troubles the assumption that developed societies are unproblematic and totally free while suggesting that issues of “self-direction and democratic egalitarianism should be reassessed” (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Steinberg, 2010). Ideas of criticality, such as the aforementioned, are pushed forward in critical pedagogy when there is an evident and pronounced contradiction between rhetoric of democratic and liberal education and the reality of authoritarian and transmission practices found in classrooms (Steinberg, 2010).
Critical Analysis of Advanced Placement Courses

AP courses were created during the early years of the Cold War as a way to provide the brightest and most gifted students educational challenges and rigor. Additionally, AP courses began to create distinctions between those who were tracked to participate in the program from those who were not “created equal” (Schneider, 2009, p. 813). As AP has proliferated over the last fifty-plus years, it has faced concern and scrutiny ranging from access and equity to pedagogical practices. As Hammond (2009) points out, however, “AP’s dominance of secondary education has blocked meaningful reform” (p. 29). In fact, AP has risen toward becoming the “nation’s de facto secondary-school curriculum” (p. 30). Further, AP’s seemingly exemplary status has allowed it to accrue near omnipotence in many areas of educational practice (Byrd et al., 2007; Hammond, 2009; Oxtoby, 2007).

Access and equity. The popularity and proliferation of courses taken by students in recent years is noteworthy. According to Schneider (2009), increased demand for access to AP courses is not a new trend; in fact, in 2000, nearly 750,000 students took 1.25 million exams. Those numbers dramatically increased in 2004 with 1.1 million students taking 1.85 million exams (p. 822). The College Board released a report showing nearly four million exams were taken in 2013 by over 2.2 million students across the United States, an increase of nearly six percent from the previous year. Additional numbers signify a 126% increase in the number of exams taken as well as 118% in the number of students enrolled in AP classes between 2003 and 2013 (College Board, 2013).
AP courses brought a respectability and prestige with them, resulting in near constant calling for an expansion of AP courses to a wider range of students in more diverse areas (Schneider, 2009, p. 814). While the rhetoric of resolving the problem of inequity was prominent, it was not until the 1990s that institutionalized barriers to access began to be removed. States such as Florida have followed up and taken serious aim at promoting and increasing the presence of AP courses in more rural districts (Byrd et al., 2007; Hawkins, 2011). This initiative has resulted in the doubling of the number students from poor families who passed at least one AP exam between 2006 and 2010 (Hawkins, 2011).

While the number of students gaining access to AP courses is increasing, there is still an apparent opportunity gap between the enrollments of African American students by comparison to that of white students. As Klopfenstein (2004) points out, between 1994 and 1999, “AP participation rates more than quadrupled” for white, black, and Hispanic students in public schools in Texas. However, black and Hispanic students enrolled at a rate that was half that of white students. Explanations for this noticeable disparity include lower expectations of minority students and lesser resources of minority schools (pp. 115-116). This may also be a result of African American alienation and lack of representation in the curriculum and in the classroom (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Further, minority students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, struggle to gain academic representation in the school setting. This would indicate that many parents are blindly entrusting the future of their children to school officials who may feel that they do not belong in AP courses (VanSciver, 2006).
Further improvements need to be made to the quality of coursework and teaching competency in urban schools where AP courses are offered. This needs to be done in an effort to maintain a level of rigor traditionally accepted of AP courses while also increasing minority student college readiness (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Issues regarding social class and educational practices are not new topics in the field. Anyon (1981) posits that “students of different social class backgrounds are still likely to be exposed to qualitatively different types of educational knowledge” (p. 3). In this case, it appears that the expansion of AP courses will struggle to succeed until educational practices are addressed to meet the needs of minority students as well as students from urban and rural areas. If not evaluated, then AP courses may continue to exacerbate the status quo, making the AP program and its classes just another in a long line of contradictions vis-à-vis rhetoric and reality. Further, its maintenance of the status quo will also continue the propagation of inequity through “the reproduction of the unequal class structure” (Anyon, 1981, p. 3).

Numerous states, for example Florida, West Virginia, and Arkansas, promoted the expansion of the AP program by mandating the minimum number of AP courses offered in schools. Further, the federal government aided in subsidizing the expansion of the program (Schneider, 2009, p. 821). As Eisner (1990) explains, students in the past who did not take AP courses were at a significant disadvantage regarding the admissions to college or university. This runs counter to the original intention of AP courses which, according to Challenge Success (2013), were “not intended to for the purposes of college admission decisions (p. 5). The move toward utilizing enrollment in AP courses as a metric for college
admission developed out of need, especially at highly selective colleges and universities, to differentiate students when traditional measures such as GPA were proving more difficult to use (Challenge Success, 2010; National Research Council, 2002).

The proliferation of courses and promotion of equity and access to AP courses has been viewed by some as a victory; however, for others this has caused increasing concern over the prestige of the AP program to the point where states and schools have begun to drop AP courses because of its lack of selectivity (Oxtoby, 2007; Schneider, 2009), restrictions on educational practices (Hammond, 2009), and increasing stressors imposed on students (Lim, 2008), as well as a lack of funding (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Increased access to AP courses without providing a substantive framework to enable and assist in the success of students in those courses serves only to perpetuate the inequity of the program. The College Board responded to the criticism, in part, by implementing an audit which requires teachers to submit their respective syllabi for review by scholars and teachers working for the College Board. According to the College Board (2010), the objectives of the audit were to:

- provide AP teachers and administrators with clear guidelines on curricular and resource requirements that need to be in place for classes to be designated with the AP label; and
- give colleges and universities assurance that AP courses are being designed to meet the same clearly articulated college-level criteria across high schools (para. 1-2).

While schools that dropped AP courses from their course offerings might have done so because of the declining prestige of AP, site-based decisions to turn over pedagogical
responsibilities and curriculum development as well as educational practices to teachers may be enabling more authentic and empowering pedagogy for both teachers and students.

**Pedagogical practices.** As a result of the review and audit of AP program, schools began dropping AP courses and pushing for those that were “self-designed” which contained educational practices that were “more innovative and more interesting” (Oxtoby, 2007, p. 45). AP courses and the curricula that guide them have led to instructional tensions for teachers and perpetuated the contradictions of belief-practice congruence regarding the purpose of social studies. For example, AP courses have come under scrutiny for its “coverage of large bodies of facts and concepts that students must retain long enough to take a three-hour exam” (Hammond, 2009, p. 30). Issues relating to the breadth-depth paradox where the application of the prescribed curriculum is “an inch deep and a mile wide” have led many teachers to utilize educational practices that are controlling and rely on stand-and-deliver methods of instruction (Byrd et al., 2007; Oxtoby, 2007; Parker et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2013; Schneider, 2009). Additionally, the salience of the formal, summative exam such as those administered by the College Board AP exam might have a profoundly negative impact on students (Deci et al., 1982).

Beginning in 2010, starting with AP World History, the College Board also began to change the curriculum of AP social studies courses. These revisions attempted to alleviate the pressures that teachers have felt while also allowing them an instructional flexibility enjoy in the college courses AP aims to emulate. The intended flexibility of this curriculum re-design seeks to allow teachers to make decisions about how to best promote the historical thinking
skills of their students. While the re-design intended to afford teachers with more curricular latitude, it, coupled with the annual audits required of AP teachers, has not alleviated deskilling of teachers and intensifying of the process of teaching as described by Apple (1990 and 2009). Further, the notion of ready-made curricula required of teachers of AP courses reduces the need for teachers to challenge or trouble the curriculum, no longer making them intellectuals but more akin to a “dutiful technician” in the classroom (Apple, 1990; Giroux, 1985; Giroux, 2001).

While the promotion of civic life remains as the cornerstone of social studies education, it could be conjectured that AP social studies classes should go to greater lengths toward fixing the contradiction of rhetoric and reality. However, teachers as well as students are increasingly disempowered within the rigid constructs and requisites of AP courses. Both teachers and students are marginalized participants within the power structure of the classrooms and school buildings where their respective voices are typically not heard. Thoughtful and guided modifications to AP social studies courses by teachers and students alike have the potential to promote autonomy and empowerment of both teachers and students.

In order to promote student empowerment as a part of democratic citizenship in AP classrooms, it has been suggested that teachers need to concern themselves with needs that are innately necessary to the well-being of their students, including the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As Cummins (1986) suggests in his theoretical framework for empowering minority students, special attention must be given toward
developing a pedagogy that “promotes intrinsic motivation on the part of the students” (p. 21). Moreover, this means that teachers cannot stand alone as the only intellectual and researcher within the classroom setting (Giroux, 1988; Kinchengoe, 2008). As Kinchengoe and Steinberg (1998) suggest, students need to be encouraged to analyze the possibilities and the social, political, and pedagogical contradictions of schooling. Conceptually, the promotion a problem-posing, dialogically meaningful discourse, and decision-making within a classroom setting can be academically, politically, and socially empowering to students. AP social studies courses have the potential to allow for the creation of such a dynamic learning environment. This possibility can be fulfilled through the utilization of more autonomy-supportive motivating strategies and less controlling motivating strategies.

Parker

**Self-Determination Theory**

In *The Psychology of Self-Determination*, Deci (1980) describes self-determination as the process of utilizing one’s will, or capacity to satisfy one’s respective needs. Further, self-determination theory (SDT) suggests that people must be aware of their strengths and their limitations while also being able to discern how to satisfy their respective needs in spite of potential environmental impediments (Schunk et al., 2008). Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan (1991) point out that many other theories of motivation focus on outcomes but fail to concern themselves with why certain outcomes are desirable. SDT addresses concerns on outcome desirability as well as “energization of behavior” through the conceptualization of
the basic and innate psychological needs that exist as a part of the human experience (e.g. autonomy, competence, and relatedness) (Deci et al., 1991, pp. 327-328).

**Cognitive Evaluation Theory.** Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) is a sub-theory of SDT that focuses on the “fundamental need for competence and autonomy” vis-à-vis intrinsic motivation within SDT (Schunk et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). CET positions itself against the social and environmental variables that “facilitate versus undermine” intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). According to CET, intrinsic motivation will decline when individuals cannot exercise self-determination, more specifically when few choices are available to them (Schunk et al., 2008, p. 249).

**Self-Determination Theory and Student Motivation**

The learning process, both formally and informally, is comprised of personal and physiological as well as psychological complexities. Myriad theories exist that attempt to not only explain the learning process but also to utilize a specific theoretical framework that may best serve the needs of the learners. Theories concerned with motivation in learning and in education suggest that the individual must have the ability to exert control over his or her respective environment (Schunk et al., 2008).

An understanding of motivational orientation and student learning in a classroom setting is imperative (Harter, 1981b). Additionally, it is necessary to recognize the roles that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play in the learning process. *Intrinsic motivation* refers to the motivation to engage in an activity or work on a task because it is deemed to be enjoyable. Schunk et al. (2008) suggest that “task participation is its own reward” which does
not require further “explicit rewards or other external constraints” (p. 236). *Extrinsic motivation* is motivation that is deemed to serve as a means to an end. Further, extrinsic motivation directs people to “work on tasks because they believe that participation will result in desirable outcomes such as a reward, teacher praise, or avoidance of punishment” (p. 236).

It is also important to clarify that *interest* (the liking and willful engagement in an activity) is not the same as motivation; however, interest is an influence on motivation (Schunk et al., 2008; Schraw & Lehman, 2001).

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are contextually sensitive, meaning that they characterize people at a given point in a given activity (Schunk et al., 2008). Intrinsic motivation, thus, can manifest and change over a period of time. Harter and Connell (1984) (as cited in Schunk et al., 2008) describe intrinsic motivation as being based on five assumptions:

- Preference for challenge rather than for easy work.
- Incentive to work to satisfy one’s own interest and curiosity rather than working to please the teacher in order to obtain good grades.
- Independent mastery attempts rather than dependence on the teacher.
- Independent judgment rather than reliance on the teacher’s judgment.
- Internal criteria for success and failure rather than external criteria (pp. 240-241).

While it is suggested that students’ intrinsic motivation lessens as they get older, according to Harter (1981b), this lessening may be more a result of schools “gradually stifling children’s intrinsic interest in learning, specifically with regard to challenge, curiosity, and independent
mastery” (pp. 309-310). Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar (2005) suggest that the lessening of students’ intrinsic motivation may be correlated to the increase of extrinsic motivators (i.e. rewards and/or punishments) with which students are presented (p. 185).

There is uncertainty regarding the directional relation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. If extrinsic motivation increases as intrinsic motivation decreases as children progress in school, then it would be reasonable to suggest that educational settings seeking to improve students’ intrinsic motivation need to increase the “challenge, interest, and relevance of the curriculum” while “minimizing the reward systems” that appear to be common practice (Lepper et al., 2005, p. 185). An understanding of motivation in learning and in educational settings is important because those individuals who have a higher degree of intrinsic, or authentic, motivation tend to have a higher degree of interest and creativity while also having greater self-esteem and overall well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995).

**Perception of control and classrooms.** It is important to also consider individuals’ perceptions of their respective control. Regarding students’ perceived control, Skinner, Wellborn, and Connell (1990) used a motivational framework that provides links for students’ experience of the social context, their self-system processes such as control beliefs, and their patterns of action as well as the actual outcomes of their performance. This model further suggests that a “student’s perceived control is influenced by the contingency (relation between an individual’s actions and outcomes) and involvement experienced by the child and
results in engaged or disaffected pattern that then have an impact on school performance” (pp. 22-23).

A proper understanding of SDT and CET in a classroom can shape students’ perception of their control which, in turn, can further impact student engagement and school performance. Skinner et al. (1990) suggest that there are three distinguishable features that contribute to perceived control:

- **Strategy beliefs** concern what students perceive it will take to do well in school which may include factors such as effort and ability as well as the power of others.
- **Capacity beliefs** concern whether students believe they have capability to do well in school.
- **Control beliefs** concern whether a student can do well in school irrespective of means (p. 23).

deCharms (1976) further suggests that students have too little power over their respective environment and that schools need to create situations that will promote student commitment and responsibility which may be accomplished by supporting students’ perception that choice (i.e. decision-making) originates from them. deCharms’ theory creates a binary regarding the role that students play in classrooms. Students are viewed as either being an “Origin,” autonomous individuals viewed as the source of intention, or a “Pawn,” a powerless participant (deCharms, 1976; Schunk et al., 2008; Woolfork, 2001).

There are negative consequences to students who view themselves as lacking control and being Pawn-like. The first consequence is that students with this perception are more
likely to demonstrate tendencies of apathy and passivity. Conversely, students who perceive their surroundings to be more Origin-like, “reported greater internal control over outcomes and higher perceived competence and mastery motivation” (Schunk et al., 2008, p. 250). The second consequence is that students have a more difficult time dealing with adversity in their environment when they have a lack of perceived control (Glass and Singer, 1972; Schunk et al., 2008). Thus, a decrease in students’ intrinsic motivation may occur if not given the opportunity to experience some semblance of autonomy. This may result in students losing interest in their environments, leading to a decrease in engagement.

**Student Empowerment and Autonomy-Supportive Strategies**

While schools promulgate that they are modeled and operated with the intent of developing students to become active participants in a free and democratic society, there is scholarship concerning student empowerment that would suggest otherwise. In fact, the current education model may be better described as indoctrinating students through methods that lead to student passivity and feelings of subordination (McQuillan, 2005). Attempts at reform have been conceptualized through the lenses of adults, negating student perspectives and voices related toward improving educational practices (Cook-Sather, 2002; Giroux, 1992). Further, shortcomings in adult-directed reform have fallen short due in part to the unchanged relationship between teachers and students (Cummins, 1986, p. 18).

Proponents of critical theoretical education champion models of education where students are provided the opportunity to act on their behalf as a part of structured and organized as well as sound educational practices. Cummins (1986) contends that “student
empowerment is regarded as both a mediating construct influencing academic performance and as an outcome variable itself” (p. 23). While empowerment can be somewhat abstract and ambiguous, the concept of student empowerment is thought to consist of three aspects: academic empowerment, political empowerment, and social empowerment (Dimick, 2012; McQuillan, 2005). Combined with students’ interests in school subjects, student empowerment can have a positive impact on learning (Weber & Patterson, 2009, p. 22).

**Academic Empowerment.** This first aspect of student empowerment, academic empowerment, is developed when students are provided with the opportunity to actively participate in meaningful learning opportunities, allowing them to openly explore the learning process as well as the realities of their lives (Dimick, 2012; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Frymier, Schulman, Houser, 1996). Academic empowerment can exist only when educational practices include demanding curricula and teachers who set high standards. High educational standards lead students to more competently think and act in their respective contexts and environments. Cummins (1986) posits that students who experience academic empowerment develop a sense that they possess the ability to complete difficult academic tasks and the confidence as well as motivation to succeed academically.

**Political Empowerment.** Political empowerment enables students to recognize, and critically examine, variables that control and maintain “power inequalities within the sphere of political participation” both in-and-out of the classroom (Dimick, 2012; McQuillan, 2005). The process of politically empowering students requires trust from both teachers and students. The proposition of empowering students to critically evaluate and affect change
cannot be mere rhetoric; students must be positioned with real power and the potential for real impact. (Cook-Sather, 2002; Dimick, 2012; McQuillan, 2005; Weber & Patterson, 2009). One such example of political empowerment of students involves curricular decisions made in classrooms. Knowledge of instructional strategies that support students’ organizational, procedural, and cognitive autonomies as outlined by Stefanou et al. (2004), serve as a guide toward meeting this outcome. Because curriculum cannot be viewed as neutral, but rather as an inherently subjective variable, an organized restructuring of such would promote political empowerment. Further, it promotes an open and shared authority over curricular development and the learning process (Dimick, 2012, p. 995).

**Social Empowerment.** Social empowerment deals with social aspects of the classroom setting, including social interactions, that are characterized as safe and supportive while also being non-discriminatory and non-oppressive (Dimick, 2012; McQuillan, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000; North, 2008). Social empowerment, perhaps more than the other two dimensions, requires a significant level of conversational discourse between teachers and students, a discourse that allows for a free and open sharing of feelings and ideas (McQuillan, 2005). Ladson-Billings (1994), as discussed by McQuillan (2005), conjectures that social empowerment should maintain students to care not only for themselves (i.e. successes, accolades, etc.) but for their classmates as well. This promotion of selflessness has the potential to create synergy where empowered students will seek to aid in the empowerment of others.
Autonomy-Supportive Motivating Style

Self-determination theory (SDT) serves as macro-theory used to delineate human motivation, development, and well-being (Niemec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Principles of SDT can be implemented into the educational milieu with the adoption of autonomy-supportive motivating styles of instruction. As discussed earlier, SDT posits that intrinsic motivation is an important aspect of learning. Teachers and classroom climates have the ability to either support or impede students’ internal motivation which can influence the emotions, learning, and performance of students (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Deci et al., 1991; Reeve, Jang, Hardre, & Omura, 2002). Reeve (2006) suggests that student engagement depends on the climate of the classroom; moreover, within the dialectical framework of SDT, “students possess inner motivational resources that classroom conditions can support or frustrate. When teachers find ways to nurture these inner resources, they adopt an autonomy-supportive motivating style” (p. 225). In part, this is accomplished via techniques that nurture students through the facilitation of opportunities that meet students’ needs, interests, and preferences (Reeve et al., 2004, p. 148).

Facilitating internalization. In the classroom setting, autonomy-supportive motivating instruction has the potential to increase intrinsic motivation in students, an important aspect of learning, while also meeting psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Niemec & Ryan, 2009). While the focus has been predominantly on intrinsic motivation, it is important not to discount the presence and importance of extrinsic motivation because the “internalization of extrinsic motivation is
essential for students’ self-initiation and maintained volition for educational activities that are not inherently interesting or enjoyable” (p. 138). Essentially, when students’ basic psychological needs are met, they are more likely to internalize their motivation to learn while also being autonomously engaged (Niemec & Ryan, 2009).

**Autonomy-Supportive Strategies and Promotion of Empowerment**

The use of autonomy-motivating strategies and their support of the three innate psychological needs of students (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) show dramatically similar conceptual connections to the three dimensions of student empowerment (political, academic, and social). A better understanding of the praxis of autonomy-supportive strategies could lead to the development and promotion of student empowerment.

**Support of autonomy.** The support of autonomy is conceptually similar to that of political empowerment for students. Student autonomy is often impeded when pressure-laden teacher practices and coercive language are used in such to impose a particular set of beliefs, thoughts, or behaviors on students, denying students the opportunity to realize their goals, values, and interests (Reeve, 2009; Niemec & Ryan, 2009, Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002). One of the most prominent examples of pressure-laden practices is the use of results-based formal assessments, and these assessment practices have been intensifying in recent years. Teachers who fail to minimize the consequences of formal assessments on students are also failing to support the students’ autonomy (Niemec & Ryan, 2009). Teachers have the ability to support and enhance autonomy by providing understandable and meaningful rationales.
when pressed by students regarding a pressure-laden activity (Niemec & Ryan, 2009; Reeve et al., 2002; Reeve, 2009).

Assor et al. (2002) suggests that fostering relevance, providing choice, and allowing for criticism/encouraging independent thinking serve as three overarching categories for supporting but also enhancing autonomy. These categories can be manifested and utilized in a classroom setting procedurally (student ownership of form), organizationally (student ownership of environment), and cognitively (student ownership of learning) (Katz & Assor, 2007; Stefanou et al., 2004). When autonomy supportive measures are in place, not only does intrinsic motivation likely increase but so too do various facets of engagement (i.e. behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) (Wu, Anderson, Nguyen-Jahiel, & Miller, 2013).

Support of competence (structure). The notion of supporting competence is conceptually similar to that of academic empowerment for students. Oftentimes, instructional styles not considered controlling in nature are criticized for lacking structure. As Reeve (2006) explains, “A lack of structure yields not an autonomy-supportive environment but instead one that is permissive, indulgent, or laissez-faire” (p. 231). Further, autonomy-support and structure should neither be conceptually nor practically misconstrued as antithetical to each other. In order to support the need for competence, according to Niemec and Ryan (2009), students need to be introduced to learning activities that are challenging and that allow for expansion of their academic capabilities. Additionally, teachers should focus on developing activities that are personally valuable while concurrently providing clear expectations and constructive feedback (Reeve & Halusic, 2009).
Support of relatedness (interpersonal relationships). In order to fully utilize autonomy-supportive instructional methods, it is necessary to consider motivating styles that promote “high-quality ways of relating to students” (Reeve, 2006, p. 232). According to Reeve (2006) four, overlapping characteristics need to be considered – attunement, relatedness, supportiveness, and gentle discipline. Teachers attuned to their students attempt to understand the needs and thoughts as well as the feelings of their students. In addition, relatedness is developed when teachers allow for a close and personal dynamic between them and their students. Nel Noddings (1988) describes this relatedness as a teacher’s response “to the needs, wants, and initiations” of the student. As a result, the student will recognize and respond to the caring initiative of the teacher (pp. 219-220). Supportiveness allows for teacher affirmation of the student’s capacity while the use of gentle discipline promotes the guidance of students in terms of their ways of thinking and believing (Reeve, 2006).

Conclusion

The objective of a literature review is to capture the scholarship of particular topics while also identifying how a proposed study could fill open spaces in the scholarship. This proposed study is focused on how autonomy-supportive modifications could be implemented in an effort to promote student empowerment. This review of the literature has attempted to:

- provide a brief overview of the critical theoretical framework for the study;
- provide an overview of the Advanced Placement Program while also critically analyzing aspects of AP courses;
• provide an understanding of the importance of motivational theories in education with a particular emphasis on self-determination theory;

• provide a description of student empowerment to include its dimensions in an educational setting;

• provide an explanation of how the utilization of autonomy-supportive motivating styles and its support of autonomy, competence, and relatedness can also promote student empowerment.
CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Purpose of Study

By most accounts the AP program and its courses have been heralded as a symbol of academic success and excellence in public education in the United States for many years (Sadler, 2010). Even with its ostensible success, myriad concerns have been raised regarding the efficacy of the various AP courses and their respective curriculum. In response, the College Board has made attempts to reform policy and procedures as well as curriculum within its program and its courses. These attempts by the College Board signal a need to further investigate and assess additional areas of concern within its program and courses that range from curricular coverage and testing to the lack of pedagogical flexibility experienced by teachers to the marginalization of student populations.

While one of the objectives of AP courses is to provide students with academically enriching practices that will afford them a deeper and more meaningful understanding of content, many courses are structured and taught utilizing teacher-centered and authoritarian approaches (Parker et al., 2011; National Research Council, 2002). These commonly applied practices have created discord between the rhetoric and the reality of the AP experience – for both teachers and students alike. The purpose of this study was to explore how utilizing an authentic educational practice such as discussion pedagogy, containing discourse in seminar and deliberation, could create a learning environment that would meet the objectives of both AP courses and social studies education. Additionally, it sought to promote and support student autonomy and empowerment within the classroom setting (Parker, 2001; Parker &
Hess, 2001; Reeve, 2006; Reeve, 2009; Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Reeve & Halusic, 2009; Stefanou et al., 2004).

**Research Question**

The primary research question that this study sought to answer is, “How does modifying a standard AP social studies course, through the use of discussion pedagogy, promote and support student autonomy and empowerment?”

**Subjectivity**

Along with being a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, I am also a high school history teacher at an urban high school in the southeastern United States. I have taught standard and honors as well as AP social studies courses over the past ten years. I also taught at The Governor’s School of Humanities and Visual and Performing Arts at the University of Richmond where I co-created courses in historical revolutions explored by the students and faculty through variant lenses.

The majority of my classroom and instructional experience has been in AP courses. At the time of the study, I was teaching two sections of AP European history and one section of AP World history. I brought to this study a deep, trained understanding of the current curriculum for AP European history. I believe that social studies curriculum, in particular history curriculum, should present the historical narrative and human experience from multiple lenses irrespective of the potentially negative light that it may bring to a people, a culture, a government and/or an entire state. While this is a belief about which I feel strongly, my role as a teacher necessitates that I negotiate and reconcile my beliefs about curriculum
and my instructional curriculum practices, given the constructs of AP courses, in ways that do not bring harm to students in their efforts to achieve success on the summative exams. While I believe that many students and teachers have become consumed by the ends of AP courses, the standardized summative exam, this study has to consider at all stages, how actions taken and instructional practices implemented will impact students’ ability to achieve success on the aforementioned exams.

**Qualitative Methodology**

Given the questions being raised in the study, the use of qualitative methods was warranted. Qualitative methods are often used when attempting to better understand situations that are considered unique in a given context (Patton, 1985). Further, this study attempted to discover and extract meaning through the use of appositional and interpretive as well as inductive approaches in which, as the researcher, I served in various capacities (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The use of qualitative methods allowed this study to examine student populations whose voices are typically silenced while attempting to empower them so that their voices could be heard (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

**Philosophical Assumptions of Qualitative Research**

The use of qualitative research predicates that the researcher identifies and addresses ideas, backgrounds, and histories s/he brings to the study. The philosophical assumptions of the research (ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology) must be addressed prior to choosing a qualitative method (Creswell, 2013). Further, a researcher’s beliefs regarding how they view and interpret knowledge and understanding will lead to distinctive ways of
conducting research while also determining what should be considered a legitimate contribution (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001; Peter & Olsen, 1983).

Qualitative research is inductive by nature in that it serves to generate theory out of data. Thus, it is imperative that researchers are aware of and open to the ideologies and values that they bring to a proposed study. As a result, the use of qualitative research should be viewed more as a process where decisions made demonstrate sound congruence with the purpose of the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

**Epistemology.** Epistemology concerns the question about the nature of knowledge. Moreover, it questions the possibilities of what can be known and whether knowing can ever actually be absolute (Koshy, 2010). It is my contention that knowing can never be absolute. Knowing also lacks neutrality (Shor, 1992, p. 34). Further, reality is known through an understanding of social structures, freedoms and oppression as well as power. It is my belief that it can be changed through the use of research.

**Research Method: Action Research**

The use of action research as the research method for this study was appropriate in several ways. This study was developed in response to current issues that exist in AP social studies courses. Constraining curricular and course designs have created tensions and have imposed limitations on teachers and educational practices. These professional constraints cause teachers of AP courses to become reliant on practices that are teacher-driven and authoritarian as well as controlling. As a result of the consistent use of such practices, learning environments emerge where students are passive and subordinate, and suffer from
reduced autonomy and perceived lack of control. Further, this type of environment is ostensibly antithetical to the objectives of AP courses as well as social studies education. As a result of such constraints and limitations, practitioners of action research are forced to make difficult decisions regarding instructional practices that are implemented in classroom settings. As a result, conceptual frameworks that guide action research must be mediated during all stages of the action research process.

Action research (AR) is a distinctive and systematic process that involves an action-oriented and reflective approach to inquiry that seeks to find solutions that have the potential to be powerful and liberating to everyday problems and situations. In this case, the study was concerned with how the use of an authentic pedagogical approach, such as discussion pedagogy, could lead to students gaining increased autonomy and agency in the educative process. Further, this method promoted positioning the researcher as an active participant in the process (Altrichter et al., 2002; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Stringer, 2007). While there is not a dominant definition for AR that is widely accepted, AR is positioned on the idea that localized, everyday problems cannot be viewed as macro-representative (Altrichter et al., 2002; Stringer, 2007). The construction of one-size fits all definition of action research may cause disenfranchisement and restriction for action researchers (Altrichter et al., 2002; Holly, 1996).

**Purpose of action research.** Attempting to represent the multitudes of AR – from purpose to design to rigor – is challenging. Berg (2001) suggests that there exist three modes of AR:
• A technical/scientific/collaborative mode seeks to “test a particular intervention based on a pre-specified theoretical framework.”

• A practical/mutual/collaborative/deliberative mode seeks to “improve practice-and-service delivery.”

• An emancipating/enhancing/critical science mode seeks to “assist practitioners in lifting their veils of clouded understandings, and help them to better understand fundamental problems by raising their clouded consciousness” (Newton & Burgess, 2008, pp. 186-187).

While this study included characteristics of all three modes, it ultimately sought to explore how an intervention, specifically discussion pedagogy, could promote student autonomy and empowerment while also creating opportunities for students to build “transferable conceptual understanding and inquiry skills” (Parker et al., 2011, p. 534).

**Strengths as research method.** AR is a systematic process that also holds up against the standards of rigor. According to Stringer (2007), the act of formal research can be viewed as an extension of daily questioning. Through the engagement and collaboration of participants, AR can allow for a deeper and more authentic awareness and understanding of these day-to-day activities. Evaluating AR from a social context, Stringer (2007) describes the characteristics of AR:

• It is democratic, enabling the participation of all people.

• It is equitable, acknowledging people’s equality of worth.

• It is liberating, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
It is enhancing, enabling the expression of people’s full human potential (italics in original, p. 11).

AR is deemed an appropriate method when seeking to improve a situation as opposed to attempting to simply problem-solve (Ferrance, 2000, p. 2). AR is charged with creating democratically collaborated relationships in an effort to create potentially powerful change. Further, AR holds as a cornerstone that relevant stakeholders must be participatory; a notion that other modes of research may fail to see as necessary (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003, p. 25). This fundamental difference has led to a “paucity of partnerships” between conventional and action researchers. Moreover, the use of AR has the potential to expand conventional scholarship into areas with which it has not previously been exposed and/or concerned (Bradbury-Huang, 2010).

**Action Research Stages in Context of Study**

The groundwork for this action research study actually began in spring 2013 at North Carolina State University. In partial fulfillment for completion of Doctor of Philosophy degree, I was required to complete a Master’s Thesis Equivalency. During this process, I sought out available scholarship related to AP vis-à-vis curricular trends and concerns as well as various democratizing and curricular reforms.

The research focused on a critical exploration into the apparent lack of cultural relevance that exists in AP social studies courses. Like the current study, the exploration dealt with AP European History courses taught in an urban high school (grades 9-12) in the southeastern part of the United States. The study had two primary objectives:
1. Apply critically adapted historical research, via sound pedagogical methods, on topics concerning revolutionary movements of the late-18th and 19th centuries.

2. Reflect on my interpretations and the critical adaptations made in my AP European History courses.

This preliminary research established an opening move in an action research cycle that continued in the research reported in this paper.

**Action research cycle.** When designing a study, it is imperative to give significant attention to AR’s “systematic execution of carefully articulated processes of inquiry” (Stringer, 2008, p. 4). Since Kurt Lewin (1946) introduced the term “action research,” it has focused on generating knowledge about a social system or environment while also attempting to bring about change (Elden & Chisholm, 1993, p. 121). Since then, others have built on Lewin’s work, resulting in a traditional and accepted approach. This traditional and cyclical process includes five stages of inquiry:

1. Identification of problem area
2. Collection and organization of data
3. Interpretation of data
4. Action based on data
5. Reflection (Ferrance, 2000, p. 9).

This traditional approach with its five stages is commonly accepted and, according to Elden and Chisholm (1993), all five stages must be present “in some degree” in order for any research to be considered AR (p. 130). What this suggests, as Elden and Chisholm (1993)
further posit, is that new varieties of action research are taking place where stages are modified in ways that go beyond the traditional model (p. 131).

As both a teacher and researcher, I experience all five of these stages. As Whitehead (1985) outlined, the process of action research is personalized and can be represented as:

1. I experience a problem when some of my educational values are negated in my practice;
2. I imagine a solution to my problem;
3. I act in the direction of my solution;
4. I evaluate the outcomes of my actions;
5. I modify my problems, ideas, and actions in light of my evaluations (p. 98).

The design of this study reflected a careful consideration to these five phases in relation to the purpose of the study as well as the research question. As a result, the cycle of action research that was most appropriate was the process of ‘initial reflection – planning – action – observation – reflection’ (“Stages of Action Research Project,” n.d.).

**Initial reflection.** The initial reflection phase of the study, in part, came about as result of the previous research that I conducted on issues of cultural relevance in AP social studies courses. This element of the action research process coincides with what Whitehead (1985) described as the recognition of a problem and further discord between educational values and practice (p. 98). This initial element of action research included the transition from broad educational concerns to more specific questions of inquiry to be studied.
According to the Center for Enhanced Learning and Teaching (n.d.), changes that are made as a part of action taken often falls into one of the three categories:

- Changes to the curriculum or syllabus
- Modifications to teaching techniques or adoption of a new method
- Changes to the nature of the assessment (Initial reflection section).

The critical, initial reflection that took place during this element of inquiry, allowed me to developed and narrow the focus of the research, while also allowing me to develop a concrete research question that would guide the action research study (Hendricks, 2006).

**Planning.** This element of the action research reported here was a result of my initial reflection coupled with an extensive review of relevant literature and scholarship. The review of scholarship is detailed in Chapter Two. Along with substantiating my stance that a problem(s) does, in fact, exist in AP social studies courses, the review of scholarship also allowed me to develop and plan an appropriate intervention, or action.

**Action.** The intervention, or action, taken in this study is outlined in the “Research Design” section below.

**Observation.** During the observation element of the action research process, classroom sessions featuring the discussion pedagogy activities that I designed were audio recorded. In addition, I maintained a daily journal of these activities. Moreover, as described in detail in the “Research Design” section of this chapter, I conducted and transcribed twelve semi-structured student interviews at the conclusion of the intervention.
in an effort to gain better insight to what students experienced. This triangulation of data allowed me to more critically reflect on results of the study.

**Reflection.** According to the Center for Enhanced Learning and Teaching (n.d.), the critical reflection element is an integral aspect of action research projects. Oftentimes, this reflection element will allow for the recognition and articulation of findings while also enabling the development of questions for an additional cycle of action research and inquiry to begin.

**Research Design**

The purpose of the study was to explore how the utilization of authentic and purposeful discussion in an AP European history class could promote and support student autonomy. As Parker (2006) posits, AP courses tend to be some of the most teacher-centered and content driven as well as being “as discussion-free as any” (p. 12). This authoritarian style of instruction can have negative impacts on students’ wants “to express themselves and let their voices be heard” and needs “to be encouraged to find their own voice” (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007, p. 82) Using action research as the framework allowed for a re-positioning of the teacher and students as collaborative learners and active participants who attempted to promote both content and process. As a teacher of AP social studies, this study provided a unique opportunity for me to utilize a confluence of scholarship in both discussion pedagogy and self-determination theory to promote student autonomy and empowerment. The study was conducted in relation to three units in an AP European history course curriculum which lasted four weeks. The topics that were covered included imperialistic activities of the 19th
century, the antecedents of World War I, World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the post-war negotiations (i.e. Treaty of Versailles).

Discussion pedagogy was used in the seminars and deliberations, which allowed students to meaningfully dive into selected texts in addition to allowing for “discussants to speak, listen, and learn together, with and across their differences (Parker, 2006, p. 12). The application of the discussion included

- the selection of meaningful texts (i.e. temporary ephemeral products, journals, books, paintings, etc.) that sought to challenge students and create interpretive opportunities;
- the creation of centralizing questions to serve as initial starting points for student discussion;
- the utilization of an open forum of discussion among the students and the teacher with limited, but clarified, expectations for discussion (Apple, 1993; Parker, 2001; Parker, 2006).

Site Selection

The site selected for the study was one of convenience; the study was conducted at an urban high school (grades 9-12) located in the southeastern United States where I have been teaching for ten years. The school has approximately 1900 students with a heterogeneous demographic composite.

Participants

The students in my AP European history class collaboratively served as active participants in the study. The study was conducted in two, junior and senior level classes.
Participants ages (N=48) ranged from 15 to 18. The 48 students were enrolled in the class by the school’s administration who constructs all student schedules for the school. The AP European history course was an elective course, meaning that it was not a requirement for graduation.

Prior to the beginning of the study, students were given a consent letter that they and their parent(s)/guardian(s) were required to sign if they wished to participate. If the parental consent form was not signed by both parties and returned by the specified date, student artifacts (i.e. class work, audio recorded participation) were not included in the data that was collected and analyzed. The need for the parental consent form made parents aware of the study being conducted and notified them that student artifacts and participation in the seminars and deliberations as a part of the class would be examined for the purpose of the study. Out of 48 students in the class, four students declined the opportunity to have their work or their recorded participation used for analytical purposes in the study.

As a part of the parental consent form, students were asked whether they would accept or decline the opportunity to participate in a semi-structured interview which would be conducted at the conclusion of the study. Out of the 48 students who agreed to participate in the study, eight students initially stated that they would decline the invitation to participate in the semi-structured interview. At a later date, two students changed their decision and stated that they would accept the invitation to participate in the interview if asked.

All potential identifiers were removed in order to protect the anonymity of the students. The students did not receive any direct benefit (i.e. extra credit, financial
compensation, etc.) as a result of their participation; however, they may have experienced indirect benefits such as the acquisition of knowledge.

**Participants of Learning Climate Questionnaires (LCQ).** All 43 of the 48 students who agreed to participate in the study took the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) prior to the intervention. The LCQ was also given to the students at the conclusion of the modifications. The LCQ is a 15-item survey that was given anonymously and was administered by a faculty member in the social studies department who is not affiliated with the study.

**Participants of semi-structured interviews.** There were twelve students asked to participate in a 20 to 30 minute semi-structured interview either before or after school. The table below provides a breakdown of the students who participated. Pseudonyms were provided to each of the students to protect their identity.
TABLE 1: Participants Selected for Semi-Structured Interview (n = 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>AP Courses</th>
<th>Distinguishing Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander (B/No)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I think there is definitely a place for discussions…but you wouldn’t get through everything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethann (A/Yes)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“I thought it benefitted me more because I would actually get to choose what I wanted to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany (A/Yes)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Well, it [participating] felt good because I was just like, oh, my answer is actually right for once.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth (B/Yes)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Before the seminar approach, I was really intimidated to speak out in class.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly (A/No)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“It didn’t feel like the teacher is God and we are a bunch of grunt students. It [seminars] set us on an equal platform.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth (B/Yes)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I think it [seminars] gave history a kind of face before we walked in.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae (B/No)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“It definitely felt more open…especially on the day we went over the pictures and the Hemingway thing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael (B/No)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“When you prompt someone instead of being teacher driven…most people will talk and want to be heard.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle (B/Yes)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I think I prepared a lot more and read more. I think it [seminars] deepened my understanding.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas (A/Yes)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“It was like we were asking the questions and we were leading everything, so we became the Christopher Dagues.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricki (A/No)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“The rest of the class was memorization, but the last three [weeks] you were making the ideas yourself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne (A/Yes)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“It’s the teacher. We work. It’s [AP class] not as interactive as other classes.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes if the participant was a student in a previous class prior to the study.

**Denotes the number of AP courses students had taken at time of interview.
Data Collection

The study was conducted in the fall school semester of 2015. After receiving approval from all of the study’s stakeholders to include the institutional review board (IRB) at North Carolina State University, the LEA, the building administration, and the parents/guardians as well as the students, the discussion pedagogy was implemented in the two AP European history. The discussion pedagogy was utilized through the concluding weeks of the semester, excluding the examination week.

It was important that the sources and procedures used to gather information were congruent with the purpose of study and question(s) being asked. When conducting action research, it is necessary to maintain the cyclical aspects of initially reflecting, planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001). For this study, the following sources were used from which to collect data: self-administered questionnaires (i.e. LCQ), a reflective journal, instructional materials (to include the AP European history curriculum), and student interviews as well as student artifacts. All of these sources of data are considered acceptable when using action research (Koshy, 2010; Stringer, 2008). The use of multiple data sources enables the triangulation of data (Creswell, 2013; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Triangulating the data sources allows for deeper meaning with evidence from multiple sources and analytic methods (Stringer, 2008). For this study, it was imperative to also maintain a high degree of auditability, which included a thorough trail of documentation (Given, 2008). In part, this is accomplished by maintaining an audit trail (Beck, 1993; Guba and Lincoln, 1981).
Based on Wolcott’s (1992) categorization of data, the use of questionnaires, field notes, and student artifacts demonstrates diversification in data collection.

- The use of a questionnaire will allow me to inquire into the thoughts and experiences of the students.
- The use of field notes will allow me to experience the study through my own senses.
- The use of student artifacts will allow me to examine the direct outcome of the student’s activity (Holly, Arhar, Kasten, 2005; Stringer, 2008; Wolcott, 1992).

**Learning Climate Questionnaire.** The Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) was administered at both the beginning and the conclusion of the study. The use of the LCQ, created by Williams and Deci (1996), allowed for a better understanding of how students perceived teaching and learning in relation to autonomy-supportive motivation as well as controlling methods of instruction (Reeve, 2009). The support of students’ autonomy has been shown to be critical to the development and maintenance of student-teacher relationships (Davis, 2003; Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981; Reeve, 1998; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986; Ryan & Stiller, 1991). As Davis (2003) posits, “Teachers who successfully manage balancing the need for structure with the need for autonomy increase students’ locus of responsibility for their own learning, their intrinsic motivation for academic tasks, their feelings of competence, and their use of strategies leading to conceptual understanding” (p. 213). When the initial LCQ was analyzed, the findings were shared with students so that the addition of discussion pedagogy could be addressed with students as a way to further explore a deeper understanding of students’ experiences.
**Reflective journal.** Through the study I maintained a journal, which allowed me to freely write about the experience of conducting the research. The use of reflective journaling is a widely accepted method for data collection (Ortlipp, 2008). It was primarily used during the observation process in an effort to record material germane to the study (Stringer, 2008). The reflective journal served as a type of field notes that were used in the analysis of the classroom experiences. While these field notes were not taken down at the exact moment that some experiences occurred, I frequently wrote to reflect on what was observed.

**Student artifacts.** According to Stringer (2008), student artifacts “provide a wonderful resource for investigation, providing highly informative, concrete visual information (p. 74). I collected artifacts as they pertained to the relevance of the study. These artifacts consisted of formative assessments complete during the implementation of discussion pedagogy (Reeve & Halusic, 2009, p.148).

**Student interviews.** At the conclusion of the study, twelve semi-structured student interviews were conducted. The sampling of students selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews was purposeful. As Morse (1991) suggests, purposeful sampling is utilized when “the researcher selects a participant according to the needs of the study” (p.129). Students were not selected prior to the intervention but rather as the study unfolded and emergent themes became more evidentiary (Coyne, 1997; Morse, 1991; Sandelowski, 1995). All twelve of the interviews were transcribed for further analysis.

**Data handling.** Prior to the beginning of the study, the North Carolina State Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research. The IRB serves to protect the
interest of human subjects when conducting research on them. It was a priority to protect the identities of the students and to make sure that they and their parent(s)/guardian(s) understood, in plain language, the goals and objectives of the study. All data was stored on the researcher’s personal laptop. The information contained on the laptop are password protected.

**Data Analysis**

The process of qualitative data analysis seeks to take large quantities of data and distill it in an effort to make sense and uncover the significant aspects that are located within the data (Stringer, 2007). Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process that requires time for reflection and interpretation. The analysis of this study was guided by procedures for categorizing and coding as delineated by Stringer (2007). In analyzing the data, it was important for the researcher to try and reduce the “propensity to conceptualize events through their own interpretive lens” (p. 99).

**Reviewing the collected data.** During this phase, all of the research methods were reviewed and necessary changes were made in that process. After data collection was complete, the first step in that review was to calculating the mean scores for both administrations of the LCQ. A specific group of items on the LCQ that was most germane to the study were then selected for closer analysis. Additional review of data included reading the field notes and reflections in their entirety without necessarily trying to create any type of particular meaning. This process supported the organization of data for analysis later. The
same process was used to organize student work, specific written responses during a deliberation and student essays.

**Utilizing the collected data.** This phase of the analytical process sought to “identify the discrete ideas, concepts, events, and experiences that are incorporated” (Stringer, 2007, p. 100). The process began with the tagging of information in the field notes in order to identify particular excerpts that were of potential value later in the coding process. The process involved highlighting words, phrases, and sentences for tagging information. After tagging, labels were recorded on a hard copy of the transcripts (i.e. memoing). These tags and labels aided in the development of initial codes.

**Coding and categorizing.** The next phase involved coding and categorizing where units of meaning could appear. Coding involves taking non-numerical data and extracting meaning from it (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 309). The process of coding, and qualitative research in general, is an iterative process; this is a result of new ideas, discoveries, and conjectures that arise when coding begins. As a result of newly found items, it became necessary to go back and re-evaluate tags and labels as well as previously established codes. While looking at both the highlighted copy of the transcripts as well as the hard copy that contained the memos taken during the reading process, the initial codes were defined and developed. The process of analyzing data after the tags and labels were sorted out helped lead to the initial codes. These initial, or descriptive, codes were used with the idea of eventually creating a set of key concepts or categories. It was important to identify and analyze the created categories for the perspectives of the various stakeholders.
TABLE 2: Initial Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Substantiating Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student appreciation/acceptance of lecture style of instruction</td>
<td>“[With] the lecture method, I’m kind of forced to be more intent. I’m forced to listen more because that’s all I’m going to get.” (Student Interview, Kenneth, January 24, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Variation in instruction among AP classes</td>
<td>“We get worksheets, like AP US History. [Students] always complained about having to color. That’s all we did.” (Student Interview, Mae, January 28, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Overall insecurity of students</td>
<td>“What if I say something, if I look stupid, and then I’ll look like this dumb junior?” (Student interview, Suzanne, January 23, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Intervention extended depth of knowledge</td>
<td>“Well, I really liked the seminars because they helped me get a deeper understanding of the subject…it also got me more interested in the subject.” (Student interview, Kelly, January 22, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Initiative to further explore</td>
<td>“For the seminar approach…I had what I was looking for…so I found myself looking them up online and just looking for different pieces of information.” (Student interview, Elizabeth, January 22, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Developing intellectual/interpersonal comfort and discomfort</td>
<td>“I don’t know if it’s because I became more comfortable with you as a teacher or if it was because of the seminars. Either way, I felt like you stepped down from your podium…it was more open to question you.” (Student interview, Ricki, January 21, 2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, it is imperative to conduct myself and the study in a manner that meets ethical and moral standards. Aforementioned, I gained approval from the appropriate stakeholders. Additionally, the use of multiple sources in the data collection allowed me to seek out convergence and corroboration regarding the initial research question, creating a triangulation of the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Creswell, 2013). During the study, I also maintained an audit trail with supporting documentation (Given, 2008). This measure of auditability was assisted through the maintenance of a researcher log as well as through the journaling process. These quality measures assisted in the promotion of confirmability by corroborating that the procedures described actually took place (Stringer, 2007).

Limitations and Delimitations

As with all research, this study has certain limitations. One of the most notable limitations with the study was its time constraints. The data collection lasted approximately three weeks, covering two units of study in the AP European history curriculum. It has been suggested by Shor (1987, 1992) that attempts at creating empowering discourses need to occur from the very beginning of term or semester. Another limitation of the study related to my role as a novice researcher. As a result, there may be items in the design of the study that I may have overlooked or that could be amended. Although the limitations were a concern, I implemented specific strategies at my disposal and at the suggestions of committee members to reduce potential issues.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This action research study was conducted in order to explore how the use of discussion pedagogy in AP social studies courses may afford students opportunities to learn content more deeply while also having the autonomy to make decisions within the classroom. An extensive review of related scholarship suggests that many AP social studies courses are teacher-centered and use controlling methods of instruction. As an unintended consequence of such methods of instruction, the goals of both social studies education (student preparation for civic life) and AP courses (development of students’ transferable conceptual understanding and inquiry skills) are not likely being met in many AP social studies courses.

Research Question

The primary research question for this study is, “How does modifying a standard AP social studies course, through the utilization of discussion pedagogy, promote and support student autonomy?” This action research study also sought to address three sub-questions:

1. How do students experience discussion pedagogy?
2. Do students perceive a difference in the learning climate, specifically teacher-student interaction, when discussion pedagogy is implemented?
3. How does discussion pedagogy affect students’ experience relative to the content?

Action Research Advanced Organizer

Given the nature of the primary research question, qualitative, action research methods were utilized. This study utilized qualitative methods in order to study students
while also attempting to empower them by recounting their stories and hearing their voices (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Further, the use of a qualitative research method allowed for the researcher to be positioned in the study in multiple capacities. As Manfra (2009) notes, “The self-reflective nature of action research shifts the traditional role of the teacher” (p. 34). In this action research study, I served as both teacher and researcher while being immersed in the daily experiences encountered during the action research study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

While no single definition exists, it is commonly accepted that action research is a distinctive and systematic process that involves action-based and reflective approaches while attempting to find solutions that can be practical and liberating. Action research positions the researcher as an active participant in the process (Altrichter et al., 2002; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Stringer, 2007). Since Kurt Lewin (1946) introduced the term, “action research,” new action research cases have created “variations and extensions of the basic model” (Elden & Chisholm, 2003, p. 130). In fact, the action research paradigm has become an overarching term used to describe shared inquiry that, 1) situates within contexts of practice, 2) enacts a commitment to participation with practitioners, 3) leads to knowledge generation, and 4) contributes to the empowerment of participants (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014; Bradbury-Huang, 2010; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The systematic process of this action research study is cyclical and according to (Center for Enhanced Learning and Teaching, n.d.) takes form through the five stages (Figure 1):
• Initial reflection

• Planning

• Action

• Observation

• Reflection

Figure 1: Stages of Action Research Project

Initial Reflection

The initial reflection stage of this action research study actually began developing at the conclusion of a qualitative study I conducted in fall of 2013. In that narrative-inquiry study, I explored curricular issues related to AP social studies courses and cultural relevance. This study was completed in order to fulfill a thesis study requirement as a part of my doctoral plan of work. In light of my findings in that study, I sought out related scholarship concerning teaching and learning in AP courses. In seeking additional scholarship, I also
examined self-determination theory (SDT) from the educational psychology literature. My reflections on this literature led me to additional research and exploration on the intersection of AP social studies courses and SDT. Through my reflection, I sought a pedagogy that supports and promotes student autonomy as defined in SDT.

Given my experiences conducting research on issues related to AP courses along with my search of related scholarship, I narrowed the scope of the research question that guided this qualitative study. Following the “Stages of Action Research Project,” as outlined by the Center for Enhanced Learning and Teaching (n.d.), I explored how utilizing discussion pedagogy as an instructional method might have the potential to:

- provide students with greater autonomy in their AP social studies courses;
- empower students to become more active in the educative process; and
- satisfy the goals of social studies education as well as AP courses.

In my review of scholarship, particularly that of Walter Parker (1996, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2013), Walter Parker and Diana Hess (2001) as well as Shirley Engle (2003), I gained a greater understanding of discussion pedagogy and its potential to better meet students’ innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As discussed in Chapter 2, there exist three innate psychological needs as it relates to behavior. Autonomy is the need for control or agency; competence is the need to feel adept in a given environment – especially with interpersonal interaction; while relatedness is the need to be identifiable and feel connected to a group (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk et al., 2008). In an effort to support students’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness, I created an
instructional plan featuring discussion pedagogy to implement in my AP European history courses. My use of discussion pedagogy as an intervention in my AP courses was designed to enhance and support student autonomy while also empowering students in their respective educational experiences. This instructional plan was designed to provide students with input in curricular and content decision-making where they would be given choices and options regarding how they demonstrated their competence on given topics of study and assignments.

**Existing instructional approaches.** In addition to seeking out and reviewing relevant scholarship, I also began to reflect on the instructional approaches that existed in my classroom. This included evaluating the instructional methods I used in my AP European History courses prior to the intervention. This part of the “initial reflection” stage of the action research cycle gave me the opportunity to evaluate my teaching styles and the benefits that I felt students gained from my existing instructional approaches.

My AP courses were taught over an 18-week semester with each class period lasting 90 minutes. Traditionally, my AP European History courses were the most teacher-centered of the AP classes I taught. This teacher-centered approach predominantly featured stand-and-deliver lectures. I used lectures because I believed that they were the most efficient method by which to cover the curriculum in the requisite depth. My lecture-based approach was utilized in an effort help students prepare for lectures they will most likely experience in a college-level history course.

I began my daily lectures by writing on the whiteboard the names and dates of important persons and events as well as ideas that will be covered during that class. When
warranted and when time allowed, I showed students a short video or documentary from sources such as PBS and The History Channel. I showed student segments of lectures by John Merriman, noted modern French historian at Yale University, which were found on YouTube. These videos and recorded lectures were shown (with the use of a Smart Board and projector) with the intent of helping students further and reinforce their knowledge on a given subject. Most lectures lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. Students were free to raise their hands at any point during a lecture to ask questions. At the conclusion of a given lecture, the remaining class time was allocated for addressing students’ questions or for allowing students to begin the night’s reading or to work on defining key terms.

Prior to class, students were assigned daily readings from the textbook. Students were expected to read the assigned pages (typically ten to fifteen pages) before the next day’s class. Additionally, students were responsible for completing key terms for every chapter covered in the textbook (Appendix A). There were typically ten to twenty key terms for every chapter. My expectation was for all answers to include an in-depth response for each person, event, and/or idea that was listed as a key term. These terms were intended to assist students in better understanding conceptual information. At the conclusion of every chapter, a multiple-choice quiz was administered to assess student knowledge of content covered. At my discretion, I assigned students to respond to short-answer prompts in lieu of the multiple-choice based questions.

**Teacher perception of learning environment.** During the initial reflection stage, I also began to think about the two classes of students who would participate in the study
(Class A and B). Both classes had students enrolled with whom I had prior experience, meaning that they were students I had in a previous course. Between the two classes, I had 49 students. In my experience with both classes, my perception was that Class A was more aloof and less engaged than Class B. Conversely, I perceived Class B to be more engaged and seemingly more willing to ask questions during the classroom lectures.

I accounted for this discernable difference, in part, as a result of one class starting first thing in the morning (Class A) and the other class starting at the conclusion of lunch (Class B). To me, there were no other discernible factors that stood out between the two classes that I could identify as a catalyst for this difference. On some days Class A was more energetic, but overall, it was my perception that Class A tended to be less engaged in daily activities as a whole.

**Planning**

The second stage in the action research cycle was planning. This is where I developed a schedule for implementing discussion pedagogy. I planned to use discussion pedagogy in three units of study, which included European imperialism, the causes of and World War I, and the post-war settlements and their respective impacts on the 20th century. In addition to the implementation of discussion pedagogy, students would also continue to receive lectures; however, the lectures were less frequent and were significantly shorter than those prior to the intervention. As outlined by Stefanou et al. (2004), this strategy sought to support students’ cognitive autonomy with “less teacher talk time; more teacher listening time” (p. 101). After developing a schedule, I sought out meaningful texts intended to prompt discussion and
promote a shared inquiry during the seminars. The idea of shared inquiry suggests that students are afforded “opportunities to think, speak, listen and learn together, with and across differences, about a specific topic” (Parker, 2006, p. 12). The texts I selected included primary historical documents such as speeches, telegram correspondences, and photographs as well as secondary sources from noted historians and authors in the field as well as from the textbook. After selecting the texts for the seminars, I developed central questions that were intended to direct and promote students’ understanding of the text(s) and enhance discussion.

**Utilizing discussion pedagogy.** The discussion pedagogy instructional materials I developed featured the use of seminars and deliberations. Seminars were utilized to provide students the opportunity to participate in meaningful discussion regarding the given historical content. Deliberations provided opportunities for students to discuss issues and problems related to content topics. As part of the planning stage the action research cycle, I identified and selected meaningful texts (e.g. primary and secondary sources, ephemeral material, journals, books, paintings, etc.) and created central questions to serve as starting points for an open forum of discussion. The texts selected and the central questions developed provided students with opportunities to experience the historical content from different perspectives that, in some cases, enhanced students’ criticality of the historical content. With that being stated, both the texts and questions were chosen with consideration of the curricular requirements of the course. I planned to use discussion pedagogy for topics on European
imperialism, the causes of and World War I, and the post-war settlements and their respective impacts on the 20th century.

**Seminars.** In planning the intervention, I intended to utilize seminars in conjunction with abbreviated lectures. Most lectures given prior to the intervention lasted from 60 to 75 minutes; as a part of the intervention, I reduced lectures to 30 minutes. Moreover, lectures were not given every day as they were prior to the intervention. The lectures served to support the seminars and helped inform students on aspects of the historical topics being covered. The remainder of the class sessions were dedicated to the seminars. This included students being given time to prepare for the seminars (e.g. reading and/or selecting meaningful texts) or students participating in the actual seminars. The seminars served to “encourage students to plumb into the world deeply…[and] involves a rich and challenging text, a central question, the multiple interpretations that are brought to bear by discussants, and the relations among them” (Parker, 2006, p. 12).

**Global European imperialism seminars.** Two seminars focused on the colonization efforts of European countries in the 19th century. Students were encouraged to read pages 826 to 836 in the course textbook in order that they develop a historical context of the topic. I did not require students to read the textbook but encouraged students do so in order to further their knowledge of the content as a part of their preparation for the seminar. The textbook assigned to the course was *The Western Heritage Since 1300* written by Kagan, Ozment, and Turner (2004). The topics in the textbook reading included the following.

- The Close of the Age of Early Modern Colonization
• The Age of British Imperial Dominance
  ▪ The Imperialism of Free Trade
  ▪ British Settler Colonies

• India—The Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire

• The “New Imperialism,” 1870-1914

• Motives for the New Imperialism

• The Partition of Africa
  ▪ Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya
  ▪ Egypt and British Strategic Concern about the Upper Nile
  ▪ West Africa
  ▪ The Belgian Congo
  ▪ German Empire in Africa

• Southern Africa (Kagan et al., 2004)

In addition to reading the textbook passage, students were provided with a copy of *King Leopold’s Ghost* (1998) by Adam Hochschild and were asked to read pages 131-135. *King Leopold’s Ghost* describes the intricately devised plan of King Leopold II (r.1865 – 1909), King of the Belgians, and his efforts to take over the Congo region of central Africa. Information on pages 131-135 details the atrocities that many Congolese inhabitants incurred at the hands of the colonizers – all in an effort to corner the world’s market on rubber and ivory. Students were asked to write down their thoughts in any form they desired (expository,
bulleted note taking, etc.) as related to the selected text. The central questions for this seminar was,

Was the conquest and plunder of the Congo and the rest of Africa morally and ethically justifiable given that history has often proceeded in this manner?

The second seminar on the colonization of Africa provided students the opportunity to apply what they knew about imperialism in the 19th century to a modern context. The central question for the seminar was,

Are there moral and ethical justifications for conquest still utilized today – whether it is within a respective nation, between two developed nations, or between a developed and a developing nation?

One of my learning objectives was for students to engage in shared inquiry regarding human capacity for terror and violence as well as conquest. The text chosen for the second seminar was Joseph Rudyard Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden* (1899). Kipling’s writings in 1899 justified the actions taken by imperialists as a noble endeavor. This piece was chosen, in part, because it has been interpreted in different ways since it was first published. In some cases Kipling’s poem has been viewed as a justification for imperialistic activities. Conversely, it has also been viewed as a justification for philanthropic/humanitarian efforts made by colonizers on behalf of those indigenous to a given land.

*Causes of World War I seminars.* These two seminars focused on the causes that eventually led to the world’s first true global conflict in the summer of 1914. Most historians generally agree that the four predominant causes of World War I were nationalism,
imperialism, militarism, and alliance-building (Merriman, 2009, pp. 941-973). Having already discussed imperialism in the first two seminars, these two seminars focused primarily on nationalism and alliance building. Students were encouraged to read pages 838-847 in the course textbook in order that they develop a historical context. The topics in the textbook reading included the following.

- Emergence of the German Empire and the Alliance Systems (1873-1890)
  - Bismarck’s Leadership
  - Forging the Triple Entente (1890-1907) (Kagan et al., 2004).

The students were also asked to read pages 51-53 in Roderick Phillips’ book Society, State, and Nation in the Twentieth Century (1995). Phillips delineates how the nationalistic fervor of the 19th century carried over into the 20th century in various ways. Nationalism of the late-19th and early 20th-centuries was described as an intense pride in one’s country. Nationalism was propagated through church sermons to lessons taught in school to popular culture of the day.

Additionally, students were asked to read an excerpt from a speech by German Chancellor Berhard von Bülow entitled “Hammer and Anvil” (December 11, 1899) which was delivered to the German Reichstag (parliament). Bülow’s speech was intended to arouse nationalistic stirrings in the young German nation, which had been created less than 30 years earlier. Students were asked to write down their thoughts in any form they desired (expository, bulleted note taking, etc.) as related to the selected text. The central question for this seminar was,
Do you believe that World War I, or another war of devastating proportions was inevitable, given the nationalistic tendencies that existed?

In the second seminar students were provided with a series of telegrams exchanged between Kaiser Wilhelm II (r. 1889-1918) of Germany and his cousin, the Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II (r. 1894-1917). This series of telegrams provided insight into the diplomacy and negotiations that played out during the summer of 1914 after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The central question for this seminar was, Do you believe that Wilhelm and Nicholas genuinely sought a peaceful arrangement to ultimately prevent war, or do you believe that nationalism and militarism ultimately trumped any attempts at peace?

In preparation for the seminar, students were asked to write down their thoughts in any form they desired (expository, bulleted note taking, etc.) as related to the assigned text.

**Opening stages of World War I seminar.** This seminar focused on the opening stages of World War I and the impact of war-related propaganda during the summer of 1914 in United States. The central question for this seminar was, What are your immediate impressions of war given the photographs, and how do your initial impressions of the photographs impact your emerging understandings of nationalism?

For this seminar, I provided students with three photographs that showed various reactions to the impending war efforts. The first photograph showed German soldiers in railway cars on their way to Paris to begin fighting. One of the railway cars was sprayed with an item of
“graffiti” which read “Ausflug nach Paris;” this translates to “Trip to Paris” (See Appendix B). The second photograph was of French soldiers wearing the traditional French uniform as they prepared for war. The nine French soldiers were posing for the photograph and gave the appearance of being nonchalant about their participation for the war (See Appendix C). The third and final photograph was taken of French soldiers as they marched off to war. In this photograph, French citizens enthusiastically greeted the soldiers as they marched (See Appendix D).

After each photograph was projected on the classroom Smart Board, I gave students approximately three minutes to write down their impressions and perceptions of World War I given what they saw in the photographs. Students were told they could freely move closer to the screen so that they could get a closer look at the faces of the soldiers and of the photographs overall. After all three of the photographs were displayed, I asked the class for their impressions of the soldiers and the war. Additionally, students were asked to describe how their impressions fit with the ideas of nationalism being propagated during this historical period. Students were asked to write down their thoughts in any form they desired (expository, bulleted note taking, etc.) as they related to the selected text.

*The realities of war seminar.* For this seminar, students were provided an excerpt from John Merriman’s *A History of Modern Europe: From the Renaissance to the Present* (2009) and were asked to read the section entitled “The Changing Nature of War,” which vividly depicts the life of a soldier enveloped in trench warfare on the western front. Students were also asked to find at least one meaningful source (e.g. temporary ephemeral products,
journals, books, paintings, etc.) that resonated with them and that aided in their further understanding of what became the realities of World War I. Given the requirement that students find their own source, the central question for this seminar was,

How does the source you chose, along with the writing by Merriman, provide you with a clearer understanding of how World War I progressed?

Students were asked to write down their thoughts in any form they desired (expository, bulleted note taking, etc.) as they related to their selected text as well as the central question.

_Paris Peace Conference and Versailles Treaty seminar._ This last seminar focused on the peace negotiations that took place from January to June 1919. Even as World War I was concluding, nationalism was still driving policy decisions. Students were encouraged to read pages 864-868 in the textbook in order to develop a historical context. The students were then asked to read pages 154-161 in Roderick Phillips’ _Society, State, and Nation in the Twentieth Century_ (1995) as well as pages 158-165 in Margaret MacMillan’s _Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World_ (2003). The Phillips’ (1995) excerpt provided students with information about the Treaty of Versailles. MacMillan (2003) outlines the curious and unstable relationship developing among members of the “The Big Three” which included Woodrow Wilson (United States), Georges Clemenceau (France), and David Lloyd George (Great Britain) – especially as it related to the consequences that Germany would have to face. Students were asked to write down their thoughts in any form they desired (expository, bulleted note taking, etc.) as they related to the selected text as well as the following central question,
Do you believe that the policies established in the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles were actually attempting to create and maintain peace?

**Action**

I began the action stage of the action research cycle by administering the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) created by Williams and Deci (1996). In using the LCQ, my intention was to gain a clearer understanding of how students perceived my style of teaching. After calculating the simple means of the survey’s items, I was better able to evaluate how students experienced the class prior to the intervention. After administration of the LCQ and the calculation of the simple mean scores were complete, I began implementing discussion pedagogy two days later day in both Class A and B.

**Results of Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ).** Prior to utilizing discussion pedagogy, students who agreed to participate in the study ($N=45$) were given the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ). I removed myself from the actual administration of the 15-item questionnaire, hoping that students would be more candid and honest in their responses if I was not in the room. The questionnaire was administered fully expecting that students would remain anonymous in the process. I provided students with additional space to write comments for each of the items, if they desired.

The LCQ provided me with some insight into how students perceived support of their respective autonomy in the class. While the results did not cause me to change my plans to use discussion pedagogy as an intervention, it made me more cognizant of how students
perceived their experiences in the class. The results of the LCQ survey also served as a baseline for the class as we began the discussion pedagogy intervention.

The simple means were calculated for each item on the survey for Class A (n=21) and Class B (n=24). The results showed that Class A had lower individual item means than Class B. The results suggest that Class A thought they had less control and agency in the learning environment than Class B. Five items were selected (numbers: 1, 3, 7, 11, 14) for further analysis. These items provided an opportunity to better understand how students’ psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) were being met. Specifically, these items asked about strategies associated with different features of autonomy support (organizational, procedural, cognitive).

**TABLE 3: Mean scores on LCQ items 1, 3, 7, 11, and 14: Pre-intervention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item on Questionnaire</th>
<th>Class A *</th>
<th>Class B *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel that my teacher provides me with choices and options.</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am able to be open with my teacher during class.</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My teacher encourages me to ask questions.</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>6.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My teacher handles students’ emotions very well</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My teacher tries to understand how I see things before suggesting a new way to do things.</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>6.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scores on the 15-item version are calculated by averaging the individual score lines. The Likert scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The higher average scores represents a higher level of perceived autonomy support (Williams & Deci, 1996).
Interpretation of findings from pre-intervention LCQ. The results from the LCQ provided a better understanding of how students perceived my actions and behavior prior to the intervention. The items asked students to respond on a Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) to the statements. The mean scores for the five items suggested that students generally agreed with all five statements. Students’ responses to survey items showed that they experienced a learning environment in which they perceived support for their autonomy. The results from the LCQ also suggested that students experienced high degrees of relatedness and attunement. Relatedness is one of the four characteristics of a high-quality teacher-student relationship and occurs when teachers create a learning environment where students believe their ideas are important and where their personal experiences are relevant (Reeve, 2006). Attunement, which also acts as one of the four characteristics of a high-quality teacher-student relationship, includes knowing what students need while also being “responsive to students’ words, behaviors, needs, preferences, and emotions” (Reeve, 2006, p. 232).

The results of the post-intervention LCQ, obtained only for Class B, showed increases in four of the five items with Item 14 being the only item with a lower mean score than before the intervention (Table 4). The results on the pre-intervention and post-intervention LCQ suggested that the learning climate was initially favorable for students with their senses of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and that learning climate improved after the implementation of discussion pedagogy. The scores demonstrated that there was no harm done to students’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness through the implementation of
discussion pedagogy. While the results suggested that students agreed with the statements in the survey, the item scores did not demonstrate a significant finding as it relates to this study. However, it does suggest that the intervention might have led students to experience an enhanced sense of autonomy and relatedness as a result of utilizing discussion pedagogy.

**TABLE 4: Learning Climate Questionnaire: Post-Intervention for Class B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item on Questionnaire</th>
<th>Mean: Post-Intervention</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel that my teacher provides me with choices and options.</td>
<td>6.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am able to be open with my teacher during class.</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My teacher encourages me to ask questions.</td>
<td>6.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My teacher handles students’ emotions very well</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My teacher tries to understand how I see things before suggesting a new way to do things.</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Likert scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The higher average scores represent a higher level of perceived autonomy support (Williams & Deci, 1996).*

**Observation**

The observation stage of the AR cycle involved the collection of data from the implementation of the newly designed discussion pedagogy. As outlined in Chapter 3, data sources were used that were congruent with the purpose of the study and with the primary research question and sub-questions. During the observation stage of the study, I used field notes, a reflective journal, instructional materials, semi-structured interviews, and student artifacts as sources of data collection.
This action research study sought to explore how implementing discussion pedagogy in two AP European History courses would support and promote student autonomy. Moreover, this study sought to evaluate, through a critical lens, how affording students the opportunity to be more active and participatory in the educative process would impact the traditionally established hierarchical structures of high school classrooms. Such research is important because barriers exist in many AP social studies courses that might prevent students and teachers from reaching and mastering the goals of both AP courses as well as social studies education. The data collected provided the information for the reflection stage in an effort to identify and articulate the findings of this process.

**Reflection and Findings**

The reflection stage of the action research cycle provided an opportunity to analyze and evaluate the impact of implementing discussion pedagogy in two AP European History courses on student autonomy and empowerment. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) caution against presenting action research findings as final answers but instead recommend they be presented as theories for further “testing and critique” (p. 206). Further, the reflection stage should not be interpreted as the end point of the action research cycle but rather as a potential solution that could lead to another cycle of action research. Findings and reflections responded to the study’s three sub-questions as described in Table 5.
TABLE 5: Research Sub-Questions and Related Research Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Sub-Question</th>
<th>Related Research Finding</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do students experience discussion pedagogy?</td>
<td>Student involvement and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preparation for the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involvement in the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community in the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do students perceive a difference in the learning climate, specifically teacher-student interaction, when discussion pedagogy is implemented?</td>
<td>Students developed a sense of relatedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Satisfaction of students’ needs were generally frustrated in other AP courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students experienced support of their need for relatedness through discussion pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students perceived a healthy teacher-student relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does discussion pedagogy affect students’ experience relative to the content?</td>
<td>Student experience regarding historical content and historical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student development of historical argumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student development of historical interpretation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first finding focused on students’ involvement in class and the sense of community that developed through the implementation of discussion pedagogy. The second finding focused on students and their senses of relatedness, both in their other AP courses as well as during their experience with discussion pedagogy. The third finding focused on students’ experiences regarding historical content and historical thinking skills.

Student involvement and community. The first finding that emerged from analysis of the data was that students’ involvement in class activities and interaction with classmates and the teacher was impacted through their experience with discussion pedagogy. Student involvement in the classes during the implementation of discussion pedagogy manifested
itself in two ways. The first impact on student involvement in the classes concerned students’ preparation for the class and specifically for the seminars. The instructional methods implemented as a part of discussion pedagogy provided students with meaningful choices and options, leading them to prepare for class in very active ways. The second impact on student involvement in the classes concerned students’ overall involvement in the classroom community. The use of autonomy-supportive strategies, including 1) non-controlling language, 2) instructional patience, and 3) acceptance of student expression, led students to actively participate in class (Assor et al., 2002, 2005; Reeve, 2006, 2009). As a result of the changes in preparation for class and the increase in classroom participation, the learning environment transformed into a community of learners where students developed a better understanding of themselves and their classmates.

The use of authoritarian and teacher-centered methods of instruction can have various impacts on students within a given learning environment. As McQuillan (2005) suggests, learning environments that predominantly utilize teacher-centered, controlling methods of instruction can lead to student passivity and subordination. It is not uncommon for teachers of AP courses to utilize these methods of instruction in response to pressures they experience to cover the curriculum in a specified time frame. At times these teacher-centered approaches can take precedence to student engagement. As a result of teachers’ use of controlling methods of instruction, students’ psychological needs (e.g. autonomy, competence, and relatedness) may not be met.
According to Oldfather and Thomas (1998), students’ perceived degree of satisfaction to their needs could dictate their intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) posit that intrinsic motivation is “the innate, natural propensity to engage one’s interests and exercise one’s capacities, and in so doing, to seek and conquer optimal challenges” (p. 43). When students perceive their needs as being satisfied, they are more likely to become engaged and seek out challenging opportunities relative to a given goal. The findings of this action research study show that the implementation of discussion pedagogy in two AP European History courses led students to perceive aspects of satisfaction to their psychological needs; thus, we might expect students to become more engaged and to seek out challenging opportunities.

The first sub-question that guided the study concerned how students actually experienced discussion pedagogy. The use of seminars, with meaningful texts and central questions, had an impact on students’ satisfaction with their class experiences. Students were provided options in all of the seminars, which ranged from being given a choice in how they wrote responses to the central questions to their selection of sources and texts that would guide the seminars. These changes supported both students’ procedural and cognitive autonomy. Students experienced discussion pedagogy given the changes implemented in the class including the following, 1) the way students prepared for class, 2) the level and manner of student involvement in class, and 3) the development of a learning community in the class. Findings related to each of these three areas are presented next.
**Student experience of discussion pedagogy: Preparation for the class.** The data suggests that the implementation of discussion pedagogy caused students to prepare in ways different than they did prior to the intervention. The data also suggests changes in students’ desire to know more on the given topics. The changes in student preparation for the seminars might have been a result of students experiencing enhanced satisfaction regarding their autonomy (control or agency) and competence (adeptness). In particular, discussion pedagogy used instructional methods that enabled students’ cognitive autonomy. This was achieved by giving students opportunities to:

- Find multiple solutions to problems
- Justify solutions for the purpose of sharing expertise
- Formulate personal goals to correspond with interest (Stefanou et al., 2004, p. 101).

The implementation of discussion pedagogy was intended to provide students with an array of learning opportunities and activities to promote student motivation. Prior to the intervention, a typical instructional plan would include students being assigned material from the course textbook to read prior to the next day’s class. In the subsequent class, I would lecture on topics covered in the readings. In these activities, students were the receivers of the historical information that was being transmitted.

In eight years of teaching AP European History, I have been regularly frustrated by students’ inconsistency in their reading of the assigned texts. I implemented many techniques (e.g. unannounced reading quizzes, additional assignments, etc.) to encourage change in students’ behavior, and at times some of these methods were successful. However, these
pressure-laden methods only proved effective for intermittent periods of time. Even with the use of such methods, some students were still unprepared, unwilling, or unable to participate when questions were asked of them during a lecture. In many cases, I attributed blame to a lack of effort on the part of the students in the class.

Students justified their choices, at times, not to read the textbook selections. Two students, both multi-sport athletes enrolled in multiple AP courses, spoke during the deliberation of December 12, 2014, about the struggle to maintain a balance among school, extra-curricular activities, and their lives outside of school. Based on the work of Parker (2006) deliberations serve as a part of the discussion pedagogy to allow students to discuss and decide on courses of action that could be taken relative to a problem or emerging issue. In this instance, the deliberation that took place emerged from a discussion regarding educational practices and reform made in Great Britain during the late-19th century. As a result of this discussion, student deliberation turned to their experiences in their AP courses. Kenneth discussed the stresses he faces in balancing sports and grades and AP courses. Further, he discussed how he felt that teachers were unaware of some of the struggles that students in AP courses face. He spoke about how he believed teachers viewed students in AP classes as being there by choice. Other students supported Kenneth’s claim, explaining that they have to either take the AP courses or face a reduction in the weighted grade-point average through enrollment in a regular or honors course. Savannah also spoke about the pressure of doing work in conjunction with volleyball. She explained how she would sleep for a few hours after practice or a game and then get up at 4 a.m. to complete her
assignments. From her perspective, the end result is about simply completing the assignment – actual comprehension of the material basically becomes a secondary goal.

Comments by Kenneth and Savannah portrayed how they were overwhelmed by the workload in their AP courses. This forced them to make decisions about which assignments they would complete. In their interviews, Mae and Michael spoke about having to make choices in the work that they did. They both admitted to not completing my reading assignments on a regular basis. Elizabeth and Suzanne, during their interviews, suggested that the combination of content in the textbook readings and the uncertainty of what to focus on was really overwhelming. Elizabeth stated, in regards to the nightly reading, “I was just like, why bother reading the book if you’re [the teacher] going to tell us everything in lecture.” This comment suggests that students were making strategic decisions to manage their academic and extra-curricular workload.

The implementation of discussion pedagogy changed the way many students prepared for the class and, thus, the way in which they experienced the class. The curricular changes made during the intervention encouraged student self-determination and led to students changing the way they prepared for class. Of the twelve students interviewed, only Nicholas and Alexander said that the time they committed to preparing for seminars was unchanged by comparison to pre-intervention. While his time commitment was mostly unaffected, Alexander did explain how he would seek out additional readings online in preparation for class – something he did not do prior to the discussion pedagogy. Alexander explained how preparing for the seminars caused him to seek out new information in order “to find better
ways to reinforce my opinion.” Moreover, the change in his preparation and his additional research allowed him to craft arguments when opportunities for rebuttal occurred during the seminars.

While Nicholas suggested that he did not experience a significant change in his preparation, other students interviewed spoke about how they changed the way they prepared for class in comparison to pre-intervention. Ricki described how the time she spent preparing for the seminars increased. Additionally, she explained how her thinking changed during her preparation for the seminars. Ricki described how she went from reading, note-taking, and memorizing facts prior to the intervention to actually developing and formulating ideas on the readings about which she could speak during the seminars. In her interview, Ricki said, “I can remember the stuff [from the seminars] more so than I can the rest of the class. The rest of the class was memorization but the seminars, you were making the ideas yourself.” Both Kelly and Elizabeth discussed how the seminars changed the way they prepared for class. Kelly described the changes in her preparation in some depth.

When I would do the reading, sometimes if I saw a key point, I was like, I could probably make a really good point about this part…rather than the fear of being called on. If we’re having a class discussion, I’m going to want to throw my mind out there [so] that everybody can get a little piece of what I’m thinking.

Elizabeth explained that her preparation changed because the central questions narrowed her focus. “I can go deeper into that” she further explained, “most of the time it was really
interesting so I found myself looking them up online and just looking for different pieces of information.”

**Student experience of discussion pedagogy: Involvement in the class.** McQuillan (2005) found that teacher-centered and authoritarian approaches to teaching have the potential to create learning environments in which students can become passive and subordinate. Such passivity and subordination can lead to students experiencing a reduced sense of control or agency, which, in turn, can impede a student’s intrinsic motivation. Analysis of the data collected in this research study suggested that the implementation of discussion pedagogy impacted student involvement in the class. Students who did not actively participate in class prior to the intervention did so for different reasons. In asking students during interviews about their lack of involvement prior to the intervention, Bethann and Elizabeth cited being shy and intimated respectively while Brittany and Suzanne discussed their concerns about being “wrong” in front of their classmates.

Bethann explained how the seminars caused her to want to become involved during class. While Bethann said she enjoyed the lectures because they were unique by comparison to other AP courses and would help prepare her for college, she thought the seminars provided her with an opportunity to go “further in depth in certain articles and parts of history.” Bethann became involved in the seminar more quickly than other previously reserved students. In field notes from December 16, 2014, I wrote “good start to the conversation [but] carried by the usual suspects.” By “usual suspects” I was referring to students who normally participated prior to the intervention. On that same date I also wrote
that some students, including Bethann, who typically did not participate began to do so. Bethann explained that her independent search for additional information caused her to develop her “own point of view and understanding of the concepts.” She explained that her increased participation was prompted by a classmates’ opinion with which she disagreed. Bethann indicated that she felt strongly about what was said by her classmate, causing her to share her point of view. Interestingly, Bethann also stated that the seminars caused her to learn and participate without concern for the grade that she would earn; she increased her involvement because she was truly interested and because she wanted to participate for herself. As a result of the seminars and the choices they offered students, Bethann developed her own thoughts on subjects of study that she wanted to share.

Elizabeth’s preparation for the seminars also involved seeking out additional documents and artifacts. Elizabeth found herself looking for additional related information regarding the central question, “and just looking for pieces of information.” I noted Elizabeth’s first contribution to a seminar occurring on December 16, 2014. The topic of the seminar was imperialism. During that seminar, Alexander actually made a claim that suggested that it was unfair of us in the modern-day to vilify the colonizers of the 19th century. Regarding this statement, I wrote in my field notes how “the air just got sucked out of the room.” While many students appeared to be taken aback by the statement, Elizabeth was the first to speak out. While she disagreed with Alexander’s statement, she did agree with the concept he was trying to present. She talked about the fact that there is competition between moral obligation and individual ability as it relates to our own lives and to history.
“While it may be our job to try and change the world,” she said, “it may not be possible” (Classroom recordings, December 16, 2014). Essentially, she was questioning what individuals in society could do to bring about change. This was a big step for Elizabeth. I noted that her voice was “trembling as she shared her personal statement,” (Field notes, December 16, 2014). Elizabeth explained how relieved she was in hearing “more people had the same opinion…[it] gave me more confidence to speak out more.”

In addition to Elizabeth, Brittany and Suzanne also described their lack of confidence and fear of being wrong during class as the reasons for their relative silence and lack of participation. Brittany first participated during the seminar dealing with the causes of World War I through her reference of the “Hammer and Anvil” speech by Chancellor Bülow of Germany. Brittany got involved in the discussion because she received confirmation that her ideas were being well received by her classmates. She explained, “Well, it felt good because…my answer was actually right. Having the additional material kind of forced me to actually look even more in depth.”

Suzanne, who explained that the lecture-based approach was too much for her, took longer to participate than others. Suzanne became involved because she liked the new seminar approach to class. She thought the use of a central question was also helpful. It “wasn’t just one clear-cut, fact-based question; it was more open-ended, and there was more room for discussion,” Suzanne explained. In addition to her desire to participate, discussion pedagogy necessitated her involvement because, as she said, she “did not want to miss
anything.” Suzanne explained that she felt a greater individual responsibility to more thoroughly prepare in order to participate in the seminars.

**Student experience of discussion pedagogy: Community in the class.** The implementation of discussion pedagogy led to the development of a community-like learning environment for the students. The data suggested that students’ sense of relatedness to their classmates and the teacher was impacted as a result of discussion pedagogy. This developed, in part, through the comfort they experienced within the classroom. Nicholas spoke in-depth about the comfort level he experienced as a result of the seminars. He said, “You felt a lot more comfortable saying what was on your mind…you always have that insecurity with what you know and what other people are going to judge you upon [and] based upon how you feel about a subject.” This is an important aspect of the learning experiences that some students have in AP courses. Students who take multiple AP courses are often in classes with the same people. As one student put it, “AP courses are a big academic clique. We only see the same kids in every one of our classes.” Despite students taking multiple AP classes together, students are rarely provided with opportunities to develop a learning community.

The development of a learning community during the discussion pedagogy was evident in every interview conducted for this study. For Kenneth and Suzanne, they spoke about how the use of discussion pedagogy changed the learning environment for them on a basic and practical level. Prior to the seminars, both students admitted that they did not know the majority of their classmates’ names. As a result of the seminars, Kenneth was able to “put a voice and a face to fellow students as to where they [his classmates] were sitting.” When
Suzanne began following the discussions more closely, she indicated that she also began to learn her classmates’ names out of necessity; she wanted to be able to mention her classmates by name when building on their responses.

Ricki spoke about how the most beneficial aspect of the intervention was learning more about her classmates. For her, the seminars “formulated more of a community structure within the class, because you knew what someone’s argument would be after a while. It helped you to…ingrain them [classmates’ beliefs] into your own thinking.” Students also cited a sense of competition that developed during the seminars. Michael explained how students in the class wanted to defend their respective position and had to prepare in a more in-depth manner in order to do so. For Michael, the shift from the teacher-driven methods reduced the amount of anxiety and stress some students felt with the class. Kenneth, in his interview, expressed how the experience was academically liberating. He continued by saying that he felt more people were becoming accepting of one another as a result of the intervention.

While all of the students interviewed discussed how the class felt more like a community or a family, Michelle brought up several interesting points that articulated how the development of a learning community occurred. Michelle, who periodically participated in class prior to the intervention, stated that the seminars allowed her to go into greater depth with the content which helped her develop “a more educated opinion on different historical events and history in general.” She also stated that her interest increased. Like Michael, Michelle commented on how many of her classmates would attempt to compete with each
other in an effort to, “come up with the better questions.” Additionally, she discussed how
the ideas and opinions she developed would be constructed based on how she interpreted her
classmates’ ideas. This was a unique opportunity for Michelle and her classmates:

I think it feels really nice because a lot of people don’t like to take that step. I
think a class who does that, they’re going to learn more. I think it helped us
get closer in that sense and also just to broaden [our] understanding and just
think that it’s okay that I’m different. It’s okay that I have the same opinion. It
makes you more open-minded to different suggestions going on.

The communal learning environment students experienced gave them the opportunity to
learn from each other. Students like Kenneth believed the experience of learning from your
peers was unique. He described his experience when he said,

You would ask a question that was very important to the conversation and
then you [the teacher] let us take it away. I think we kind of taught ourselves
sometimes…It was back-and-forth, and I would learn from other students. It’s
just weird to think about you learning from your peers along with learning
from your teachers. I thought it was pretty interesting.

The data suggested that students’ levels of interest was impacted by the sources and the
related central questions which, for some, caused changes in their preparation for the
seminars. The choices and options provided to students through discussion pedagogy appear
to have enhanced students’ motivation to participate in the seminars. The increased
participation of students during the seminars created a communal learning environment where students began to learn from and transform the ideas of their classmates.

**Students developed a sense of relatedness.** A second major finding that emerged from analysis of the data collected in this study was that students experienced an enhanced sense of relatedness as a result of the implementation of discussion pedagogy. Students in AP courses experience unique learning opportunities coupled with intense pressures to perform on summative, standardized tests. During the December 12, 2014, deliberation, which emerged from a lecture discussing educational reform in 19th-century Great Britain, students in Class B spoke about some of the pressures they experienced in AP courses. Students described their concerns regarding pressures such as their grade-point averages and college admission as well as pressure to enroll in courses that would improve their high school grade-point average. As a result, students tended to enroll in more AP courses. Further, they spoke about the pressures of maintaining a balance between school and other activities and the overwhelming work load in some courses. What stood out was how students perceived their relationship with their AP teachers. Many of the students perceived a divide between themselves and their teachers. Further, students spoke about what they viewed as a lack of awareness on the part of teachers of their students’ learning experiences and their unwillingness to take the time to thoroughly and thoughtfully address questions and ideas that students presented during class.

Analysis of the data collected during the study suggested that the implementation of discussion pedagogy positively impacted students’ perceived sense of relatedness to the
teacher. Relatedness, according to Schunk et al. (2008), refers to the need “to belong to a

group, and is sometimes called a need for belongingness” (pp. 248-249). Further, Stefanou et

al. (2004) describe relatedness as involving “students’ need for belonging, personal support,

and security in their school relationships” (p. 99). Relatedness is one of the three innate

psychological needs which can be facilitated or frustrated in given educational contexts (Deci

& Ryan, 1985; Guay & Vallerand, 1997; Stefanou et al., 2004). For example, relatedness can

be frustrated through the use of controlling and authoritarian as well as teacher-centered

methods of instruction. A reduced sense of student relatedness can prevent students’ from

meeting their learning goals.

Analysis of the data collected showed that the implementation of discussion

pedagogy supported students’ need for relatedness among students and in teacher-student

relationships. Niemec and Ryan (2009) describe how the satisfaction of one’s need for

relatedness can facilitate the process of internalization. “People tend to internalize and accept

as their own the values and practices of those to whom they feel, or want to feel, connected

and …experience a sense of belonging,” according to Niemec & Ryan (2009, p. 139).

Relative to the classroom setting, students’ need for relatedness can be supported when their

values and ideas are respected. Discussion pedagogy provided students with opportunities to

participate in open discourse where their values and ideas could be exchanged free of any

external controls, pressures, or measures. Additionally, discussion pedagogy created

opportunities for students to talk more and, thus, more regularly demonstrate their knowledge

and show their competence. Students experiences with other AP courses is explored in the
next section followed by a description of how students’ need for relatedness was supported through discussion pedagogy as well as how students perceived a healthy change in the teacher-student relationship.

*Satisfaction of students’ needs were generally frustrated in other AP courses.* The data collected in this study indicated that the satisfaction of students’ basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were regularly frustrated in other AP courses due, in part, to the instructional practices that teachers utilize. In their writings and discussions, and again in the interviews, students indicated that their time for questions, feedback, and/or interrogation of the content presented was generally minimized by the teachers’ frequent use of these instructional practices. Further, students complained about teachers’ use of instructional practices that were overwhelming and focused too heavily on disconnected evaluations. Thus, students generally perceived that their voice and choice relative to teachers’ instructional practices were minimized, causing discontent for some students in their AP learning experiences.

The frustration of students’ needs was often a result of the curricular requirements that guide and direct AP courses. Teachers of AP history courses are required to cover a great deal of content in a specified period of time, in turn, causing preparation for the annual AP exam to take precedence to meaningful opportunities for students. The limiting of teachers and students’ ability to meaningfully delve deeply into historical content can frustrate students’ needs and the overall AP learning experience. Parker et al. (2013) have discussed “breadth-depth” tensions that exist in AP classes and their potential to “drain advanced courses of the
kinds of intellectual work they require” (p. 1424). Tensions such as those described by Parker et al. (2013) also demonstrate the undermining of teachers’ autonomy that can lead to a draining of their creative energy while also becoming reliant on controlling and “extrinsically focused strategies” relative to their instructional practices (Niemec & Ryan, 2009, p. 140).

The deliberation of December 12, 2014, provided insight into students concerned about their AP course experience. This deliberation, which emerged from our discussion about educational practices in Europe during the 19th century, provided students in Class B with an opportunity to talk about the instructional disparity that existed in different AP courses. As the deliberation took shape, I pressed students to not only discuss their respective experiences in AP courses but also to provide thoughtful ideas in order to shape possible solutions. I asked students to describe what they believed they should be doing in their AP courses. In order to further understand students’ experiences in their AP courses, students were asked to write about their 1) experiences (positive and negative) in AP courses, 2) beliefs on the purpose(s) of AP courses, and 3) thoughts on what an ideal AP course would entail.

Students opened up and discussed how the abundance of work (e.g. worksheets) coupled with the use of PowerPoint-driven note-taking were frustrating their AP experience. Essentially, students were describing how the development of their competence was not being supported. One student responded that the majority of her experience in AP classes had been filled with copious amounts of bookwork. She later described how her assigned coursework made her feel as if she were back in middle school. Other students made
reference in their writing to the fact that they wanted their AP experiences to prepare them for their college experience. During the deliberation, Michael described how he wanted his AP experiences to provide him with “a real look at what college [will] actually be like, instead of notes on a PowerPoint.” One student wrote that she did not believe AP classes should “be all about worksheets and memorizing vocab.” In her response, Mae wrote that she wanted her AP experiences to be less about merely memorizing facts. She further wrote, “I guess I’ve always wanted an AP class to be something that emphasized the conceptual aspects of the course and that had me think a little beyond just the answers.” In their interviews, both Elizabeth and Alexander stated that they experienced AP history courses that included a “bunch of coloring worksheets.”

During the deliberation of December 12, 2104, one student stated that nearly all of her AP classes used PowerPoint presentations for the purpose of note taking. The result, according to her, was that “students are learning to memorize rather than retain.” Kenneth believed that the abundant use of PowerPoint presentations occurred in AP classes because it was a “safe bet for the teacher to know that if they miss something….it’s on the board anyway.” In the writing assignment, one student described her favorite AP classes as those where students have “control of the work and discussion.” She continued by explaining how the teacher sought books that would pique students’ interest and would support the discussions that occurred in class. This type of student control supports student autonomy through the introduction of “learning activities that are optimally challenging, thereby
allowing students to test and expand their academic capabilities” (Niemec & Ryan, 2009, p. 139).

Students who reported disliking worksheets and notes from PowerPoint slides were also concerned about teachers who did not provide them with time to ask questions or to question the material being presented to them. The teacher-centered instructional methods used by teachers provided students with a “superficial” level of information, according to Mae, where students simply need to know the facts for summative assessments. She wrote about how she wanted her AP classes to push her toward “higher-level thinking.” Brittany and Suzanne, in their interviews, spoke about how teachers who use those methods tend to be more elusive in the answering of students’ questions. The AP courses about which students spoke positively, both in interviews and during the deliberation, appeared to share a common trait in that teachers provided them adequate time to discuss and ask questions coupled with meaningful learning opportunities. In providing students time to ask questions and receive informational feedback, students were describing strategies that could be utilized to support both students’ autonomy and relatedness. Kenneth described how he thinks students in AP classes should be taught “more like adults than children, which I think is what the AP program is designed to be.” The notion of being taught and treated more like adults would include teachers and students engaging a mutual and genuine respect, particularly where students feel the teacher values him or her (Niemec & Ryan, 2009).

Students experienced support of their need for relatedness through discussion pedagogy. The data analyzed in this study suggested that implementation of discussion
pedagogy created more authentic teacher-student relationships by altering the hierarchy within the learning environment. The existing classroom hierarchy in this research prior to the intervention reflected the predominant use of teacher-centered instructional methods including lecture, making the teacher the gatekeeper of information. In this context, students learned as the passive receivers of information. While some students might have perceived the lectures positively, the predominant use of lecture implicitly created a divide between the students and me. For some students it might have caused a divide between the students and the content. As Davis (2003) suggests, interaction between adults and children (e.g. teacher and students), “may shape students’ social motivational beliefs and, in turn, their beliefs about their academic and social competence, their values, and their pursuit of academic and social goals in the classroom” (pp. 208-209). Thus, the predominant use of teacher-centered methods of instruction were potentially impeding some students’ academic and social goals, thus reducing their sense of relatedness.

Further, the use of stand-and-deliver methods demonstrated lower support for student autonomy. Teachers who are high in support of student autonomy inquire about student needs and wants and respond to questions from students while trying to create a student-centered environment (Reeve et al., 1999; Stefanou et al., 2004). The discussion pedagogy implemented during the intervention reduced some of the hierarchical barriers that might have existed for some students in the class. Additionally, it caused a change in how students perceived their respective roles in the learning environment leading to an increase in agency. Several students perceived change in the roles they were playing in the classroom because of
the increased amount of time that students were allowed to discuss content with each other. Nicholas described how the class before the intervention was based on the teacher “lecturing to us, and we would have a couple of questions…and you’d respond to us.” Discussion pedagogy caused Nicholas to be more active and comfortable in the class,

I felt a lot more active and a lot more ready to be able to say what was on my mind, and it seemed like my classmates were at the same time. A lot more people began speaking up, and when it carried on between student-and-student discussion more than [between] student and teacher.

Nicholas echoed this sentiment in his interview saying, “we [the students] were leading everything.” Kenneth described how these changing roles were analogous to his historical interpretation of feudalism where the students typically view themselves as the peasants and the teacher is the king. Kenneth’s experience with discussion pedagogy “made the gap smaller,” where he recognized that the teacher “was still in charge but whatever I say you actually care about.” He also described how students “just wanted to participate [because] they weren’t afraid of consequences.” Michelle spoke about most of her class experiences including doing some of the same tasks as she did in the 8th grade where “You just takes your notes, do your homework, you get a passing grade.” Michelle’s experience with discussion pedagogy changed how she viewed her role, “I think with what we did [discussion pedagogy], it really just makes the student able to go up to the teacher and say, ‘I really don’t agree with that’.”
The implementation of discussion pedagogy was not a seamless process. In my reflective journal of December 15, 2014, I wrote that using discussion pedagogy would be a challenge for me because it would require me to be more reserved in my instructional approach. In an effort to afford students the opportunity to make meaningful connections to the material, I had to take a step back from topics where I would normally take and express a strong historical view (e.g. imperialism, war, and peace negotiations) and provide them the time to develop their own historical perspective.

The initial results of the LCQ, prior to the intervention, showed that students in both classes agreed that they did experience the type of agency associated with autonomy-supportive strategies. However, comments written in response to the LCQ’s items also suggested that my methods of instruction and the learning environment could be characterized as “intimidating” or “nagging.” In fact, Elizabeth stated in her interview that she rarely chose to speak in class because she was intimidated about being “wrong.” The notion of the learning environment being “intimidating” could have been exacerbated through my desire to have students view me as the expert while also demanding that they complete assignments and writings in ways that I deemed appropriate. The result of the demands and limitations I placed on students might have created, for some students, a learning environment that was more coercive and disengaging than challenging.

During the first day of the implementation of discussion pedagogy in Class A, I wrote in my field notes that, “students are intently working and writing on prompt.” I went on to describe how three male students in the same class, who typically appeared disengaged in the
normal lecture-based approach, were intently reading and writing. I wrote, “Is this because this format is novel? Is this sustainable?” While some students dove into the change immediately, it took others more time before they chose to participate. Brittany, in her interview, described me as a teacher who was laid back and who was really open to discussing topics and questions even before the use of discussion pedagogy. Her initial reservations to participating were a result of her own uneasiness with the material and her concern about being “right.” She described her experience with the seminars as being “not like other classes…where it’s kind of one answer [and] moving on – that’s it.” Likewise, Suzanne spoke that one of the “small things” that is important to her is when teachers take the time to answer students’ questions. While Suzanne never implied that I was dismissive of her questions, she did articulate that many teachers in her AP courses were, which for her, reduced the cultivation of a positive learning experience. Like Brittany and Suzanne, Michelle was “a bit hesitant to jump in” because she was not used to the freer flow of discussion that existed during the seminars. However, she discussed, in her interview, that the increase in choices and latitude in learning opportunities caused her to take ownership of her own learning. She stated the seminars gave her and her classmates the ability to ask the questions that they wanted to ask. Later in her interview she remarked, “I think it [the class] was a place where you wanted to be. It was a great learning environment.”

For Class A, in particular, the seminar on the “Willy-Nicky Telegrams” pushed hesitant students to participate. In my reflective journal from December 18, 2014, after a seminar in Class A that dealt with the “Willy-Nicky Telegrams,” I felt an overwhelming
sense that the students were intentionally “stonewalling” me. During this class there were several drawn out periods of silence. As I sat in a student desk centered in the middle of the room among the students (as I did for nearly all of the seminars), I felt anxious and disappointed by the lack of participation. When instances like this occurred in previous classes, I would have used more coercive language to prompt students to talk to me. As Reeve and Halusic (2009) suggest regarding how teachers can be more supportive of students’ autonomy, it was important for me to not use language or directives that would leave students with the impression that I was, in Reeve and Halusic’s (2009) words, “being insensitive to their concerns” (p. 150). My familiarity with Reeve and Halusic’s (2009) research led me to use re-directive language that was not pressure-laden. Thus, I attempted to promote student participation by saying to the entire class in a calm tone, “It is really okay to participate” and “It really is okay to discuss things” (Classroom recording, December 18, 2014). Shortly after my statements, students began to volunteer participation with significantly greater frequency. Further, after these statements, Brittany began to participate for the first time. She raised her hand and discussed her interpretation of how the previous document (the “Hammer and Anvil” speech by Bülow) related to our current seminar.

The data collected suggested that the use of re-directive language led students to become more comfortable in the learning environment. While the use of coercive and pressure-laden directives might cause some to participate, it also had the potential to have the opposite impact on others. In her interview, Michelle discussed how many students feel uncomfortable in challenging and questioning adults. For her, the ability freely ask questions
and feel comfortably in doing so, “is a great skill to have because students tend to be really scared of teachers and adults.” She continued by stating,

You’re going to be an adult soon so it’s not conducive at all for trying to raise up adults. So I think it really helped to let people grow a little bit this semester and just learn that it’s okay to have questions.

Several statements made by Kenneth during his interview supported Michelle’s ideas. As noted earlier, Kenneth viewed teacher-student relations like a feudal society with students playing to role of peasants and teachers as the king. Michael explained that the questions asked of the students during the seminars seemed to reflect a genuine desire on my part to hear what he and his classmates had to say. Kelly explained how the seminars did not make it feel like “teacher is God and we are just a bunch of grunt students.”

While students were still, at times, hesitant to participate, the seminars resulted in an almost immediate change in students’ body language when compared to lectures. Suzanne, who initially believed that the intervention was nothing more than a gimmick, changed in terms of her body language. This change led me to believe that she “wanted” to speak and engage. Her eyes were up and focused, and she was focused on what was being said in the seminar. Typically, Suzanne appeared disengaged and apathetic; often slouched in her desk with her eyes down focusing on her desktop. I wrote in my field notes on December 18, 2014, that even “she [Suzanne] has eyes up and is attentive.” As I found out later in an interview, Suzanne’s often body language and reserved nature is a result of her processing just the “right” thing to say. Students also noticed the change in some of their classmates.
During her interview, Kelly explained how her “little corner” of the classroom, consisting of Kelly and three other classmates (one of which was Ricki), interacted in the small group before they became comfortable in participating with the rest of the class. She explained, “We would be listening to whoever was talking in one ear and asking one another about the seminar.” Kelly demonstrated a desire to participate in the larger class setting by slightly raising her hand. She would then put it down before she could speak. I noticed her “little hand raise” and asked why she did not participate right away. Like many other students, she cited self-doubt as the catalyst.

Watching students develop their stances on a given topic was a powerful experience. However, it was not simply about the fact that students were participating. It was the fact that certain students who traditionally did not participate began to do so. Bethann spoke about this during her interview. When asked her about the changes to the learning environment, she said,

There was definitely a difference because at first no one would really talk, including myself. Then after a while we got to use to each other [and] more people began talking. Some people I had not heard a word from before, when class first started, and then they were sharing their views. You get to learn more about your peers; it opened up and it was like we were one big family.

Further, and even more importantly, students were engaging in meaningful discussions, which were unlike anything experienced before in my classroom. Students were willing to share a part of themselves. Kelly spoke in her interview how the seminars caused her to
“want to throw her mind out there…[so] that everybody could get a little piece of what I’m thinking.” Students discussed and listened to each other. I listened and asked questions when I thought of something that may aid in the discussion. As a result, the students gained agency in the transmission and transformation of knowledge construction during the seminars and deliberations. Over time, these changes began to transform the teacher-student relationship and the structural hierarchy of the classrooms.

**Students perceived a healthy teacher-student relationship.** There is a great deal of scholarship available regarding the roles that teachers’ play in the teacher-student relationship. Many perspectives note that teachers and their behaviors have the ability to shape and transform the quality of teacher-student relationships. Teachers can determine the quality of the relationship through: 1) their use of physical space, 2) their expectations of students’ academic successes, 3) their allocation of attention, and 4) their attempts to create a supportive climate in the classroom (Davis, 2003; Minuchin & Shapiro, 1983). As Davis posits, “good” teacher-student relationships are those where “teachers are viewed as supporting children’s motivation to explore as well as their regulation of social, emotional, and cognitive skills” (p. 209). Students in this research study were encouraged to explore content relative to the historical questions and were supported using discussion pedagogy that aligned with autonomy-supportive instructional strategies as outlined by Stefanou et al. (2004).

Post-intervention LCQ scores for Class B, suggest that utilizing discussion pedagogy strengthened students’ perceived autonomy support, thus creating a positive environment for
student learning. (adverse weather conditions prevented me from administering the LCQ to Class A, thus post-intervention results on the LCQ are only from Class B). With the exception of Item 14, all of the item mean scores increased (See Table 4). The data showed that students experienced an enhanced sense of relatedness with their teacher. This proved particularly true with respect to the role students played within the learning environment and contrasted with other experiences that students were having. One student suggested, during the deliberation of December 12, 2014, that some AP courses and the overall “standardization of schools” and teachers’ efforts toward meeting those standards have reduced her love for learning.

Teacher-student relationships develop given the interpersonal dynamics that exist between teachers and students but also, in some cases, develop as a result of the given subject and content being taught. Nicholas confirmed this difference in relationships as it pertained to his history and English courses. He described his history and English courses as being more independent and lecture-based. Nicholas reported that in these classes he was told exactly what knowledge was necessary to meet a prescribed objective. He added, “It takes a lot on the outside [on student’s time outside of the classroom] to really retain the information.” Conversely, Nicholas stated that the teacher-student relationships he had in his math and science classes tended to be more collaborative, as he put it, the “teacher with student” rather than “teacher and student.” Students also viewed the importance of the teacher-student relationship in terms of the age of the student. In the writing assignment associated with the deliberation, a student from Class B described this relationship.
In regards to student-teacher relationship, if we are striving towards a more positive outcome, an understanding between the teacher and student is important. However, if we are striving to be like college, it is unlikely that we would be so involved with our professors; therefore, it wouldn’t portray college well.

The discussion pedagogy utilized in this research created a learning environment that supported understanding between the teacher and students and power sharing in the classes. Nicholas suggested that the discussion pedagogy repositioned the hierarchy of the class. During his interview, he discussed how students, “were asking questions and we were leading everything…so we became the Christopher Dagues [the teacher].” The suggestion that he and his classmates became the “Christopher Dagues” was an empowering experience, allowing the students to serve as the gatekeepers of information. Kelly confirmed Nicholas’ suggestion during her interview. She felt, even before the intervention, that I treated her and the class in an adult-like manner, which she welcomed. “Unlike most teachers, you actually saw us as people,” she said. Additionally, she stated that using discussion pedagogy caused a shift in the existing power dynamic of the class, “It set us on an equal platform I guess.”

During our interview, Ricki also pointed out that the intervention caused the students to become the leaders. She followed up, “It [discussion pedagogy] was different because when you were doing lectures and stuff it was quite obvious you were the leader of it. When we went to seminars, it felt like myself and three other people were the leaders…and you were just kind of the sheep herder.”
The objective of this research was to explore how utilizing discussion pedagogy would support and promote student autonomy. Students identified a greater sense of relatedness to their teacher. During the seminars, students were provided with opportunities to ask questions and interject their respective insight while also providing meaningful learning opportunities. The utilization of discussion, while not seamless, supported both student autonomy and a greater sense of relatedness. Through the use of seminars, students were given the opportunity to lead and shape discussions by asking questions of the teacher as well as of each other. While the lectures and discussions used prior to the intervention were perceived as being enjoyable and unique to some, my role as the transmitter of historical truth did, in fact, alienate some students from participating. Further, the relative reduction in my leadership role allowed for students to take charge and provide meaningful insight they found in the selected texts and central questions.

**Student experience regarding historical thinking skills and historical content.**

Recent curricular revisions to AP social studies have resulted in a narrowing of the content covered and an expansion of opportunities for students to go in-depth with content. New curricular frameworks for AP European History give students the opportunity, “to practice history by explicitly stressing the development of historical thinking skills while learning about the past” (College Board, 2013, p. 3). The College Board has also outlined four historical thinking skills for integration into AP history courses, including 1) chronological reasoning, 2) comparison and contextualization, 3) crafting historical arguments from historical evidence, and 4) historical interpretation and synthesis (College Board, 2013, p. 3).
The discussion pedagogy strategies implemented in this action research study provided students with opportunities to use evidence from history to support arguments and, in some cases, to apply what was learned to modern-date problems.

Discussion pedagogy promoted change in the ways students experienced historical content. This was done by giving students choices and options on how they wished to learn and evaluate historical content in addition to giving students the opportunity to participate in democratic discussion during the seminars. The seminars associated with discussion pedagogy led some students to connect past events to contemporary times while also recognizing the change and continuity that exists in history. Moreover, students developed, in some cases, more meaningful connections to the given historical content through their respective interests in topics and motivation to seek out additional information. Students experience with discussion pedagogy implemented in the class exhibited the following: 1) students development in crafting historical argumentation was impacted, and 2) students’ interpretation of the historical content was rooted in aspects of presentism and judgment based on moral stances.

Students were encouraged to participate in the discussions associated with the seminars, and they were required to complete written responses to the central questions. In an effort to support student autonomy, I allowed students to write their responses in a manner that they chose (e.g. expository, bulleted note taking, etc.). I did provide students with a rubric in order to analyze the quality of their work. The rubric used to analyze the quality of students’ work was based, in part, on scoring guidelines used to score AP examinations.
Students were graded on a scale of 0 to 7 which coincided with a numeric mark/grade (Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score/Numeric Mark</th>
<th>Indicators of Quality</th>
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<tr>
<td>7 Points (100/100)</td>
<td>1. Thesis explicitly addresses aspects of the central question</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Organization is clear and supports the position</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Uses substantive, specific evidence to support claims/arguments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Writing is well-balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Points (93/100)</td>
<td>1. Thesis explicitly addresses aspects of the central question</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Organization is clear and supports the position</td>
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<td>3. Uses substantive, specific evidence to support claims/arguments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. May contain minor errors and/or stray slightly off topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Points (85/100)</td>
<td>1. Thesis explicitly addresses most aspects of the central question</td>
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<td>2. Organization is clear; Support of/for position is mostly clear</td>
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<td>3. Uses substantive, specific evidence to support claims/arguments</td>
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<td>4. May contain a few detracting errors</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Points (77/100)</td>
<td>1. Thesis mostly explicit; addresses most aspects of the central question</td>
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<td>2. Organization is mostly clear; Support of/for position is mostly clear</td>
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<td>3. May contain a few detracting errors</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-3 Points (69/100)</td>
<td>1. Thesis may not be explicitly addressed; paraphrasing of central question</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Essay may be poorly organized</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Uses little to no valid, substantive pieces of evidence</td>
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<td>0-1 Points (60/100)</td>
<td>1. No discernible attempted thesis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Response is disorganized</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Uses little, if any, relevant evidence</td>
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<td>4. Contains numerous errors.</td>
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Student development of historical argumentation. The College Board (2013) suggests that historical thinking “involves the ability to define and frame a question about the past and to address that question through the construction of an argument” (p. 9). The ability to craft a historical argument presupposes that students are able “to demonstrate the facts” while also recognizing that the facts are “only the raw material of historical thinking” (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000, p. 176). The use of discussion pedagogy required students to develop an “interpretive acumen” that pushed students to look beyond facts, dates, and events, through the use of selected texts and central questions (Wineburg, 2001, p. 51).

The central questions associated with specific seminars set students up to delve into particular aspects of a given topic. The task of reading and processing like an historian is a difficult task, but one that is expected of students in AP history courses. The problem with the task of reading like an historian, according to Schneider (2014), is that students oftentimes read texts and sources in a cursory manner. Students tend to jump directly into describing their feelings on the topic, paying little attention to “what the creator of the document [is] trying to say” (p. 29). As a result of this, students were provided with suggestions on how to read the texts that were provided to them. The suggestions provided to students were congruent to those I provided when teaching students how to execute their writing for the document-based questions (DBQs) they would see on their summative AP exams. Those suggestions included 1) reading the document, 2) paraphrasing and annotating the document, 3) considering the perspective of the author, and 4) writing a brief summary or draft on how the texts relate to the central questions/prompts.
The data analyzed suggested that some students began reading the assigned texts more intently while also seeking out additional information to further craft their respective argument. From the interviews conducted, several students mentioned how they did not frequently keep up with textbook reading prior to implementing discussion pedagogy. In her interview, Bethann said that primarily reading the textbook as a source of information inhibited the creation her own thoughts on a given topic because she accepted the information as a truth that was not in need of further questioning. She explained how she “dreaded the readings [from the textbook] every night…because the textbook is kind of dry.”

Michael’s statements about the readings prior to implementing discussion pedagogy aligned with Bethann’s thoughts. He explained,

I think the textbook readings, generally speaking, are just dry. They’re so dense; they have to fit so much information in. Seeing other readings, like *King Leopold’s Ghost*, about Africa and Belgium [and] their conquests in Africa, the textbook glazes over that. That’s not really talked about because it’s so overshadowed by World War I and what else is going on in the world.

Regarding the readings associated with discussion pedagogy, Kenneth stated, “I don’t know anyone that didn’t do it [readings of selected texts].” Bethann, along with other students interviewed, talked about how they sought out additional information. She explained in her interview, “I actually enjoy[ed] searching and finding articles.” In fact, Mae made reference in her interview, about how she was able to bring her prior knowledge of Ernest Hemingway’s *The Garden of Eden* (1987) to our seminar on World War I. Mae said, the
Students used both the primary and secondary historical sources assigned to and chosen by them to craft their argument in response to the central questions. The central questions were written in an open-ended format to provide students an opportunity to construct responses with less concern for being “right” or “wrong” and more emphasis on analytical and synthetic historical thinking. As Suzanne mentioned, in her interview, that the process of writing in response to the central questions was a unique and surprising experience where she was able to write, in part, about her developing perspective on the topics. She explained how the writing process “was surprising because it was more opinionated…but you had to make sure you had these facts, and you also had to use your own personal opinion.” Suzanne appreciated the topic and the format for the writing assignment saying, “I think it was a combination because it’s just the fact that I didn’t have to sit down with my book and write out facts, like okay, this happened because of this; it was less a report and more of an analysis.”

The central question associated with the first seminar asked students to consider whether or not the actions of imperialists were morally or ethically justified, given that history has often progressed through conquest. After the seminar discussions, students were required to write an argument in response to the central question. Nicholas developed an
argument that suggested conquests throughout history could be evaluated as both morally justified and unjustified. He furthered his argument by explaining how the justification of conquest often relies on a catalyst for the given conquest; specifically, he discussed the common role of religious beliefs and institutions in conquests. Nicholas’ understanding of continuity and change of history was evidenced in his claim that, “Simply because history has been penned by an assembly of unjust conquests does not make future parallels just.”

Alexander also created an argument based, in part, on religion. He wrote that Christianity “was only used as tool of control.” Further, he assigned blame not particularly to institutional religion but to society as a whole. Society was, according to Alexander’s writings, “corrupted by secularism and greed.” He went on to explain how societal success through “rising economies” caused a shift in morality, making “the exploitation of others” acceptable.

Alexander’s argument showed that he was capable of utilizing historical contextualization to craft his argument.

The arguments that student produced following the last seminar also demonstrated students’ progress in their historical thinking relating to argumentation. The last seminar focused on the attempts at peace and settlement in the aftermath of World War I. Like previous central questions, this one had multiple parts and pressed students to analyze and interpret sources in conjunction with their prior knowledge. This question asked students to decide whether they believed the outcomes of the Treaty of Versailles were fair and, if so, for whom. Additionally, students were asked to assess the long-and-short-term impacts of the settlements. One of the most poignant arguments made was by Mae. In her writing, she
initially suggested that the treatment and the provisions placed on Germany after the war should not be viewed as being unfair. She felt that the victors of World War I rightly stripped Germany of all the land they acquired prior to the war. However, in the next paragraph, she wrote that Roderick Phillips’ argument in *Society, State, and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, put a “new spin” on her original thinking. After reading the section concerning the War Guilt Clause located in Article 231, which described how Germany took full blame for the war, she wrote that she became angry. Regarding the long-term impacts, she wrote that she realized that the Treaty of Versailles caused tremendous strain to the German economy and to “German national pride.” She wrote,

> I think the decisions could have been more thoughtful. Germany was given fuel for a grudge as was Russia for being shunned. Regarding the Treaty [of Versailles], the very least that could have been done would be to lower the reparations to an amount that could be reasonably paid off by Germany so that it wouldn’t be economically crippled.

Further, Mae assessed how these decisions led Germany to make decisions that would allow them to reclaim their national pride. These actions, as she pointed out, likely led to World War II.

**Student interpretation of the historical content.** The data collected in the study presented mixed evidence regarding student interpretation of the historical content. Both in discussions associated with the seminars and through writings related to the central questions, students exhibited aspects of historical presentism and judgment based on moral
stances in the development of their historical interpretation. Historical presentism is described as the propensity to interpret the past via modern or presentist terms (Hunt, 2002). Historical interpretations and judgments based on moral stances are, according to Barton and Levstik (2004), evaluations of the past rooted in aspects admiration, condemnation, and remembrance. The development of students’ interpretation, exhibited through presentism and moral judgments, fits under the historical thinking standard of “historical issues analysis and decision making.” This standard suggests that students should

- Identify issues that people have confronted in the past and present,
- Bring historical perspectives to bear on these issues,
- Consider alternative actions people might have taken, and
- Assess the consequences of decisions made (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000, p.177).

Student experiences with disciplinary sources and central questions enabled them to develop their respective interpretations. During seminars, it became evident that particular topics triggered student recognition that previous historical contexts caused people to make decisions and to participate in practices different from the modern-day norm. Student development of historical presentism and moral judgment was most evident during the seminars concerning imperialism and World War I. In particular, students’ interpretations were heightened when they were given the opportunity to select their own sources during the second seminar dealing with the realities of World War I.

*Students’ historical interpretation and European imperialism.* These two seminars focused on the global colonization that took place throughout the better part of the 19th
century – predominantly by European states such as Great Britain and France as well as Belgium. In addition to the readings from the textbook, students were also asked to read excerpts from *King Leopold’s Ghost* (1998) and Joseph Rudyard Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden* (1899). During the first seminar on colonization, the central question asked students to evaluate the decisions made by the European colonizers while also evaluating the ethical and/or moral justifications of their actions.

During the first seminar, it was no surprise to hear students describe their overall disdain for the behavior of those who colonized through any means necessary. Alexander began addressing the central question by saying that while he did not believe that colonizers’ actions were justifiable, whether they were justified or not should not be our concern. In my field notes from December 16, 2014, I wrote how the “initial silence was deafening” in the classroom after he made his claim. While students were apparently stunned, Alexander followed up by saying that “it does not matter if it was morally right because it was socially acceptable” since the exploitation led to prosperity. In this instance, Alexander was confronting issues and decisions in the 19th century that are different from what most people in today’s society consider acceptable. Minutes later, Kenneth stated that if, in fact, we are going to denounce the imperialists, then we must denounce everyone who has conquered another group. He continued by suggesting that as people living an industrialized society, we can actually identify with the imperialists. He also attributed our current technological advancements to those who colonized in the 19th century. While both students likely did not agree with the actions taken, they did recognize the imperialists’ perspective, specifically
their need and desire to compete with other states that were participating in the race for colonization. Alexander also suggested that it was not right for us to demonize Europeans in the 19th century because we did not experience what they experienced. Similarly, a student in Class B claimed that colonization in Africa resulted, in part, from people valuing the rubber being collected in central Africa more than they valued lives of people in that region. This particular seminar demonstrated that students felt a discernible compassion for those who were being conquered. Students’ developing interpretations, rooted in both presentism and moral judgment, was exhibited through their acknowledgment that our passing of judgment on the conquerors was somewhat unfair and unnecessary.

Students also began to contextualize the events that took place during the period of colonization. During his interview, Michael spoke about how he felt that the actions that took place were not addressed adequately in the curriculum or in the textbook. This was a point brought up in the seminar as well. He suggested that all of the events that followed imperialism took attention away from imperialism, including World War I. Savannah suggested that she felt sickened by what she had learned in the readings. She explained, “Realizing that without all of this happening, we would not have the luxury of car tires and the ability to have cars and thinking about we would not have such easy transportation makes me sick.” Savannah went on to explain that she was sickened because of the actions that took place but also because she has actually benefitted from them. During the seminar, Savannah discussed how national pride took precedent over the lives of those conquered. In the discussion, Kenneth built on Savannah’s point, “When I look at these photos, I feel sad. But
even more I feel embarrassed.” In her interview, Michelle explained how she appreciated learning about the atrocities because it was content that was not typically addressed in other history classes that she had taken. For her, the first seminar concerning imperialism demonstrated a reality “that history isn’t always good.” For Mae, the experience of reading and learning about the occurrences in the Congo was horrifying. Further, it caused her to recognize the real-life implications of what happened. As some students mentioned, the structure of discussion pedagogy brought a face to history that they had not previously experienced.

Students’ historical interpretation and World War I. Students developed strong stances given the historical content which was prominent during the seminars discussing the rhetoric and realities of World War I. Understanding the rhetoric and diplomacy that led up to World War I helped students to better understand the decisions made by those who participated in the build up to the war. In discussing the “Willy-Nicky Telegrams,” a series of correspondences between Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and Czar Nicholas II of Russia, students were able to analyze the extent of diplomacy that occurred during the initial stages of the war. Another student mentioned how the first thing she noticed about the telegrams was the ways in which each leader signed the letters. The telegrams were typically signed in an affectionate manner, such as “Your loving cousin, Nicky.” Bethann also mentioned how she felt that the two leaders, on the verge of war, were far too friendly with each other. Other students expressed surprise at the tone of the telegrams and how they were both condescending and concerned regarding the impending war. Another student, who rarely
spoke in class prior to the seminars, explained how he felt the telegrams were for show, and it all seemed pointless. Edwin explained the tone of the telegrams by saying, “It is like going up to someone and cracking your knuckles and asking them about the weather. Then, you go and punch them.” He suggested that the tone and the telegrams were simply necessary to show that each tried to prevent the war – when war was what both really wanted.

During the second seminar that specifically dealt with World War I, students were asked to select sources that represented the realities of the war. Kelly described how the photographs that students selected for the seminar concerning the realities of World War I brought a face to the war. In her previous experiences learning about World War I, Kelly explained she always learned about the numbers associated with the war, specifically the large numbers of casualties. The seminars changed that for her. She explained that the pictures “really put me in their shoes, so to speak. It really got me thinking [about how] this was a devastating war.” She made an additional statement where she realized that the war was really about the people involved – not just one country versus another country.

One of the photographs brought in during the seminar in Class B featured the eyes of a soldier in the trenches during the opening stage of war on the western front. The photograph (See Appendix E) was brought to class by a student and drew sharp opinions from students. With glare of the camera flash on his eyes, his smile, and his helmet askew on his head, most students described how the photograph made them feel that the soldier had gone crazy as a result of his efforts in the war. Elizabeth made another interpretation. “My opinion was that maybe it was just taken at a moment when he was laughing or something.
Everyone gets like that when it happens.” This photograph provided her and others with a far more human connection to the historical events that occurred.

The development of historical interpretation and synthesis is an important historical skill that needs to be fostered in students. Through the use of discussion pedagogy, students were able to engage with sources that are not regularly used in AP history classes. The discussion pedagogy did not inundate students with names, dates, and events that would overwhelm them. Instead, it provided students with opportunities to examine historical content that they could openly discuss and counteract predispositions while attempting to foster a meaningful understanding of those being studied (Brophy & Alleman, 2008; Cooper, 1995; Seefeldt, 1993).

**Conclusion**

Discussion pedagogy impacted the interpersonal dynamics in the classroom leading to students carefully preparing for class and actively participating in class. Students gained agency in their educational experience, affecting the structural hierarchy of the classroom and impacting how students’ perceived who was in control in the classroom. Instead of being passive receivers of information, students were co-constructors of knowledge. Discussion pedagogy supported a sense of relatedness between and among their classmates. Students began to learn about their classmates, ultimately leading to the development of a communal learning environment. Lastly, students practiced important historical thinking skills through the crafting of historical argumentation while developing historical perspectives for how people in the past handled situations and the consequences associated with those decisions.
CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Implications

AP history courses have long aimed to set rigorous standards in preparing high school students for college while also being viewed as an “incontrovertible indicator of educational excellence” (Sadler, 2010, p. 3). In recent years, the College Board has implemented curricular reforms to AP U.S. History, AP World History, and AP European History in an attempt to reconcile the incongruence between the rhetoric and reality of AP social studies courses. These reforms address the lack of diversity in the historical narrative in forming the courses and the lack pedagogical flexibility for teachers that result, in part, from existing breadth-depth tensions (Parker et al., 2011; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). AP history curricular reform suggests that traditional and teacher-centered instructional methods need to be reconsidered in order to meet the objectives of these newly revised history courses.

The College Board launched its curricular revisions for AP European History in the 2015-2016 school year. The revised AP European History course focuses on “developing students’ abilities to think conceptually…and apply historical thinking skills as they learn about the past” (College Board, 2013, p. 4). Additionally, the revisions require students to reason through content in an historical manner while also affording “teachers flexibility to teach certain topics of their choice in depth” (College Board, 2013, p. 4). The College Board’s revisions to the AP curriculum prompted the pedagogical modifications that were implemented in this action research study. Specifically, this study explored how implementing discussion pedagogy, primarily through the use of seminars, could create learning environments that supported and promoted student autonomy in AP European
History courses. In addition to supporting and promoting student autonomy, the use of discussion pedagogy intended to meet the content and conceptual objectives of AP courses (Parker et al., 2011; National Research Council, 2002) and civic goals of social studies education (NCSS, 2013).

This chapter provides discussion of the findings that emerged from the data collected and analyzed in this action research study. Moreover, this chapter also discusses the implications of these findings for practice and for further research.

Discussion of Findings

The data collected and analyzed revealed three major findings. The first major finding demonstrated that student preparation and involvement in class activities was impacted by discussion pedagogy. Students’ experiences were also impacted by the development of learning communities that emerged in the classes. The second major finding suggested that students’ need for relatedness was impacted by changing dynamics in the teacher-student relationship that emerged through the implementation of discussion pedagogy. The third major finding demonstrated that students engaged historical content and thinking during the implementation of discussion pedagogy, most notably in the areas of historical argumentation and historical interpretation.

Student involvement and community. Analysis of the data collected revealed that student involvement was impacted by their experience with discussion pedagogy. The utilization of discussion pedagogy affected how students prepared for and became involved in the seminars. Moreover, students’ preparation and involvement in class seminars
contributed to the development of a communal learning environment where free and open discourse occurred among students and between the teacher and students. Discussion pedagogy provided students with opportunities to increase their agency within the class by providing them with choices related to the seminars. Student agency was encouraged by allowing students to select sources for use in the class seminars (e.g. primary and secondary sources, literature, art, ephemera, etc.). Additionally, students were provided opportunities to freely express their thoughts in the seminars and in their responses to the central questions. Providing students the opportunity to actively participate in the learning environment in a way that was “consistent with their goals and interests” is supported by scholarship on self-determination theory (SDT) and autonomy-enhancing teacher behaviors (Assor et al., 2002, p. 264).

SDT (Deci, Ryan, & Williams, 1996; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997) posits that “people experience a sense of autonomy when they realize their personal goals, values, and interests” (Assor et al., 2002, p. 262). Autonomy-enhancing teacher behaviors such as fostering relevance, providing choice, and encouraging independent thinking can impact and enhance students’ achievement and motivation as well as their engagement in the learning process (Assor et al., 2002; Katz & Assor, 2007). By supporting students’ procedural and cognitive autonomies, students were able to prepare for class in more depth and, thus, more actively participate in class. Following the work of Stefanou et al. (2004), students’ procedural and cognitive autonomies were supported through their opportunities to:

- Choose materials to use in the seminars
• Have some say in how their competence (adeptness) would be demonstrated
• Find multiple solutions to problems
• Share expertise when justifying solutions to problems
• Formulate personal goals that correspond with students’ interest
• Debate ideas freely
• Ask questions
• Have less teacher talk time and more listening time.

**Implications for student involvement and community.** The capacity for discussion pedagogy to support student involvement and the development of an active learning community has implications for the field, particularly for teachers of AP social studies courses. Much discussion and debate exists regarding the current state of AP courses. Oft viewed as the gold standard for rigor and academic excellence, AP courses are being increasingly scrutinized for the extensive amount of content teachers and students must deal with in order to achieve the goals of those courses. Additional concerns have been raised that AP courses and related summative exams are actually creating students “with little time and energy…to become resilient, successful, meaningful contributors for the 21st century” (Challenge Success, 2013, p. 1).

The increase in student involvement and community demonstrated in this research suggests that instructional methods such as discussion pedagogy can serve as an alternative approach to the breadth-depth tensions that exist in AP courses. As Parker et al. (2011) explains, AP courses are well-known for the “stuffing of arguably important topics into a
space temporally too small and pedagogically too meager to contain them meaningfully” (p. 534). Through discussion pedagogy, students experienced change in the ways they prepared for and participated in class. This was a result of the reduced number of tasks that required students to memorize information for later recall on a summative assessment. Discussion pedagogy included instructional practices that provided students opportunities to actively engage in open discourse (seminars) in support of content-based objectives, coupled with the use of formative assessments (responses to central questions). The sustained use of such instructional practices and engagement in AP history courses has the potential to support students in completing the complex tasks involved in learning AP content (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008; Parker et al., 2011).

Additionally, the positive benefits of discussion pedagogy are supported by scholarship on Self Determination Theory (SDT) and autonomy-supportive strategies. Reeve and Halusic (2009) provide some clarity on questions typically asked by teachers about how to put SDT principles into action. In describing how autonomy-supportive teaching is unique, Reeve and Halusic (2009) explain that teachers need to 1) take and prioritize students’ perspectives, 2) solicit students’ input, and 3) conduct formative assessments (p. 148). Reeve and Halusic (2009) also recommend providing students with clear expectations, guidance during an activity, and constructive feedback. Furthermore, the utilization of discussion pedagogy fostered students’ inner motivational behaviors. Students were supported through the limiting of coercive language and extrinsic rewards or punishments which can undermine students’ intrinsic motivation and which are often staples of traditional practices in AP
history courses. Discussion pedagogy offers opportunities for teachers to encourage and enhance student autonomy through the instructional practices that foster relevance, provide choices, allow for criticism, and encourage independent thinking. As Assor et al. (2002) outline, the presence of at least two of these behaviors can have a “significant positive effect on intrinsic motivation” (p. 263).

Discussion pedagogy should be situated in the context of other approaches to teaching and learning social studies that enable students to be “meaningful contributors for the 21st century” (Challenge Success, 2013, p. 1). New curricular and instructional approaches in social studies, such as the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards, contend that students need to be able to “ask good questions and develop robust investigations into them; consider possible solutions and consequences; separate evidence-based claims from parochial opinions; and communicate and act upon what they learn” (NCSS, 2013, p. 6). The C3 Framework is an approach that promotes knowledge growth for students as they actively participate in the educational process (VanSledright, 2013). The C3 Framework puts forward an approach to social studies that is guided by inquiry and is constructed around four dimensions: 1) developing questions and planning inquiries, 2) applying disciplinary concepts and tools, 3) evaluating sources and using evidence, and 4) communicating conclusions and taking informed action (NCSS, 2013, p. 12). Efforts to reform pedagogy in social studies education should take into consideration how discussion pedagogy and the type of inquiry suggested by the C3 Framework can complement one another.
Instructional approaches outlined by the C3 Framework that promote authentic inquiry are similar to those associated with discussion pedagogy in a number of ways. In particular, the use of discussion pedagogy aligns with the literacy and civic outcomes of the C3 Framework. As described by Parker and Hess (2001), discussion in the classroom is rooted in literacy actions such as “reading, writing, and talking with others about texts and issues” as well as through “listening and speaking, gathering and evaluating evidence, [and] subjecting one’s own beliefs to. Furthermore, discussion pedagogies prepare students to engage in the types of civic discourse suggested in the taking informed action phase of the C3 Framework’s Inquiry Arc (Grant, 2013).

Students developed a sense of relatedness. The second major finding revealed that students’ need for relatedness was impacted through their experience with discussion pedagogy. In interviews and writings as well as classroom discussions, students expressed frustration with typical AP courses. Students identified traditional and teacher-centered approaches (e.g. note-taking for memorization, Power Point presentations), coursework that was not challenging (e.g. coloring maps, worksheets), and summative exams as examples of approaches that frustrate them. Moreover, these instructional strategies did not appear to provide support for students’ organizational, procedural, and cognitive autonomies as outlined by Stefanou et al. (2004). The uses of traditional, teacher-centered methods of instruction often limit and impede students’ sense of relatedness. Additionally, these methods also impede of students’ need for autonomy and competence.
According to Self Determination Theory, “relatedness” is one of three basic psychological needs that draw people close to others (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Katz & Assor, 2007; Ryan, 1993). For students, relatedness involves students’ “need for belonging, personal support, and security in their school relationships” (Stefanou et al., 2004, p. 99). Findings in this research suggested that students’ experiences with discussion pedagogy help to shape the teacher-student relationship through supportive teacher behaviors and instructional practices. Instead of being the passive receivers of knowledge, students were given the opportunities to co-construct knowledge in preparation for, and involvement in, the seminars. Students’ active involvement in the seminars through “text-based shared inquiry of the listening-and-talking kind” also appears to have supported students’ procedural and cognitive autonomies (Parker & Hess, 2001, p. 275). In addition to supporting students’ need for relatedness, discussion pedagogy also supported student autonomy through power-sharing within the classroom. As Thomas and Oldfather explain, “teachers who are willing to share their power support the development of student autonomy [do so] by providing structures that help students take on increasing responsibility for their own learning” (p. 117, as cited in Davis, 2003). Discussion pedagogy provided for power-sharing and increased student responsibilities by enabling meaningful dialogue among students on historical content. In addition, discussion pedagogy reduced reliance on what Freire (2009) calls a banking model, which suggests that:

- teachers teach and students are taught;
- teachers know everything and students know nothing;
• teachers think and students are thought about; and

• teachers choose and enforce their choices and students comply (Miller, 1998, p. 65).

Through discussion pedagogy, teachers’ external control over everyday classroom activities is reduced, which in turn enhances students’ intellectual engagement. As Davis (2003) posits, “teachers who develop relationships with their students characterized by excessive controls may trade off behavioral control at the expense of promoting students’ sense of intellectual control” (p. 213).

Students were provided opportunities to make choices and to input into the learning process, which further supported their procedural and cognitive autonomies. Poplin and Weeres (1994) posit that students’ desire for authentic relationships with their teachers develops “through warm and honest discourse and where students are given responsibility in their learning.” Additionally, Reeve and Halusic (2009) point out that support of student autonomy must be rooted in a teacher’s genuine willingness to “take and prioritize the students’ perspective during learning activities” (p. 148). Through the discussion pedagogy implemented in this research, students were responsible for guiding the seminars given their perspectives and ideas as well as through their interests. The implementation of discussion pedagogy in this research lowered some of the traditional barriers that often exist in AP courses when teacher-centered pedagogies are used. The autonomy support students’ received affirmed their competence and helped students to develop a greater sense of self-confidence.
**Implications for developing a sense of relatedness.** Helping students develop a sense of relatedness with their teacher requires knowledge and skill on the part of teachers. Given the findings of this research, one area where teachers might need professional development is in the field of motivational theory. Pre-service teachers must gain knowledge in both their subject area concentration as well as in pedagogical practice, but part of pre-service teachers’ training should also include coursework and experiences with educational psychology where they can focus on how students cognitively and socially develop and the variables that enhance or impede that development.

An important task in teaching is to identify and use instructional methods that will facilitate students’ intrinsic motivation. Recent scholarship suggests that controlling and teacher-centered methods of instruction can impede students’ innate psychological needs and thus create learning environments where students feel restricted and alienated in the learning process (McQuillan, 2005). Moreover, the use of controlling methods of instruction and external controls (e.g. rewards and punishments for evaluations) can impede students’ intrinsic motivation and self-esteem (Deci et al., 1982). Pre-service teachers should be prepared to better understand how self-determination theory and autonomy-supportive instructional strategies can promote positive curricular and relationship outcomes in classrooms (see Assor et al., 2002; Davis, 2003; Reeve, 2006, 2009; Reeve and Halusic, 2009; Stefanou et al., 2004).

Understanding students’ motivational orientation as it relates to student learning is important in the development of an enriching learning environment (Harter, 1981b).
Instructional methods and learning environments that reduce the level of control students perceive (reduced autonomy) can result in negative learning consequences for students. These consequences can include student passivity and apathy in the classroom (McQuillan, 2005) as well as students having a difficult time dealing with adverse situations (Glass & Singer, 1972; Schunk et al., 2008; Woolfolk, 2001). Teachers who know how to use motivation in learning can assist in facilitating students’ intrinsic motivation. Students who experience higher degrees of intrinsic motivation tend to exhibit enhanced degrees of interest and creativity as well as self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, Ryan & Deci, 2000; 1995; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995).

This action research study emerged in response to existing AP courses that tend to stifle and impede students’ intrinsic motivation, thus reducing students’ interest and creativity. Scholarship on self-determination theory and autonomy-supportive instructional strategies describe pedagogical practices that can be implemented to support and promote students’ autonomy. The findings of this research revealed that the use of discussion pedagogy can provide students with opportunities to exercise control while actually satisfying students’ needs and wants; this can also aid in the facilitation of students’ intrinsic motivation. The findings of this research suggest that students developed a sense of relatedness to both their classmates and their teacher while also meeting curricular objectives. These findings can provide teachers with a better understanding of how to use methods that support student motivation and promote positive interpersonal relationships (e.g. teacher-student, student-student).
Student experience regarding historical thinking skills and historical content.
The third major finding of this research study revealed that students utilized historical thinking skills in order to understand historical content and craft historical arguments through discussion pedagogy. They did so using a combination of teacher and student-selected historical sources. Students crafted historical arguments in response to the central questions and shared their arguments in both their writing and during class seminars. Moreover, discussion pedagogy created opportunities for students to freely discuss and debate a wide range of historical content. Students also developed historical interpretations that predominantly reflected characteristics related to historical presentism and moral judgment. The findings in this study suggested that students developed skills that support historical argumentation and did so primarily through the use of presentism and moral judgments. Additionally, students developed their historical interpretations and crafted their historical arguments through historical thinking skills characteristically representative of historical empathy.

Through discussion pedagogy, students interpreted historical content in ways that enabled them to craft their historical arguments. The ability to develop historical arguments and articulate intellectual ideas is an important skill necessary not only for academic success but also for success beyond the classroom. As Monte-Sano and De La Paz (2012) suggest, students “must learn to read and write increasingly complex and specialized forms of text…[and] must go beyond telling what they know with the text, to engaging in knowledge construction, reasoning, and discourse with the text” (p. 274). Through their participation in
seminars students went beyond memorizing facts and dates. Instead, they began to analyze sources in order to construct historical knowledge and develop their historical interpretations based on historical accounts that they then shared during the seminars.

**Implications for students’ experiences regarding historical thinking skills and historical content.** The teaching and learning of history requires students to develop historical thinking skills in an effort to better understand the past and to transform it into meaningful learning experiences. This is a challenging task for teachers and students alike. Part of the challenge lies within lingering conceptual debates regarding the historical lenses students should utilize to discover and better understand the past. As is the case with other aspects of teaching and learning history, the role of historical thinking continues to serve as a source of “discussion, debate, criticism, and avoidance” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 206).

According to Barton and Levstik (2004), some scholars reject the use of presentism in historical learning because “allowing contemporary cares and concerns to creep into history is disastrous and unforgivable” (p. 228). Hunt (2002) suggests that presentist interpretations in historical study “encourages a kind of moral complacency and self-congratulation [by] interpreting the past in past in terms of present concerns lead[ing] us to find ourselves morally superior.” Barton and Levstik (2004) reject that notion, explaining that care, as a source for historical understanding, is the “motivating force behind nearly all historical research” (p. 228). Thus, if students do not exhibit aspects of caring for those who lived in the past, they will likely not exert the necessary energy and effort to learn about the past. Moral judgments also stand at the center of debate and discussion. Moral judgments can
revolve around issues of remembrance and forgetting, fairness and justice, and heroes and heroism (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Barton and Levstik (2004) further contend that presentism demonstrates a caring that is necessary for the study of history while moral judgments can lead students to question aspects of history to include fairness and justice as well as remembrance and forgetting. Moreover, the moralizing of history is critical toward 1) making the study of history meaningful, 2) understanding ourselves, and 3) developing an appreciation for the world in which we live (Levstik, 1995, p. 114). It is important to note, according to Barton and Levstik (2004), that historical presentism also demonstrates a salient overlap with aspects of historical empathy as caring. Historical empathy is described by Endacott and Sturtz (2015) as the processing of cognitive and affective engagement with persons and events of the past which involves, “understanding how people from the past thought, felt, made decisions, acted, and faced consequences within a specific historical and social context” (p. 1). Much like presentism and moral judgment, empathy in historical thinking brings with it competing conceptualizations. While historical empathy is believed to be an important aspect of historical thinking, questions also arise about end it which empathy should be used. Brooks (2009) explains that historical empathy should be absent of affective displays in order to serve larger curricular and cognitive objectives. However, recent scholarship has begun antagonizing those sentiments by describing how the development of skills related to historical empathy and its affective dimensions can impact students’ ability to contextualize historical events while developing their perspectives (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Brooks, 2011; Endacott, 2010; Endacott & Sturtz, 2015; Kohlmeier, 2006).
The purpose of this study was not to parse out the definitions or determine the mutual exclusivity and/or the coalescence of specific historical thinking skills. However, one’s understanding that an ongoing discussion exists about the role of historical empathy allows room for further research. The third sub-question of the action research study sought to explore how students related to the content given the use of discussion pedagogy. Students demonstrated their ability to craft an historical argument through the use of presentism, moral judgment, and to a lesser degree, historical empathy. The use of formative writing assignments related to the selected sources provided students time and opportunity to identify personal interpretations while also constructing an argument based on those interpretations. Additionally, the use of seminars gave students time and opportunity to identify and co-construct interpretations with their classmates as well as with their teacher.

Moreover, the approaches used in this research supported the ultimate goal of social studies to prepare young people for civic life. Through an open discourse in seminar and deliberation, students were given the opportunity to freely discuss their thoughts and understandings about historical content. These collaborative discussions allowed students to take positions and present ideas freely, something Parker (2006) argues is essential for students as they mature in their civic and political lives. Additionally, Barton and Levstik (2004) posit that open discourse in classroom settings is necessary for students to participate in and contribute to the common good in a democracy. The development of historical thinking skills such as empathy can enable students “to understand that differing perspectives are a normal part of social interaction” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 219). The free exchange
of ideas in discussion pedagogy can lead to further discussion about social justice and equity, which might otherwise be undiscoverable through the predominant use of teacher-centered methods of instruction.

**Future Research**

The action research process is a cyclical model where initial findings and conclusions from the reflective stage should ultimately lead to more questions and thus the development of another cycle. This study focused on how implementing discussion pedagogy in two AP European History courses could support and promote student autonomy. Based on the findings presented in this research and given the increased promotion of equity and access in AP courses, additional research should be conducted that focuses on the potential benefits of discussion pedagogy for supporting and promoting the autonomy among historically marginalized populations.

The number of students enrolling in AP courses is growing. However, there still appears to be an opportunity gap for African American students when compared to white students (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). As Parker (2004) suggests, in order to effectively cultivate “the democratic potential of schools,” interventions congruent with discussion pedagogy need to be implemented in the following ways:

- increase the variety and frequency of interaction among students of diverse backgrounds,
- construct interactions where competent dialogue occurs, and
- expect, teach, and model competent and open discussion (p. 70).
Thus, a further exploration of discussion pedagogy in urban school settings could lead to new understandings about how to promote student autonomy in the classroom while also providing a better understanding of self-determination theory applied in a critical contexts.

**Conclusion**

This action research study explored how utilizing discussion pedagogy could support and promote students’ autonomy while also serving to meet the goals of both AP courses and social studies education. Discussion pedagogy demonstrated the ability to both support and promote students’ autonomy as well provide them with meaningful opportunities that better prepare them for civic life. Discussion pedagogy provided students time and opportunity to delve deeply into historical content while also being able to independently and collaboratively think, speak, and listen in ways unique to their experiences in other AP courses. Discussion pedagogy facilitated change relative to how students prepared for and became involved in class. The learning community that developed as a result demonstrated that students experience aspects of relatedness not only with their classmates but also with their teacher. Additionally, students learned historical content through the independent construction of knowledge using diverse sources while listening to and recognizing the interpretative stances of those around them. Discussion pedagogy should not be solely viewed as a means to an end. Rather, it should be viewed as providing students with time and opportunity to express and to consider, to speak and to listen, to recognize and to understand, the diverse views that exist both in the past and in the present – both of which are necessary in promoting meaningful contributions by students in their civic life.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A: Example of Key Terms

Chapter 18:
The French Revolution

Know, understand, and be able to explain the importance of the following terms. These terms will assist you in better understanding of the information that is more conceptual. These terms will be collected prior to the quiz over the chapter.

1. Jacques Necker:

2. Charles Alexandre de Calonne:

3. Transformation of Estates-General to the National Assembly:

4. *Cahiers de doléances*:

5. Tennis Court Oath:

6. July 14, 1789:

7. August 4, 1789:

8. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen:

9. Constitution of 1791:

10. Olympe de Gouges:

11. Assignats:

12. Civil Constitution of the Clergy:

13. Declaration of Pilnitz:

14. Jacobins and Girondists:

15. *Sans-culottes*:

16. Edmund Burke:

17. Reign of Terror:

18. Committee of Public Safety:

19. “Republic of Virtue” and Robespierre:

20. Jean-Paul Marat:
Appendix B: World War I Seminar Photo

“Trip to Paris”
Appendix C: World War I Seminar Photo

“French Soldiers in Uniform”
Appendix D: World War I Seminar Photos

“French Citizens Celebrate War Efforts”
Appendix E: World War I Seminar Photos

“Madness in the Trenches”