ABSTRACT

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Social studies has often had a reputation amongst students for being uninteresting due to the teaching strategies and content that educators have utilized. However, in a field as diverse and relevant as social studies, there are opportunities to garner the attention of students and empower them with information to improve and enhance our democracy and society. This qualitative case study examined a teacher’s enactment of the New Tech Network educational model with her students and the teaching strategies she used to engage students and gauge student achievement. Detailed teacher interviews, classroom observations, and analyses of student assignments, rubrics, and readings were the sources of data for the study. Themes emerging from the data included real world application and relevance, the utilization of scaffolding strategies, accountability and structure in student collaboration, positive teacher/student interactions, and the importance of technology in the NTN model. Discussion centered on the integration of culturally relevant pedagogy within project based learning in this particular classroom and the implications of this integration. Recommendations for future research include a more expansive study of the use of project based learning in social studies and different means of integrating culturally relevant pedagogy into project based learning.
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Real World Engagement: A Case Study of a Teacher’s Implementation of Project Based Learning in Social Studies

by
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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 in Curriculum and Instruction

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to DeCarlo Polk (a former student), Raymond Lofton (my maternal grandfather), and Addie Lofton Best (my aunt). I will never forget the pain of your deaths between June 2007 and March 2008. You definitely taught me the value of life. And, I know if I am blessed to be here, I better make the most of it. It is just like my grandmother says, “We are not here for decoration.” I love you all.
Daniel Kelvin Bullock was born and raised in the eastern North Carolina city of Wilson. As the son of two hard working parents - Mr. Dannie Bullock, an employee at Bridgestone-Firestone, and Mrs. Wanda Bullock, an elementary educator in Wilson County Schools - Kelvin learned early in life the value of perseverance and determination. His sister, Jessica, also inherited this work ethic, and utilizes her talents as an outstanding second grade teacher in their hometown. He was also blessed with a large network of family and friends that continually pushed his pursuit of excellence. To this day, Kelvin still credits God, his familial unit, friends, and the city of Wilson with providing the foundation that supported his growth and development.

Upon graduating from Beddingfield High School in the year 2000, Kelvin enrolled at UNC – Chapel Hill as a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. It was in this program that a friendship developed with Ronda Taylor that would eventually blossom into a fruitful and fulfilling marriage. Kelvin’s experience at UNC, as a whole, was spellbinding. As soon as he arrived on campus, the seeds were being sown for a group of friends to grow together throughout their years at the university. This group of friends came to be known as Nexus, a supportive family that maintains strong bonds to this day. Additionally, he was privileged to become a member of, and develop life-long brotherhood within, the Mu Zeta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. These networks of fellows, friends, and brothers provided the primary supports as Kelvin made his successful runs for Mr. Black Student Movement and UNC Homecoming King.
After graduating from UNC with a degree in History in 2004, Kelvin enrolled in UNC’s Masters of Arts in Teaching program. During this program, he proposed to his classmate, Ronda Taylor, and they began their life together in the fall of 2005. They were hired as teachers at the same school in August and tied the knot on October 1st. At their school, they both experienced success as “the young couple” that was pouring their talents into their classrooms, sports, and student government. They also enjoyed their time working with the youth at their church from 2004-2008. In 2006, they were both selected to research a reform model that would possibly come to the school in the next year. The more they researched it, the more interested they became. In the end, Kelvin decided to apply to be the inaugural social studies teacher at the new school. He received the position.

At the school, Kelvin and the rest of the staff underwent extensive professional development to prepare for the implementation of the reform model. It was not in vain. The school experienced immediate success in its first year in terms of end of course test scores and a positive, academic school culture. Soon, Kelvin began to think of the next steps in his professional career. After his second year of teaching at the new school, he decided to enroll in the Curriculum and Instruction Ph.D. program at North Carolina State University. With Dr. Meghan Manfra as his advisor, he planned strategically to advance through the coursework at a relatively quick pace. It was in the midst of completing his classes that he and Ronda were blessed with the birth of their first child – Zion – in 2011. With his coursework behind him, Kelvin decided to conduct his doctoral study on a successful teacher at his old school. Now, he is employed as a social studies curriculum specialist in an urban
school district and is looking forward to what the future holds in the field of curriculum and instruction.
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First of all, I would like to thank God for blessing me on this journey to my Ph.D. It has been a great learning experience and I can truly say I have enjoyed it. I look forward to what the future holds, but I am also rejoicing in the present. Thank you, God, for blessing me with this opportunity and a support system that helped it to become a reality.

I would also like to thank my wife, Ronda, for all of your support throughout this process. I know that it was not easy for us as I took a year of educational leave to finish up the coursework for this degree. But, you stuck by me, pushed me, and supported me. I could not have done this without you. We’ve seen a lot of changes and growth over the last four years. The most important change we’ve experienced has been the birth of our first child, Zion. I pray that the coming years hold increased blessings for us all. I love you, both.

Dr. Meghan Manfra, you have been the best advisor that I could ever ask for. When I met you over four years ago, you made me feel like NC State could be the place for me. From the minute I enrolled, I knew you were right. I truly appreciate all the support, advice, and feedback you’ve given me over the years. Perhaps, even more than that I appreciate the example you have set for me as a well-rounded, influential college professor. I cannot believe that we are nearing the end of this journey. I definitely look forward to working with you again, in the future.

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I love and appreciate you all.

In closing, I would like to thank my parents (Dannie and Wanda Bullock), Sister (Jessica Bullock), family, friends, church family and anyone else that has been a part of this process. God is good. The future is bright! Let’s do it!
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Her presentation marks the culmination of weeks of work focused on the era of Civil War and Reconstruction. Jada, an African American high school student, steps forward to give her take on how Reconstruction impacted the African American community.

Throughout this project, Jada’s progress was marked by ups and downs. At times when she collaborated with her group members to work on portions of the final product, she was energized and engaged. During the periods where she had to complete graphic organizers based upon information presented by the teacher, she was less interested. Yet, as she steps forward to speak about this particular topic, she seems confident and willing. She understands that her prior experiences in this classroom have prepared her for this occasion. She begins to speak and the words that she vocalizes include a depth and understanding that captivate the audience. It is evident that Jada has truly internalized the struggles and advances of African Americans during Reconstruction and has engaged in historical thinking about the time period.

Yet, the learning does not stop there. During the class period that follows her teacher challenges students to brainstorm ways to revitalize an area of their city that rose to prominence during Reconstruction. As Jada and her group members present their ideas on how to attract businesses and economic income to the area, a heated discussion ensues in the class over the consequences that their proposal would create in the community. As I reflect on this educational scene, I realize that this is what it looks like to engage students in civic issues. This is what it looks like to have students make connections from historical content to contemporary concerns. This is what it looks like to engage students in an urban school in
a U.S. History classroom. This is project-based learning that is informed by culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Background of the Study**

It is well documented that students tend to like social studies classes the least amongst all school subjects (Goodlad, 1984, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2001; Shaughnessy & Haladya, 1985, as cited in Heafner, 2004). Heafner (2004) noted, “Many teachers struggle with the lack of student interest in the content which translates into a lack of motivation to learn. This is especially prevalent in social studies classrooms” (p. 43). This may be true for a variety of reasons. First of all, the teaching methods that are often used in social studies classes tend to be non-collaborative in nature. These methods may consist of direct lecture, reading from the textbook, and taking tests and quizzes that assess a student’s ability to retrieve memorized information (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010). Additionally, social studies content often lacks an acknowledgement or celebration of student culture (Ladson-Billings, 2001). In an increasingly diverse society, it is very important to make sure the social studies curriculum has cultural relevance for students and will prepare them for life in a multicultural society.

Despite the fact that the content and the methods often utilized by social studies teachers are not engaging for all students, the purposes of the subject are vital for the maintenance and growth of our society. Social studies has been defined as a field made up of many disciplines (i.e. history, sociology, anthropology, etc.) intended to increase students’ understanding of (and participation in) democracy and citizenship (Evans, 2006). It is in the social studies that students are supposed to critically analyze, evaluate, and effectively
interact with our political and social systems (Parker, 2008). It is very important that we use the best instructional and assessment methods possible and strive for high student achievement in a subject area that is critical to our country’s political and social future.

Current research argues that authentic instruction and assessment are effective methods for evaluating student achievement while also supporting student success (Archbald & Newman, 1988; Bergen, 1993; Gronlund, 2003; Meyer, 1992; Newman, Brandt, & Wiggins, 1998; and Wiggins, 1989a, 1989b as cited in Frey, Schmitt, & Allen, 2012). This may be due to the nature of authentic assessments; students are engaged in activities that require them to use skills and perform tasks that have relevance for life outside of school. Research shows that students’ interest and engagement increases when learning is connected to authentic, real-world problems (Newmann, King, & Carmichael, 2007). This increase in engagement is especially needed in social studies to ensure students are able to make informed decisions in our democratic and social systems.

Educational reform. Large scale, national efforts are being proposed to address instructional problems like engagement and achievement in K-12 education. In the proposed reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), President Obama placed a heavy emphasis on school transformation and turnaround for public schools that were identified as low performing (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This continued the trend started by President Bush in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) where he introduced the idea of restructuring schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress.

It is important to note that President Obama distinguished teachers as critical components of students’ success. This reflected Thornton’s (1991) idea that teachers are
“curricular-instructional gatekeepers.” “That is, they make the day-to-day decisions about the subject matter and experiences to which students have access and the nature of that subject matter and those experiences” (Thornton, 2001, p. 237). So, as we seek to understand how authentic assessments may be able to enhance social studies, we will need to focus specifically on how a teacher utilizes those assessments and creates “classroom environments that engage and motivate students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

In 2005, in the spirit of No Child Left Behind, North Carolina Superior Court Judge Howard Manning threatened to close schools that were not providing a sound, basic education to their students (Manning, 2005). Many of the schools that were threatened with closings were schools that served large African American and/or Latino American populations. Under this prompting, and efforts by Governor Mike Easley via the Center for 21st Century Skills, some school districts in North Carolina made strides to address achievement issues (North Carolina Business Committee for Education, 2007). The primary means of determining achievement and whether or not a school was providing a basic education was through analysis of standardized test scores. Many of these districts began to implement various “turnaround models” to address low achievement scores, such as those promoted by the New Technology Foundation and Project Lead the Way (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007).

**New Tech Network model.** One of the educational models that was implemented emphasized achievement through project based learning and authentic assessment rather than achievement through standardized tests. This model developed by the New Technology Foundation (now known as the New Tech Network) grew out of the success of Napa New
Technology High School, which was formed in 1996 after local educational and business leaders met to address the concern that students were not “graduating with the skills needed to meet the needs of the new economy” (NTN, 2013a, para. 2). New Tech Network (2013a) reported that:

As Napa New Technology High School thrived, local business leaders and education advocates came together to ensure the school’s long-term success and sustainability by establishing the New Tech Foundation. In 2001, New Tech was awarded a $6 million grant [and] charged with launching 14 schools over three years. From this initial launch, New Tech has continued to grow… Today, our name is New Tech Network and we support 120 schools in 18 states and Australia. (para. 4)

The New Tech Network (NTN) model centers on project based learning in a small school and technology-rich environment. New Tech Network (2013b) defines project-based learning as “contextual, creative, and shared” where “students collaborate on projects that require critical thinking and communication” (para. 2). The small school settings are considered to be high schools with less than 100 students per grade level, while the technology-rich environment implies a 1:1 student to computer ratio. The model is intended to create a higher level of engagement amongst students by helping them to “gain the knowledge and deeper learning skills they need to succeed in life, college, and the careers of tomorrow” (NTN, 2013b, para. 1).

Engagement High School. In 2007, the New Technology Foundation model was selected as a transformation model to be implemented at a school in an urban district in North Carolina. This model was intended to help increase student achievement. Using the NTN
model, a new school would be created within the existing, traditional school that would provide an additional, innovative educational opportunity for the students in the area. The school, named Engagement High School (pseudonym), was housed within the larger, traditional school, but had a distinct principal and faculty. Although it was intended to serve the same population as the larger school, the students would only be admitted to Engagement High School (EHS) through an application process. The school was officially classified as a “Redesigned STEM High School” and was the site of my qualitative research study.

EHS has now been open for five years and there are some important characteristics to note about the students and faculty. The student population is about 94% Black, 2% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 2% White; approximately 51% of the students receive free or reduced price lunch. Among the 26 faculty members, 59% are Black, 41% are White and there is a median of four years of educational teaching experience. There are no more than 100 students in each grade level. The school’s campus consists of one wing of one hallway of the larger, traditional school and a large modular unit on the southern part of the campus that houses five classrooms. The average class size is 21 students. The school’s culture is themed around “Trust, Respect, and Responsibility;” these ideas are emphasized in each classroom and serve as the foundation of school rules. All of the core classes are considered “honors” or “Advanced Placement”. In addition to fulfilling standard graduation requirements for the district, students are required to complete 150 hours of community service and participate in an internship. EHS’s first graduating class had a 100% graduation rate and 97% college acceptance rate. The second graduating class had a 97% graduation rate.
Pilot Study

In a pilot study that was conducted at Engagement High School in the fall of 2010, I investigated the effectiveness of the NTN model for increasing the achievement of minority students in two, urban secondary social studies classrooms. This qualitative case study relied on data gathered from interviews with teachers and observations of classes. Although the study was intended to focus on minority student achievement, I found that teachers believed the model was effective for educating all students. Additionally, these teachers spoke about an alternative understanding of achievement in the social studies classes that contrasted with the popular notion of linking achievement with standardized test scores. When asked about achievement, the social studies teachers at EHS rarely referenced test scores, but rather referred to students’ abilities to meet the standards outlined in the project rubrics. For example, when one teacher was asked how achievement was defined in the school, he responded, “I try to define it the same way the school does (by using) the learning outcomes.” The learning outcomes referred to content knowledge, collaboration skills, oral communication skills, written communication skills, work ethic, and technology skills. Another teacher stated,

On one end we do judge them by their content knowledge on the basis if they pass the standardized test. But, another way that we judge their growth and achievement is through their presentation skills, communication skills, whether they’re able to work well with others.

Through interviews and observations, I also witnessed much evidence that the NTN model, as implemented in these two social studies classes, was effective for increasing
student engagement. Specifically, real world applicability was often referenced as the most vital component for sparking student interest and successfully implementing project based learning. For example, as one teacher described the model, he stated:

The idea behind the model is that students will be engaged and learn more when they work on real world problems as opposed to just memorizing facts. So, we try to come up with a curriculum that poses real world problems to them. And, to give them tools to answer those problems.

The second teacher expressed her belief that real world applicability was what made all the difference with the NTN model. She stated:

I think I’m able to sell history more that I’m able to tie in the real world connections - because they (the students) get more into it. I don’t think I could have the type of success I’ve had if I wasn’t able to make the project true to life and relate to what they are interested in.

These findings inspired me to further investigate how a teacher utilized this model to garner students’ interest and encourage achievement.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to research how a social studies teacher in an urban school enacted the NTN model, engaged students, and ensured student mastery of curricular content. I conducted a qualitative case study focused on the pedagogical practices and beliefs of Ms. Olivia Jordan (pseudonym), the EHS 2012-2013 Teacher of the Year. Whereas the pilot study was a snapshot conducted over a week, this study occurred in a social studies classroom for the entire instructional unit about the Civil War and Reconstruction.
Instruction included project based learning and an extension activity (12 class periods). Data for this case study was collected through interviews with the teacher, observations of classes, and document analysis (i.e., class assignments, rubrics, lesson resources).

This study is important for a variety of reasons. First of all, social studies courses have long had the reputation of being uninteresting to students. The reasons for this range from the teaching methods commonly used by teachers to the lack of multiculturalism covered in the content. The centerpiece of the NTN model, project based learning, is intended to increase the engagement of students and lead to better educational outcomes in all subjects (NTN, 2013b). Current research in the field of the social studies has demonstrated that although students rarely feel engaged by the subject, teachers still embrace traditional pedagogies. This may be detrimental to not only the students but to our society as a whole since it is in the social studies that students learn about society, government, economics, and effective citizenship.

This study is also important because school reform models are being implemented across the country in schools that have been deemed low performing. However, altering the instructional model of the school seems to be just the first step in improving the educational experiences of students. Teachers have been identified by the current presidential administration as the most important factors in determining a student’s success (USDOE, 2010). In this particular study I hoped to learn more about the pedagogical strategies that Ms. Jordan employed and the manner in which she engaged her students and ensured academic success. I found that she was able to utilize project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy to accomplish these goals.
Research Questions

There were two research questions that I addressed through this study. Those central research questions were:

1. How does a social studies teacher in an urban school enact the New Tech Network educational model with her students?
2. Which teaching strategies does she use to engage students and gauge achievement?

Theoretical Framework

The overarching framework that guided this study was culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995a) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as “a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Culturally relevant pedagogy is vital in a diverse society. America is home to people from all over the globe and our diversity is only projected to grow in the coming years. Howard (2003) stated:

While students of color currently comprise approximately one third of the U.S. school population, the U.S. Department of Commerce (1996) projects that by the year 2050 African American, Asian American, and Latino students will constitute close to 57% of all U.S. students. (p. 195)

With the increasing ethnic diversity that our country will experience, culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds experience 1) academic success, 2) cultural competence, and 3) sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-
Billings, 1995a). This framework was ideal for this study because I sought to understand how a teacher enacted pedagogy and facilitated student engagement and achievement in a school where 94% of the student population was African American. Furthermore, the NTN model emphasized relevance to students by addressing real-world problems. As I analyzed the data that was collected through interviews, observations, and curricular documents, I used culturally relevant pedagogy as a heuristic for understanding my findings.

Scope of the Study

This qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) began in the fall of 2012 as I formally requested the participation of the teacher at the research site. I conducted a pre-interview with the teacher and designated a class period that would be used for the study. I performed twelve observations of the teacher focused on one unit of project based learning in its entirety and an extension activity related to the project. During those class observations, I looked for evidence of the manner in which Ms. Jordan implemented project based learning, the strategies she employed to engage students, and indications of the students’ mastery of content. Additionally, I analyzed documents that she used to enact project based learning and gauge student achievement. Throughout the time period when I was conducting observations and analyzing documents, I also met with her for two individual interviews to reflect on the implementation of the project and evidence of student engagement and achievement. Following the observations and conclusion of the project, I conducted a post-interview with Ms. Jordan to reflect on student engagement and achievement throughout the unit, discuss her ideas on social studies instruction and the role of social justice and multiculturalism in the social studies classroom, and review ideas developed throughout the
study and how those ideas might inform future practice.

My theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy informed my data collection and analysis. For example, I asked interview questions to gain a better understanding of how student academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness informed the teacher’s pedagogical decisions. I also sought to understand the teacher’s conception of self and others, social relationship with the students, and conception of knowledge. All of this information was important for understanding her efforts to ensure the engagement of the predominately African American student population. Finally, as I analyzed my data, I used the culturally relevant pedagogy framework to help articulate my findings.

**Definition of Terms**

*Project Based Learning* – a method of learning in which students work in groups to create a project/presentation that addresses a real-world problem posed by the teacher

*New Tech Network (NTN)* – a nonprofit organization that provides professional development for schools to assist with the implementation of its instructional model; this instructional model centers on project based learning, but also includes a 1:1 student to computer ratio
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been noted that traditional teaching methods (i.e. completing worksheets, reading from textbooks, and memorizing information) are still being overly utilized in the social studies (Levstik, 2008). Furthermore, the content taught in many social studies classes still lacks the cultural diversity that reflects the demographics of the United States and the global community. These issues are often exacerbated in urban settings where there may be a higher proportion of African American and Latino American students and, hence, more differences between the culture acknowledged in the social studies curriculum and the culture of the students. It is possible that concerns of engagement, diversity, and achievement in the social studies may be addressed by project based learning within the NTN educational model.

In this review, I will analyze scholarly literature that has been written on engagement in social studies, authentic instruction and assessments, project based learning, and culturally relevant pedagogy to gain a deeper understanding of these topics and where gaps may occur in the research.

**Authentic Instruction and Assessment in Social Studies**

In their studies, Downey and Levstik (1991) found social studies to be amongst the least liked subjects in schools (as cited in Howard, 2004). Howard (2004) attributed this to the disengaging methods and materials often used to teach the content. Research has also shown that the attitudes of many educators and students toward social studies have been negatively impacted by their prior experiences in social studies classrooms (Gustafson, 1993; Hinde & Ekiss, 2005; and Pahl, 1995). The reasons for these attitudes range from the lack of relevance of the curriculum and instructional methods, to lack of teacher excitement about
the subject, to the inundation of random historical facts in the content (Gustafson, 1993; Hinde & Ekiss, 2005; Pahl, 1995; and VanSickle, 1990).

Yet, social studies is a subject that is ripe with purpose for the 21st century. It is vital that students learn the content that is covered by the five strands of social studies (history, economics and financial literacy, civics and government, culture, and geography) to promote active and knowledgeable participation in our democracy (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013). Furthermore, the racial and cultural diversity in our nation is increasing (Orfield & Lee, 2006). It is important that educators incorporate content into their instruction that is relevant to students of diverse backgrounds. Authentic instruction and assessment may be ways of increasing engagement in the social studies for students of all backgrounds. In the following sections of this literature review, I will analyze both authentic instruction and assessment.

**Authentic Instruction**

Authentic instruction consists of the various teaching strategies that should be utilized to engage students in a social studies curriculum that enhances our democracy. Newmann, Bryk, and Nagaoka (2001) also explained that there was evidence “that when teachers organize instruction around assignments that demand higher order thinking, in-depth understanding, elaborated communication, and that make a connection to students’ lives beyond school, students produce more intellectually complex work” (p. 2). This authentic intellectual work has been found to heighten student engagement and achievement (Carmichael & Martens, 2012).

A possible outcome of authentic instruction in social studies classrooms is that it can
make classrooms more democratic. Walter Parker (2008) elaborated on student culture in a democratic classroom when he stated, “The study and practice of democracy have a common end: what we could call enlightened political engagement” (p. 68). This means that students should not only be able to evaluate our political and social systems, but also engage in methods of improving them. Parker (2008) suggested that teachers should engage students through seminars and deliberations that could be evaluated based upon students’ ability to work cooperatively to interpret text and decide the best course of action to solve authentic problems.

It is the notion of addressing real social questions or problems that makes authentic instruction so compelling in social studies. Wiggins (1993) suggested that students could “Conduct an oral history on a topical but historically interesting issue: recent American immigrants [or] veterans of Desert Storm, Vietnam, and World War II on ‘America as policeman in the world” (as cited in Mathison & Fragnoli, 2006, p. 209). Avery (1999) described an effective social studies assignment where students had to “collect information on their family’s migration to the state,” “share this information in class, organize the information on charts… search for patterns,” “compare their findings to the patterns described in their textbook,” and write an essay that required them “to summarize and speculate on the significance of their findings” (para. 10). In these examples of authentic instruction, there was substantial critical thinking involved and also components that required students to collaborate with peers and community members to address social issues. These types of instructional strategies will heighten engagement and achievement in the social studies.
It has been argued that the move towards more authentic instruction will not be effective with populations of students that have typically experienced difficulties with traditional learning methods (Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001). This idea rests on the rationale that students, who have not mastered the basic knowledge that has been provided through traditional means, will not have the foundation to build the complex understanding that is achieved through authentic instruction. Newmann et al. (2001) explained the misconception that:

… it is widely believed that more sustained attention to didactic methods is essential. From this perspective, the best way to teach is to present students with the desired information and ask them to memorize it, whether this be facts, definitions, algorithms, vocabulary lists, rules of communication, procedures… and so on. Through various drills, exercises, and tests, students are expected to recall and repeat what they have memorized. (p. 9)

Yet, their research revealed that, “students exposed to teaching that demands complex intellectual work are likely to do as well or better than students exposed to basic-skills-only instruction” (Newmann, et al., 2001). Levin, Newmann, and Oliver (1969) found this to be true in high school social studies, in particular (as cited in Newmann et al., 2001).

Furthermore, Newmann et al. (2001) supported the notion that traditional teaching methods (i.e. didactic instruction) should not be totally discarded to make room for authentic instruction. Instead they proposed the idea that, “Significant intellectual accomplishments build on prior knowledge that has been accumulated in the field… This is usually the central focus of direct instruction in basic skills” (p. 15). Hence, didactic methods still have a place
in a classroom that utilizes authentic instruction. Direct instruction might be utilized, in moderation, to provide a concise baseline of information upon which students may construct new knowledge through authentic instruction.

Teachers often need to be taught methods of implementing authentic instruction. Avery, Freeman, and Carmichael-Tanaka (2002) conducted a study to analyze the impact that professional development had on teachers’ utilization of authentic instruction and the effect that this type of instruction had on student engagement and achievement in the social studies. The researchers found that there was a significant increase in the teachers’ utilization of “higher order thinking” skills and the development of “deep knowledge” of subject matter following professional development centered on authentic instruction (Avery et al., 2002, p. 53). There were also increases in the quality and authenticity of assessment tasks and student performance. Students showed gains in “analytical abilities,” “understanding of significant disciplinary concepts,” and conveying “ideas through extended writing” as teachers made improvements in “clarity,” “disciplinary content,” the “disciplinary process,” and the inclusion of an “audience beyond the school” (p. 54).

**Authentic Assessment**

Ultimately, the practices that a teacher uses to assess student knowledge should be connected to the instructional methods that he or she utilizes. Newmann, King, and Carmichael (2007) described the connections between authentic instruction and assessment and, subsequently, authentic intellectual work as “construction of knowledge, through the use of disciplined inquiry, to produce discourse, products or performances that have value beyond school” (p. 3). Similarly, Wiggins (1989) argued that:
We have lost sight of the fact that a true test of intellectual ability requires the performance of exemplary tasks. First, authentic assessments replicate the challenges and standards of performance that typically face writers, businesspeople, scientists, community leaders, designers, or historians. These include writing essays and reports, conducting individual and group research, designing proposals and mock-ups, assembling portfolios, and so on. (pp. 703-704)

Essentially Wiggins believed that assessments in school should mirror the responsibilities that people have outside of the classroom. Sleeter (2005) also provided possible examples of authentic assessments that included projects, essays, portfolios, and performance-based assessments.

*Implementation of Authentic Assessments*

There are various ways to construct and implement authentic assessments. Sleeter (2005) explained that students should learn to evaluate their work in comparison to a standard. Furthermore, the process of constructing effective authentic assessments consists of defining expectations for achievement, communicating those expectations with students, and evaluating final products in light of prior communication. This is precisely what happens in the NTN model as students are given rubrics to understand the expectations for a project. Sleeter also (2005) explained that, “All forms of assessment, including testing and classroom-based assessment, should be culturally relevant” (p. 71). As assessments are created for the students’ unique perspective, and perhaps with student input, it is inevitable that the assessments will have more real world applicability. Furthermore, Mathison and
Fragnoli (2006) indirectly emphasized the importance of communication between the teacher and the student as they explained that assessments should not be utilized in mere summative manners, but rather, used for learning in ways that enable “more and better student understanding of what is being taught” (p. 201).

O’Brien (1997) explained, “In most other subject areas, a student learns a skill and practices it… in English, one learns about different forms of writing, then uses them; but in social studies, one learns about citizenship, then takes a test” (p. 54). Consequently, educators developed a pilot project-based social studies assessment that had the following characteristics: “Thematic orientation,” “skills emphasis,” “reliance upon social studies perspectives,” “use of a variety of social studies resources,” and “community orientation” (O’Brien, 1997, p. 55). This approach was intended to assess the diverse skills and bodies of knowledge that students were expected to acquire in their social studies courses. Similarly, Levin-Goldberg (2009) recommended utilizing “service learning,” “extracurricular activities,” “class discussions and debates,” “role plays and simulations,” and “home-school connections” to increase civic engagement amongst students (p. 15). Students are typically more motivated to learn when they are allowed to participate in a project in which they have a vested interest (Levin-Goldberg, 2009).

Despite the promise of authentic assessments, they are not without their critics. Some people argue that authentic assessments are too expensive. Wiggins (1990) noted that the average cost of evaluating a multiple-choice test was only 1 cent, which was extremely inexpensive compared to the $2 cost of evaluating an open ended assessment. There has also been concern about the reliability and validity of authentic assessments. Tanner (2001)
explained how an instructor reviewing a portfolio in any given subject must wonder how a colleague would evaluate the same material. This could lead to confusion over reliability and validity. Furthermore, Tanner (2001) stated that authentic assessments may not “neutralize some of the disadvantages that… minority children must shoulder” the way that many of its advocates suggest (p. 28).

A number of scholars have addressed the issues raised in critiques of authentic assessment. Wiggins (1990) cited a number of effective assessment systems that evaluate authentic assessments as opposed to multiple-choice exams. These systems, which include College Board’s Advanced Placement program and the New York Regents exams, have overcome questions of reliability and validity (Wiggins, 1990). Wiggins (1989) also explained that, “Evaluation is most accurate and equitable when it entails human judgment and dialogue, so that the person tested can ask for clarification of questions and explain his or her answers” (p. 704). Sleeter (2005) supported this notion as she stated that, “Bottom-up planning, in which teachers and even students can participate in the process of constructing assessment systems, is what it means to democratize assessment” (p. 71). Many scholars agree that tests created by external entities are not able to accurately assess students learning. Jones (2004) has promoted the idea that, “Schools should be held accountable to their primary clients: students, parents, and the local community” (p. 59). This, indirectly, supports a system of accountability that favors local input over mandates from larger bodies.

These ideas of “bottom-up planning” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 71) and schools being held accountable to local entities (Jones, 2004) point us to an assessment system that hones in on the educational experiences in individual classrooms. Teachers should utilize assessments
that accurately gauge the information and concepts that have been taught to students. In this type of assessment system, the assessment would be created before the instruction is even implemented. Project based learning, which incorporates authentic instruction and assessment, “begins with the vision of an end product or presentation” and “creates a context and reason to learn and understand the information and concepts” (Buck Institute for Education [BIE], 2009).

**Project Based Learning**

The Buck Institute for Education (2009) defines project-based learning as “an extended process of inquiry in response to a complex… problem” where “students learn key academic content (and) practice 21st Century Skills” through the creation of a project (para. 1). It is similar to problem based learning, where “students learn content, strategies, and self-directed learning skills through collaboratively solving problems, reflecting on their experiences, and engaging in self-directed inquiry” (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007, p. 100). Yet, the objective of project based learning is to take problem based learning a step further and create a product or presentation that may be used as a solution for the problem. Hence, all project based learning is essentially problem based, because the creation of the project is meant to solve some real world problem. However, all problem-based learning is not necessarily project based, because it may not result in the creation of a product or presentation. For this study, I focused on project based learning because it was the mode of instruction adopted and implemented at EHS.
**History of project based learning**

As early as 1918, there were efforts to describe a method of instruction, which centered on the creation of projects. F. E. Heald, who was a specialist in agricultural education for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, wrote a report where he made suggestions that educational projects should include contracts and an alignment with work done at home (Kliebard, 2004). Also, in 1918, William H. Kilpatrick published an article in *Teachers College Record*, entitled “The Project Method,” which became a centerpiece for debate in education (Kliebard, 2004). In the article, Kilpatrick (1918) defined a project as a “whole-hearted purposeful activity” that is “the typical unit of the worthy life in a democratic society” and should be “the typical unit of school procedure.” Kilpatrick (1918) elaborated,

> We of America have for years increasingly desired that education be considered as life itself and not as a mere preparation for later living… A man who habitually so regulates his life with reference to worthy social aims meets at once the demands for practical efficiency and of moral responsibility. Such a one presents the ideal of democratic citizenship. (para 7).

Kilpatrick also took a relatively behavioralist approach, as he explained his beliefs that curriculum should start with the child (Kliebard, 2004). His article and subsequent writings had a major influence on other scholars (Kliebard, 2004). Dewey (1931) reflected on the idea of the project method in his lecture “The Way Out of Educational Confusion,” where he stated that, while he did not fully endorse the method, he believed it had “certain characteristics which are significant for any plan for change” (as cited in Kliebard, pp. 30-31). His main criticism was the possibility for lack of structured instruction and purpose...
(Kliebard, 2004).

There was not much literature written on the “Project Method” or “project based learning” in America before the topic was rejuvenated in the 1990’s. There was a brief resurgence in Western Europe in the 1960’s as projects “were viewed as a form of learning through inquiry and were promoted for their practical relevance, interdisciplinarity, and social bearing” (Knoll, 1997). The use of projects has continued to ebb and flow in Western Europe as effort has been given to “harmonizing project work with more conventional methods of teaching” (Apel & Knoll, 1997). However, it was not until the latter part of the 20th century that the Buck Institute for Education (BIE), which was created in 1987 as a non-profit organization dedicated to educational research and development, began to research and focus on project based learning due to its successful implementation in various schools in the western United States (specifically California) (BIE, 2011). The BIE created its own project based learning model and developed instructional materials to assist schools in implementing it (BIE, 2011). This particular model became a leading approach for project based learning due to its adoption by the NTN and other educational reform organizations. Ultimately, the model and materials created by BIE have an impact on schools as they are used as a framework to help teachers execute project based learning (BIE, 2011). The NTN (2013c) has also developed resources such as the “Project Idea Rubric” to assist teachers with the implementation of project based learning.

*Project Based Learning and Constructivism*

Along with the recent expansion of project based learning, there has also been evidence from cognitive psychology that project based learning may lead to a better
understanding of information. Mabry (2004) stated, “Uniform expectations directly contradict not only our romantic collective self-concept as a nation of rugged individualists but also the best current learning theory… constructivism” (p. 51). Knowledge expands by building upon information that already exists in the mind – hence, the idea of construction. These ideas of knowledge construction stem from theories developed by Lev Vygotsky, where he determined that complex mental processes were often increased in social settings (Bruning et al., 2011). Vygotsky posed the idea that there was a distinction between what a child could learn alone, and what he or she could learn with the help of a more knowledgeable peer or adult (Bruning et al., 2011). He termed this distinction the “zone of proximal development” (Bruning et al., 2011). During the use of project based learning, the teacher acts as a facilitator that assists the student in constructing understanding of subject matter from their existing knowledge.

Bruning, Schraw, and Norby (2011) stated that within the idea of constructivism, “learners arrive at meaning by selecting information and constructing what they know either individually or in collaboration with other learners” (p. 194). Thus, “the aim of teaching… is to encourage knowledge formation and metacognitive processes for judging, organizing, and acquiring new information that is student-driven” (p. 194). Project based learning may be effective because teachers are prompted to scaffold information for students to help them construct understanding, as opposed to bestowing their knowledge and expertise on an uninformed student.

*Project Based Learning in the Social Studies*

Project based learning has been implemented in the social studies in various forms for
many years. John Dewey, while he did not coin the phrase “project based learning,”
indirectly advocated this type of learning through his scholarship and lab school (Kliebard,
2004). Dewey believed that, historically, knowledge was created as humans tried to solve
real-world problems (Kliebard, 2004). For example, architecture was an outgrowth of
people’s desire to build durable, reliable dwelling places. Thus, when Dewey started his
school at the University of Chicago, which was officially called the University Laboratory
School, the students were involved in a variety of activities that were rooted in current and
historical real-world problems (Kliebard, 2004). While learning about a particular time
period, some students constructed buildings and devices that were utilized by people in that
era (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936 as cited in Kliebard, 2004).

Some scholars have also utilized PBL in the social studies and experienced positive
results compared with traditional practices. For example, Parker, Mosborg, Bransford, Vye,
Wilkerson, and Abbott (2011) conducted a study on the usefulness of project based learning
in the instruction of AP US Government and Politics. They utilized projects where students
had tasks such as advising “a new nation just emerging from a long dictatorship about the
various forms and features of constitutional democracy” and proposing “public policy and
action that will improve society” (Parker et al., 2011, p. 541). They found that students who
engaged in project based learning performed as well or better than students who used
traditional learning methods on the AP exam (Parker et al., 2011). Summers and Dickinson
(2012) had similar findings in their comparison of a school focused on project based
instruction and a traditional high school. While they did not provide examples of how
project based instruction was utilized, they found that the school centered on project based
instruction “had higher social studies achievement than the experimental (traditional) group as measured by standardized assessments” (Summers & Dickinson, 2012, p. 98).

MacArthur, Ferretti, and Okolo (2002) studied a sixth grade classroom that implemented an eight week project investigation of immigration in the U.S. during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Students were tasked with researching immigration during this time period to prepare for debates they would have with classmates over immigration laws (MacArthur et al., 2002). MacArthur et al. (2002) found that students made significant gains in their knowledge of immigration, were more engaged in the social studies content, and were more participative in the instruction. This supported their belief that social studies should help to produce a more “informed citizenry” that encourages “thoughtfulness and reflection” that is “fundamental to participation in democratic institutions” (MacArthur et al., 2002, p. 161).

There have also been a number of studies conducted on the use of project based learning in elementary social studies. In their study of second grade social studies, Halvorsen, Duke, Brugar, Block, Strachan, Berka, and Brown (2012) found that students from low socioeconomic-status (SES) schools “made statistically significant gains in social studies and content literacy” and “showed no statistically significant differences from the students in the high-SES schools” when they implemented their projects (p. 198). The particular projects that were used in the study included an economics project that focused on raising money for a local charity and a civics project that centered on studying a local park and making recommendations for improvements to a local government official (Halvorsen et al., 2012). In her research on the use of project based learning in a first grade classroom,
Diffily (2002) described the process of students creating an exhibit for the school intercultural festival. The class was tasked with selecting a country to analyze for the event and chose Japan (Diffily, 2002). To prepare for their exhibit, students interviewed Japanese students from a local university and conducted research using books and the internet to gain a greater understanding of Japanese culture (Diffily, 2002). Then, they created their booth exhibit, which featured Japanese artifacts, stories about the lives of Japanese children, and student-created posters and brochures (Diffily, 2002). Diffily (2002) found that the students “gained knowledge about ancient and modern day Japan,” “enhanced their reading and writing skills,” “and negotiated solutions to problems and group decisions” (p. 43).

Although some scholars have noted the successes of project based learning in the social studies, other researchers have reported a lack of scholarship in the field. For example, Summers and Dickinson (2012) mentioned their surprise in conducting their study when they found that “social studies (project based instruction) research was unexpectedly sparse” (p. 83). Walker and Leary (2009), in their quantitative study of project based learning implementation in various subjects also noted, “There is… a clear need for additional quantitative controlled studies in… social science… and a less dramatic need for work in the sciences” (pp. 21-22).

**Critiques of project based learning**

There have been a number of critiques of project based learning. Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006) argued that problem-based learning (and consequently project based learning), which was labeled as minimally guided instruction, was an ineffective teaching strategy because learners needed more direction to understand challenging content. Research
was cited from various scholars in cognitive studies to support this notion (Kirschner et al., 2006). However, Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, and Chinn (2007) responded to this critique by explaining that problem-based learning and inquiry learning approaches (such as project based learning) were “highly scaffolded” and thus “powerful and effective models of learning” (p. 99). To identify these instructional techniques as minimally guided was misleading, erroneous, and would likely lead to misconceptions about the benefits of the approaches.

Halvorsen et al. (2012) also posed possible concerns with project based learning:

Others might wonder whether it is possible to curricularize (i.e. instantiate in formal unit and lesson plans) for widespread use an approach to learning that is, by definition, somewhat dependent upon the specific students, classroom, and community in which the learning takes place. (p. 204)

Halvorsen et al. (2012) essentially resolved this issue in their study by “providing… support to teachers,” “aligning project-based units to specific learning standards,” and making efforts to curricularize project based learning so that it could be replicable (p. 204).

Some researchers have also argued that project based learning was more appropriate for gifted learners and not necessarily a proven instructional strategy for raising the achievement levels of struggling learners (Mergendoller, Maxwell, & Bellisimo, 2006). For example, Diffily (2002) argued that, “Project-based learning (wa)s particularly suited to the needs of gifted children” (p. 40). She explained that this type of instruction lent itself to gifted students expanding their knowledge on a particular topic by investigating it in depth (Diffily, 2002). Furthermore, since students were assigned different roles in the project,
there would be no stigma attached to a gifted student working on something different, or more complex (Diffily, 2002). This was important to note because the purpose of using project based learning at Engagement High School was to increase the previous performance of a low performing school. If it was not proven that this was an effective method of increasing student engagement and achievement for struggling learners, then one should have questioned why it was being used.

Hertzog (2007), in her study of the use of project based learning in two 1st grade classrooms, argued an opposing point from Diffily. Hertzog (2007) believed that the critical thinking skills employed through project based learning were the types of skills commonly utilized in gifted education. In her study, she researched the effects of implementing project based learning in elementary classrooms composed of students from low socio-economic status (Hertzog, 2007). She found that students were definitely more engaged and better behaved during the projects, but teachers were not sure if students learned more. Filippatou and Kaldi (2010) employed pre and post-tests in their study of the effectiveness of project based learning with primary school students with learning disabilities in Greece. They found that students with learning disabilities made gains in academic performance, motivation, and their ability and efficacy in working in groups while learning through projects. MacArthur et al. (2002) also conducted a study on the use of this pedagogy with general education and special education elementary students and found that both groups made significant gains in their knowledge of the subject matter. Also, Thomas (2000) in his research on project based learning, found that it “had value for enhancing the quality of students' learning in subject matter areas” (p. 35) and seemed “to be equivalent or slightly better than other models of
instruction for producing gains in general academic achievement and for developing lower-level cognitive skills in traditional subject matter areas” (p. 34). The conflicting conclusions of some of these scholars prompted me to conduct further research on the possible benefits or disadvantages of project based learning.

Again, with our society becoming increasingly diverse, it is advantageous for us to analyze project based learning and authentic instruction and assessment through a lens of cultural relevance. Ultimately, the pedagogy that is enacted with students will need to take into account their cultural background and experiences.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a viable framework for rethinking authentic instruction, assessment, and project based learning in the social studies. Essentially, culturally relevant pedagogy is a methodology that results in high achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness in students from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings (1995a) described the achievement of students in classrooms utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy in various ways as she stated:

- students in these classrooms were at or above grade level on standardized achievement tests. Fortunately, academic achievement in these classrooms was not limited to standardized assessments… students demonstrated an ability to read, write, speak, compute, pose and solve problems at sophisticated levels—that is, pose their own questions about the nature of teacher- or text-posed problems and engage in peer review of problem solutions. (p. 475)

Subsequently, cultural competence was described as “a way for students to maintain their
cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 476).

Similarly, in her writings on culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2002) stated, “when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (p. 106). Ladson-Billings (1995a) emphasized that teachers helping students to develop socio-political consciousness, identified and helped students to understand the “political underpinnings of the students' community and social world” (p. 477).

During her study of eight elementary teachers in California, Ladson-Billings (2001) described how culturally relevant pedagogy might appear in social studies. She noted that one teacher encouraged students to discover information by conducting oral histories and creating migration maps with family members. This supported the teacher’s philosophy of “history as a way of uncovering truths” (p. 206). A second teacher used a conversation with students on community problems to fuel a project where they proposed renovation ideas to the local city council. This required the students to research the historical uses of community space and how the area could be more useful to members of the neighborhood. Both of these were examples of authentic instruction or, more specifically, project based learning, and culturally relevant pedagogy being utilized simultaneously.

Various scholars have conducted studies and written articles on the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy since Ladson-Billings framed the idea in 1995. Essentially, researchers have found that educators who utilize culturally relevant pedagogy share similar “conceptions of self and others,” “conceptions of knowledge,” and structures of “social
Conceptions of Self and Others

Ladson-Billings (1995a) noted that, while various educators in her study met the criteria of helping African American students experience academic success, increase cultural competence and socio-political consciousness, there were few similarities in the methods they used. Some of the teachers were very structured in their delivery, while others utilized more laissez-faire pedagogical strategies. However, she found similarities in the beliefs of the teachers. The first area of ideological resemblance was within teachers’ conception of self and others. Ladson Billings (1995a) found that the teachers:

- believed that all the students were capable of academic success,
- saw their pedagogy as art - unpredictable, always in the process of becoming,
- saw themselves as members of the community,
- saw teaching as a way to give back to the community,
- believed in a Freirean notion of "teaching as mining" (1974, p. 76) or pulling knowledge out. (pp. 478-479)

Several scholars have corroborated these findings while researching successful educational experiences of minority students in America. Irvine (2009) provided the example of an elementary teacher who had a class, composed of predominately African American and Latino American students, learn about the concept of about classification by using vegetables. When the students became discouraged because they did not recognize some of the images that were being used, the teacher decided to refer to something she heard the students speak about in a non-academic conversation – cars. Thus, the teacher was able
to use a topic that was familiar with students to teach the concept of classification. This example reflected the teacher’s conception of self and others because the teacher did not accept the fact that students could not learn the concept of classification because the first teaching effort failed. She believed the students could learn and used a creative method for helping the students construct an understanding of the desired concept.

Within the theme of conception of self and others, it is also common for teachers to recognize that students enter the classroom with prior knowledge, amassed from their own experiences. It is the task of the teacher to pull this knowledge out and use it as a foundation upon which to build curricular concepts and ideas. Thus, “culturally relevant pedagogy is ultimately a constructivist pedagogy” (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). Tyson (2002) provided an example of how children’s literature might be used to engage students in controversial issues and social action. In this study, she aimed to connect the day-to-day experiences of students with literature and explore how this connection produced political identities. It was found that, through literature, students developed an enhanced understanding of social action. A similar approach was used by Howard (2004) as he sought to understand how an eighth grade U.S. history course could be used to enhance students’ understanding of social issues (specifically race) in America. He found that he was able to use the U.S. history curriculum as a foundation for students (of various races) to engage in discussions about personal experiences and ideas related to race. Gay (2002), in her theory of culturally responsive teaching, summarized these types of pedagogical techniques as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). The idea that students
bring meaningful background knowledge into the classroom is vital for the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and authentic instruction.

_Social Relations Within the Classroom_

Teachers that utilize culturally relevant pedagogy also tend to create a collaborative atmosphere that ultimately educates both the student and teacher. Ladson-Billings (1995a) noted that exemplary teachers develop healthy student/teacher relationship, show an ability to connect with all types of students, create a supportive classroom community, and encourage students to take responsibility for each other’s education.

Again, various scholars have found that successful teachers of minority students create a collegial classroom environment. Milner (2011) discussed how a white male science teacher, Mr. Hall, successfully implemented culturally relevant pedagogy by focusing on building relationships with students and embracing them as family members. Milner (2011) documented the following quote from Mr. Hall:

> I like the family aspect because I mean if family’s not important to you, then what [or who] is? I mean family should be the thing that’s most important to everybody. And I mean that for some people it’s not, so hopefully in here they kind of get that aspect… I care about everybody; I love them all… just like I would my own [biological children]. (p. 85)

The notion of caring relationships is vital to the social relationships found in culturally relevant pedagogy. In her study of a teacher implementing this methodology, Irvine (2009) noted, “Culturally relevant teachers form caring relationships with their students” (p. 60). She continued, “If you have a true, caring relationship with your students,
you will know what their interests are, what information they relate to” (p. 61). Gay (2002) also described one of the essential elements of culturally responsive teaching as “demonstrating caring and building learning communities” with students (p. 106). She elaborated that, “Cooperative group learning arrangements and peer coaching fit well with the communal cultural systems of African, Asian, Native, and Latino American groups” (Gay, 2000; Spring, 1995; as cited in Gay, 2002, p. 112).

Relative to caring relationships, culturally relevant pedagogy is aligned with equity pedagogy. Banks and Banks (1995) defined equity pedagogy as “teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society” (p. 152). Banks and Banks (1995) suggested that equity pedagogy be used to increase students’ engagement in classrooms and felt that this could be accomplished through the utilization of instructional strategies like cooperative learning. Banks (2006) provided an example of a teacher that taught his students about the civil rights movement and then helped them advocate for a social issue of their choice. Ladson-Billings (1995a) presented a similar example of a teacher who “worked with her students to identify poorly utilized space in the community,” studied previously “inaccessible archival records about the early history of the community,” and wrote “urban plans which they presented before the city council” (p. 477). Similarly, Brown (2004) wrote about “transformative pedagogy” that is intended to help students learn “to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality,” and offered similar pedagogical advice (p. 77). She
explained that teachers should utilize “rational discourse” with students and take action based on this discourse and reflection (Brown, 2004, p. 93). Finally, Marshall (2001), in her research on teachers who experienced success with African American students, found that those teachers often had an emphasis on community within the classroom and drew connections to the larger African American community.

An emphasis on community can provide the real-world connection that is necessary for the implementation of authentic instruction. Again, teachers that utilize culturally relevant pedagogy are able to make the curriculum relevant for students beyond the boundaries of the school. Many of the facets that make authentic instruction a means of heightening engagement in social studies are what make culturally relevant pedagogy effective for diverse populations.

Conceptions of Knowledge

Finally, Ladson-Billings (1995a) discovered that teachers that implement a culturally relevant pedagogy have similar epistemologies about knowledge. The teachers tend to believe:

- Knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed.
- Knowledge must be viewed critically.
- Teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning.
- Teachers must scaffold, or build bridges, to facilitate learning.
- Assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence.

(Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 481)

This understanding of knowledge connects to Marshall’s (2001) research in which
she found that successful teachers of African American students had the “the recognition that no knowledge is sacrosanct” (p. 108). Banks (2006) also elaborated on the notion of the contingent nature of knowledge by stating:

Much of the knowledge institutionalized within the schools and the larger society neither enables students to become reflective and critical citizens nor helps them to participate effectively in their society in ways that will make it more democratic and just. This chapter proposes and describes a curriculum designed to help students to understand knowledge as a social construction and to acquire the data, skills, and values needed to participate in civic actions and social change. (p. 203)

Irvine (2009) has also noted that, “knowledge and meaning are constructed.” This contrasts with a traditional transmission model of knowledge that values the facts that are presented in social studies classes as the most valuable information for students to acquire and utilize.

It is equally important to understand that within this model the teachers must value the backgrounds and experiences of students to help them obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to improve society. Ladson-Billings (2001) borrowed an idea from Giroux and Simon’s (1999) writing on critical pedagogy as she explained that educators that implement culturally relevant pedagogy “strive to incorporate student experience as ‘official’ content” (p. 202). Howard (2003), in his study on the importance of critical teacher reflection, noted, “Teachers need to understand that racially diverse students frequently bring cultural capital to the classroom that is oftentimes drastically different from mainstream norms and worldviews” (p. 197). Teachers must recognize the value of this capital and build upon it. For example, in Ladson-Billings’s (1995a) study, a teacher provided an opportunity for
students to utilize outside knowledge and interests (i.e. basketball and cooking) for a project in which they shared their expertise in a domain of their choice. This exemplifies a conception of knowledge that is often absent from social studies classes.

Culturally relevant pedagogy also calls upon teachers to view the curriculum critically and to utilize various means of assessing student knowledge. In her writing on culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2002) explains that:

Culturally responsive teachers know how to determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality… These analyses should focus on the quantity, accuracy, complexity, placement, purpose, variety, significance, and authenticity of the narrative texts, visual illustrations, learning activities, role models, and authorial sources used in the instructional materials. (p. 108)

Ladson-Billings (2001) also provided an example of teacher who challenged her students to view history critically and as “a way of uncovering truths” (p. 206).

This perspective on the curriculum should lead teachers to utilize innovative assessment methods. In Ladson-Billings’ (1995a) study, there were teachers that prompted students to conduct oral histories, create migration maps, and present plans for community restoration. In Tyson’s (2002) research, children’s literature was used to inspire students to “develop understandings of social action and ways of thinking about social action in their own communities” (p. 50). This was accomplished by activities like “journal writing, story boards, drama, small group discussion, [and] internet research” (p. 50).
Critiques of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Despite the large body of research that has been developed to substantiate culturally relevant pedagogy, it is not without its critics. Hirsch (2010) has argued that the proper path of educating for social justice involves teaching a core body knowledge in all subjects. Eisner (2002) summed up Hirsch’s viewpoint as an understanding that “not all content is created equal” (p. 65). Hirsch (2010) noted that, “The chief cause of our schools’ inefficiency is… curricular incoherence” (p. 36). Essentially, Hirsch’s argument stems from the belief that centering learning on students and their backgrounds may lead to them not learning information that will be vital for cultural capital and social change. Yet, this argument, with certain interpretations, could support a rationale where educators ignore injustices in curriculum. It should be the primary goal of American education, and specifically the social studies, to enhance our democracy. This enhancement can only occur as social issues (which often lie beyond the traditional body of knowledge) are studied and analyzed. This does not mean that certain traditional ideals should be avoided (i.e. democracy), but that some long-established historical points might be sacrificed (i.e. one dimensional portrayals of historic figures). Efficiency, thus, becomes a secondary concern to the broader goal of a more developed democracy and engaged citizenry.

Conclusion

Current literature shows that there are efforts being made to reform instruction and assessment practices across all disciplines. This task is particularly important in social studies, where there is a reputation for not engaging students. Authentic instruction and assessment methods like project-based learning will likely become more common in schools.
in the coming years. While I was able to locate notable amounts of literature written on the topics of project-based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy, there was a lack of research on project based learning in the social studies and how a successful teacher utilizes it. In this study, I hope to bolster this area of research that has been sparsely documented and help to increase our understanding of how a teacher might maximize the use of project based learning in the social studies.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

General Introduction

This qualitative research study focused on two primary research questions – How does a social studies teacher in an urban school enact the New Tech Network educational model with her students? And, which teaching strategies does she use to engage students and gauge achievement? According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research should be conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored in a complex, detailed manner and methods such as interviews and observations best serve the purpose of addressing that problem. In this case, a qualitative study provided details necessary to gain an understanding of how the New Tech Network model was utilized by a successful teacher at Engagement High School. I used three of the methods of data collection commonly used in qualitative research – interviews, field observations, and document analysis.

Specific Methodological Approach

Specifically, case study methodology was employed for this research, as the methods of data collection included an exploration of a particular educational model (the New Tech Network model) in a bounded environment (one urban, secondary social studies classroom). Furthermore, this study followed Creswell’s (2007) design for a case study by utilizing “in-depth data collection” and reporting “a case description and case based themes” (p. 73). According to Stake (1995), this type of case study would be categorized as “instrumental,” because it developed from an interest in an issue. Typically, these types of studies develop when a researcher has a general concern and “selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). In this particular case, I became interested in the utilization of the
New Tech Network model in an urban setting and the prospect of increasing engagement and achievement in the social studies. I decided that it would be ideal to study a teacher that had experienced success in the model and utilized strategies to spark student engagement. I concluded that a single case study would be the best type of research to conduct, based on the limited number of teachers in my geographic area that satisfied these criteria.

In order to conduct an in-depth study of this topic, a number of quantitative and qualitative data could be used. I chose to make this a qualitative study because I was “interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, pp. 28-29). Primarily, I aimed to provide a rich description of learning experiences that students had in this classroom. This included information on the teaching strategies that the teacher utilized and the students’ reactions to those strategies. I also wanted to help people understand the ideology behind this teacher’s practices and the educational philosophy that informed her pedagogical decisions.

**Research Questions**

There were two primary questions that I sought to answer through my study. Those primary questions were -

1. How does a social studies teacher in an urban school enact the New Tech Network educational model with her students?

2. Which teaching strategies does she use to engage students and gauge achievement?

These questions were vital to address because research was needed to gain an understanding of how the NTN reform model was being implemented and how it might become a model for
engaging students that have not traditionally experienced academic success. This issue is particularly important in the social studies, a subject responsible for the democratic education of students.

**Site Selection and Sample Criteria**

I selected my site of study for a variety of reasons. First of all, I was interested in how the New Tech Network model was being enacted in the social studies to engage students and ensure achievement. Furthermore, I was interested in how this model was being utilized with African American and Latino American students. I investigated possible sites and found that EHS was the only school in the area that satisfied those requirements.

Once EHS was selected as the site of the study, I needed to select a teacher or teachers that exhibited success in implementing the NTN model in social studies. As a previous employee of EHS, I was well aware of the success that one of my colleagues, Ms. Olivia Jordan (pseudonym), had experienced. I witnessed her innovative approach to teaching, reputation for engaging students and helping them to master content, organization of multiple school-wide extra-curricular events, and classroom management skills.

Additionally, she was a participant in the pilot study that inspired this research. She was also selected as the EHS 2012-2013 Teacher of the Year providing some indication of her status as an effective teacher in the school community. Thus, the prospective sample was selected using Merriam’s (1998) idea of “purposeful sampling” (p. 61). I knew that there was much that could be learned from studying Ms. Jordan, who had been able to continually capture the interest of students in social studies and enhance their learning.
Data Collection

I started to collect data in the fall of 2012 as I received a signed, formal agreement from Ms. Jordan to participate in the research. This agreement included information on the purpose and scope of the study and what would be requested of the teacher. We also decided that Honors U.S. History would be the most appropriate course for this study because of the fact that it served the 11th grade students at EHS with more diverse learning needs. Again, there were only two levels of U.S. History offered at EHS – honors and Advanced Placement. With the absence of a standard level class, the honors level classes tended to serve students with a wider range of academic successes and challenges. Next, I conducted a pre-interview with Ms. Jordan on topics such as the NTN educational model, the Honors U.S. History course, student engagement and achievement, her educational philosophy, and the successes and challenges of project based learning in the social studies (see Appendix A).

The study consisted of data collection that lasted throughout the duration of a single project-based unit and an accompanying extension activity. The unit (including the extension activity) lasted for twelve days. Within that time period, I conducted two interviews with Ms. Jordan that occurred at the beginning and middle of the project using the “Interview Questions” (see Appendix A). The interview questions focused on the implementation of the project, student engagement, and student achievement. I also collected audio recordings and transcribed those conversations verbatim. Finally, there was a post-interview with Ms. Jordan after observations were completed to reflect on the project using the “Post-Interview Questions” (see Appendix A).
I conducted twelve observations every other day, consecutively. My semi-structured observation protocol was based on “questions of interest” that I developed from my research question and my “conceptual framework” (Merriam, 1998, p. 96). For example, I looked for evidence of student engagement, achievement, and how the New Tech Network model was enacted. Specifically, for student engagement, I made notes of the types of activities in which students participated and the quality and duration of their participation. I also noted occurrences that were specific to culturally relevant pedagogy, including the social relationships in the classroom and evidence of student achievement, cultural affirmation, and socio-political consciousness. Stake’s (1995) advice was followed as he noted, “During observation, the qualitative case study researcher keeps a good record of events to provide a relatively incontestable description for further analysis and ultimate reporting. He or she lets the occasion tell its story” (p. 62). As such, I scripted verbatim field notes during the class observations in my researcher journal.

Finally, I collected all documents that were distributed to students throughout the project and additional documents that reflected the utilization of the NTN model. Merriam (1998) noted that “finding relevant materials is the first step” in effectively using documents in case study research (p. 120). I collected documents such as the project rubric, graphic organizers, class readings, written assignments, quizzes, tests, etc. Ms. Jordan was not hesitant about sharing documents with me since transparency was common in the school (i.e. grades were posted online and were accessible by each teacher and teachers often shared classroom resources).
Data Analysis

Following data collection, I began the extensive process of coding my findings for the study. For this, I relied heavily on Merriam’s (1998) methods of “category construction” and theory development (p. 179; p. 187). First, I read through the transcribed interviews and observations and made notes on general points that were raised by Ms. Jordan and ideas that emerged from the observations (Merriam, 1998). Then, I began to draw connections between the different issues that were raised in the interviews and observations and created preliminary categories (Merriam, 1998). Next, I reviewed the documents that were collected, categorized them according to their purpose, structure, and content, and found connections between the documents and the preliminary categories for the observations and interviews. It is important to note that in this process, the original interview questions and observation instruments were ignored and the focus was placed on the data collected to ensure I “heard” what the interviewee, observations, and documents were saying (Creswell, 2007). After reviewing those categories, I identified specific categories that generalized the findings from the study and could be used to interpret the results. Those codes were compared and weighed against each other to understand which codes took precedence in the data and which codes were correlated or subordinate (Merriam, 1998). This allowed the data to be presented thematically via graphic organizers and text. As I wrote the findings and discussion for the study, I continued to analyze and refine the codes and themes to ensure I was accurately representing the data collected.
Research Validity and Reliability

Before this data and analysis could be reported, it was essential that I validated my conclusions and ensured my findings were reliable. I utilized six of the validation strategies highlighted by Creswell (2007) including “triangulation,” “rich, thick descriptions,” “prolonged engagement and persistent observation,” “member checking,” “peer review,” and “clarifying researcher bias” (pp. 207-209).

To ensure my findings were reliable and valid, I utilized triangulation, rich, thick descriptions, and peer reviews (Creswell, 2007). With triangulation, I compared and contrasted the information that I gathered from each observation, interview, and document and checked for contradictions that may have compromised my findings. I employed multiple research strategies including interviews, field observations, and document analyses to corroborate findings. I also used each research strategy multiple times to further substantiate the findings. Stake (1995) referred to this practice as “methodological triangulation” (p. 114). Furthermore, I provided thorough descriptions of the site and the classroom procedures and exercises I observed. These detailed depictions helped readers to understand and make use of the results of the research. My graduate program advisor and dissertation committee co-chair, Dr. Meghan Manfra, also served as a peer reviewer throughout the research process. She challenged me with questions about methodology to ensure that I was utilizing the best and most appropriate research procedures possible for the study.

I also had prolonged engagement in the field and used member checking to verify Ms. Jordan’s statements in the interviews. Creswell (2007) recommended “building trust with
participants” and “learning the culture” of the research site (p. 207). Because of the fact that I was a previous employee of the school, I entered this research with a reasonably informed understanding of the school culture and a good rapport with Ms. Jordan. I also utilized member checking as I sent the transcribed interviews to Ms. Jordan for review after the post-interview. She received the document, which contained the interviews, and said that she had no concerns with the transcriptions.

Broad measures were also taken to ensure that my findings were reliable. Interviews were recorded via the voice memo application on my iPhone and notes from the field observations and document analyses were typed on my personal computer. Again, many details were included in the notes to ensure validity and that the most thorough description possible was provided. Each observation lasted 90 minutes and included many notes regarding what occurred at different times throughout the observation. The transcriptions included details as meticulous as the words mumbled by the respondent during her pauses and notes about brief lapses of silence in responses that may have signaled a change in train of thought. There was no intercoder agreement within this study, due to the fact that the interviewer created, conducted, and transcribed all of the interviews and observations (Creswell, 2007).

**Subjectivity Statement**

In this study, it was very important that I acknowledged personal biases or interests that could have affected the management of the research or its analysis. There were three areas of possible bias that I had to be mindful of – current working relationship, work history, and interest in project based learning.
The primary issue I had to be cognizant of was the fact that I had a current working relationship with the subject of the study. I was the social studies curriculum specialist of the school district in which Ms. Jordan was employed. As the social studies specialist I provided professional development and organized learning community meetings for teachers. I had to interact with Ms. Jordan about once a month on district wide events. However, this was a non-evaluative position in which my job was to serve as a resource for Ms. Jordan if she should ever need assistance from the district level. In no way did I have any effect on her status as an employee.

Secondly, I had to acknowledge that I worked with Ms. Jordan for three years and I had to be careful not to make prejudgments about the phenomenon I was studying based on my prior experiences. I had to conduct interviews and observations in an objective manner and let the data speak for itself. This was not difficult to achieve, as I was very focused on understanding what was occurring in this particular project and not investigating past practices. The temptation to focus on past achievements and successes was further dissuaded by the fact that all truthful, authentic data was useful to gain a better understanding of how she enacted effective pedagogy in her class.

Finally, it was important for me to acknowledge that, due to my positive experiences with the New Tech Network model, I could have been somewhat interested in finding evidence of its usefulness in school reform. I believed the primary instructional method of the NTN model, PBL, was an effective instructional method for 21st century schools, and more educators should employ those strategies. However, I also understood that if PBL was truly a remarkable educational technique, it should be evident through objective interviews,
field observations, and analyses of documents.

**Ethical Considerations**

There were no major ethical concerns to consider in the study, but there were minor risks associated with Ms. Jordan’s involvement. First of all, there may have been apprehension about participating because descriptions of her teaching would be published in public documents. This apprehension may have been compounded by the fact that the principal, who is in an evaluative position, would have the ability to access the dissertation and information about Ms. Jordan’s teaching. Yet, these risks were minimized because of the nature of school. In the NTN small school environment, transparency was already a common element. The information that was collected was very similar to the types of information that was already shared in the school (i.e. observations and planning documents). So, the participant was comfortable with sharing them in the study. Furthermore, I ensured that the risks were communicated to Ms. Jordan via the formal agreement that was signed prior to the start of the study and she had the opportunity to review transcriptions and the data analysis.

Since there was only one participant and I conducted multiple observations and interviews, it was very difficult to ensure confidentiality on the local level. However, I was able to take efforts to ensure the confidentiality of the study beyond the local level. A pseudonym was used to refer to Ms. Jordan throughout the study and there were not any connections between the pseudonym and the identity of subject through documents such as a master list. Observation notes, audio recordings, and interview notes were saved on my computer, which was password protected. All of this information will be deleted once the
study is complete and I have successfully defended my dissertation. Additionally, I emphasized to Ms. Jordan that I was not observing her teaching for corrective purposes. I was simply conducting research on how the New Tech Network model was enacted in her class and the methods she utilized to engage her students and ensure their achievement.

Limitations of the Study

There was one primary area of limitation for this study – a lack of generalizability. As a single case study, this research was inherently small in scope. I was only looking to investigate how a teacher enacted the New Tech Network model in an urban, secondary social studies classroom, engaged students, and ensured students achievement. The bounds were too small to generalize on a large scale. This study could been more generalizable as a multiple case study where results were compared from different sites. Instead the results may only be useful for gaining an understanding of this particular teacher’s methods and how they may be refined or enhanced.

Furthermore, as a qualitative study, this research does not delve into information provided by such quantitative data as standardized test scores. This type of information could enhance the understanding of the effects of high student engagement and the different means of gauging achievement. Again, the limited type of data reduced the ability to generalize the results.

Summary of Chapter

My use of case study methodology was effective as it helped me to understand how Ms. Jordan enacted project based learning via the New Tech Network model and the strategies she used to engage students in social studies. Qualitative research was appropriate
for this study because an issue needed to be explored in a complex, detailed manner and methods such as interviews, observations, and document analyses best served the purpose of addressing the issue. I triangulated these data collection methods to provide rich, thick descriptions of the research. I also had prolonged engagement in the research site, validated my data with Ms. Jordan, and crafted my methodology with the advice of Dr. Manfra to ensure the validity and reliability of my study. In the next chapter, I will present my findings via themes that emerged from my data analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to research how a social studies teacher in an urban school enacted the New Tech Network model, engaged students, and ensured student mastery of curricular content. I conducted a qualitative case study focused on the pedagogical practices and beliefs of Ms. Olivia Jordan, the Engagement High School 2012-2013 Teacher of the Year. Data for this case study included four intermittent interviews with the teacher and twelve 90-minute class observations. I also analyzed relevant classroom documents including student assignments, course readings, and teacher-created rubrics used to assess student work. Culturally relevant pedagogy served as the analytical framework for the study as I sought to understand how Ms. Jordan promoted academic achievement while empowering students with cultural competence and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Engagement High School (EHS) divides its classes into alternating A-Day and B-Day sections. Classes meet every other day throughout the school year and each school day is divided into four, 90-minute class periods. The majority of the observations for this study (7 of 12) took place in Ms. Jordan’s Honors U.S. History 1st period, B-Day class. The remaining observations (5 of 12) took place in her 1st period A-day class. The racial and gender demographics of these classes are reflected in Table 1.
Table 1

*Demographics of Classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American Females</th>
<th>African American Males</th>
<th>Latino American Females</th>
<th>Latino American Males</th>
<th>White Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st period B-Day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st period, A-Day</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The class sessions that I observed centered on the Civil War and Reconstruction unit. Within this unit, students completed a project where they created a website intended to showcase the distinctive role that their city of residence played in the Civil War and Reconstruction. For example, it was the site of the largest surrender of Confederate soldiers at the conclusion of the Civil War. The city also became the home of many African Americans during Reconstruction due to the job opportunities that were available through the growing tobacco industry. Students were prompted to conduct research on the conditions that led to the Civil War and the complexities of Reconstruction while also situating their city in the midst of these events. The project began as students read a fictional letter from the city’s visitor’s bureau asking the students to create a website for a new Internet magazine that the bureau was constructing to educate a younger audience about this time period. Specifically, the bureau was hoping to promote this educational website as a resource for high school students. Within this website, students were asked to include an interactive timeline, an interactive map, and two editorials/blog posts (Table 2).
Table 2

Project Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive Timeline</th>
<th>Interactive Map</th>
<th>Editorials/ Blog Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Must describe political, social, and economic events leading up to the civil war</td>
<td>• Must identify the battles of Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg Vicksburg, Appomattox Courthouse, and Bennett Place in the correct locations</td>
<td>• Must include two 1 page editorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Must describe each event in two to three sentences and describe important people, and places for each event</td>
<td>• Must provide details about major people and outcomes of those battles</td>
<td>• One editorial must address the question – How did Reconstruction benefit African Americans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least five of the events link to a picture/video/ website</td>
<td>• Must address women and African Americans that were a part of the Civil War</td>
<td>• One editorial must address the question – How did Reconstruction restrict the rights of African Americans?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced Criteria</th>
<th>Includes over 10 battles</th>
<th>Links editorials to modern day events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Has a picture/video for every event</td>
<td>• Includes video, photos</td>
<td>• Includes video, photos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the project was complete, there was an extension activity in which students had to analyze the present condition of a neighborhood in the city that developed during Reconstruction and propose ideas for how to revitalize it. This issue was especially pressing because the county redevelopment commission was also working on ways to rejuvenate the area.

All of the work to create the website and the proposal was completed in student-created groups in both classes. After forming these groups, the following roles were divided...
amongst the members through a group contract: leader, liaison, tech liaison, and timekeeper.

Table 3 provides information on the group management responsibilities of each role.

Students’ overall responsibilities for the project consisted of fulfilling these roles in addition to completing chosen tasks from the project rubric (i.e. interactive timeline, interactive map, editorials/ blog posts).

Table 3

Roles within Project Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Liaison</th>
<th>Tech Liaison</th>
<th>Timekeeper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Responsible for organizing group meetings and plan of work&lt;br&gt; • May be responsible for communicating group progress with teacher</td>
<td>• Responsible for communicating general group concerns or questions to teacher&lt;br&gt; • May be responsible for communicating group progress with teacher</td>
<td>• Responsible for monitoring and troubleshooting technological issues within the group&lt;br&gt; • Responsible for communicating with the teacher about technological issues</td>
<td>• Responsible for monitoring lapses of time during time-constrained activities&lt;br&gt; • Responsible for communicating upcoming deadlines from group plan of work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After analyzing the qualitative data collected in this study, I found that there were five interconnected themes that emerged (see Figure 1): real world application and relevance, the utilization of scaffolding strategies, accountability and structure in student collaboration, positive teacher/student interactions, and the benefits and challenges of technology.
Perhaps the most important theme to emerge in this study was the prominence of real world applications for the history taught in Ms. Jordan’s classroom. She made a concerted effort to ensure that students could find connections between historical content and current events. During our pre-interview, she emphasized that this was a feature of the New Tech Network model, “One of the key components of this model is to implement with fidelity project based learning in which students take real world situations and create products or projects, which address those issues.” In terms of culturally relevant pedagogy, Ms. Jordan’s use of real world issues enhanced student achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). She accomplished these ends by a variety of methods that included incorporating content that was culturally relevant to students, inviting community members to be a part of instruction, using the community as a
center-piece of the curriculum, and providing opportunities for students to learn outside of the classroom.

*Culturally Relevant Content*

According to culturally relevant pedagogy, there is a need for the teacher to affirm cultural identity through content and pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ms. Jordan spoke about how her instruction was relevant for her student population:

Well, our school (is) pretty homogeneous. It’s mostly all African American. So, I incorporate historical narratives that are often left out… What I do is I give a perspective that adheres to our majority. We talk about Latinos and African Americans in history, or from a different perspective. I don’t just teach African American history, but I do incorporate the narratives of women, African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans. So, for example, when we get to reconstruction, I talk a lot about Black towns after reconstruction. In their course of study, it’s like a footnote. But, I actually spend time reading about the black towns of North Carolina… And, we delve deeper into that because it’s relevant to them. And, I always bring in the theme of women each unit and how women have been mis/underrepresented and discriminated against.

There was ample evidence of the manner in which Ms. Jordan put these ideas into practice through my observations and document analyses. At the start of the first class period that I observed, she asked students to provide feedback on slave narratives that they read for homework from the previous class. This reading was intended to serve as the springboard for the unit on the Civil War and Reconstruction. I was not able to obtain copies of these
narratives, but I listened as students described the experiences of various enslaved individuals based on their reading. For example, one student talked about the challenges that faced Cynthia, an attractive slave whom the master kept as his mistress. Another student talked about Josiah’s description of the 100 lashes he received for misbehavior. Also, as Ms. Jordan covered this unit, she noted that there were more African Americans in Congress during Reconstruction than there are today. She explained the challenges that African Americans faced with voting that created this reality and also the changing demographics of the south.

Ms. Jordan consistently made efforts to ensure that the curriculum was culturally relevant for her students. She spoke about her expectations for the U.S. History curriculum when she began her career as an educator:

When I came into teaching, because of my own high school experience I thought that I was going to have to teach revisionist history. But, the more I met and studied under other U.S. History teachers in the district… I mean, teachers here, black, white, whatever (their) background, they really do teach about minority history as well as just the mainstream history. I don’t even know how you can teach the Civil War without talking about the involvement of black soldiers.

Ms. Jordan did note, however, that there was a need to address gender disparities in the curriculum. She stated:

I would say that the only thing that I don’t see enough of is the dimension of gender. And, I try to make that a theme… So, with the civil rights movement, I explain to them that it really was a woman’s issue – (specifically) the Montgomery bus boycott.
And, we talk about women and how they were the ones who initially were petitioning for there to be more security, for there to be a better system and how it was women who were the ones who were walking. And, so, women were the ones who had to stand in solidarity during that time.

An interesting example of how she was able to incorporate cultural relevance while addressing the lack of female representation in the curriculum during this unit was through her inclusion of information about Mary Tepe. She provided an image and brief biography of Mary Tepe and helped students to understand her role in the Civil War by comparing her to a resourceful and clever character from the popular 1990’s African American sitcom “Martin.” The majority of the students were very familiar with the character she referenced and were able to make the connection with Mrs. Tepe. Students had to record notes on Mary Tepe and other influential figures like Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe on a timeline graphic organizer.

In terms of cultural relevance, Ms. Jordan regularly incorporated information on the historic experiences of African Americans and the role of racism in American history. She asked students about the impact of legislative decisions like the Wilmot Proviso and why some people would want to ban the spread of slavery into new territory. Students offered various explanations that reflected the social impact of slavery, while Ms. Jordan also helped them to understand the economic impact of the spread of slavery on unemployed whites. She also prompted students to analyze a flyer from 1851, which cautioned free African Americans in Boston of the threat of being identified as runaway slaves by “slave catchers.” During this analysis, a student asked Ms. Jordan about the different means African
Americans had of proving their freedom. Ms. Jordan responded that it could be very difficult to provide that proof, especially with a judicial system that was biased against African Americans. While students did not have experiences with slavery, they were able to see connections between historic and contemporary legal processes for proving innocence and issues, such as bias, that were endemic in those processes.

Students also analyzed a document about their city and its roots as a town for African Americans during Reconstruction. They learned from this document that many black businesses thrived in the city at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and used this information as a resource to help write articles about the positive and negative aspects of life for African Americans during Reconstruction. The inclusion of this type of information affirmed the cultural identities of Ms. Jordan’s African American students.

Ms. Jordan made consistent efforts to tailor her instruction to fit the needs and interests of her students. This did not always translate into pedagogy intended for a specific racial group or gender, but more as an effort to address the culture of teens, in general. During the pre-interview, when she was asked about the strategies she used to engage students, she replied:

I try to create relevant projects - projects that reflect current events and things that teenagers would be interested in. I add an element of competition into a lot of the projects, because that motivates students. I also try to bring in outside community resources to evaluate the projects, because that makes students more committed to making a quality final project.
I found evidence of how Ms. Jordan’s pedagogical approach was able to capture the interest of students during my observations. Perhaps the most energetic activity was a review game she held to help students prepare for the unit assessment. During the 20 minutes of this game of “Civil War Jeopardy”, all students were engaged in the game and were talking, laughing at wrong answers, and arguing over when different groups wrote their answers. The element of competition was a useful method of securing the interest of high school students.

Ms. Jordan also helped students draw connections between the content that was being covered and current events. Immediately before the unit began, the 2012 United States Presidential election took place. Ms. Jordan spoke about her plans to help students make connections between the recent election and the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. She stated:

I’m going to show them the electoral map in 1860 and the electoral map of this past election. And, have them compare and contrast how those maps are similar. And, I think they’ll be shocked to see that. And, I think it’ll bring up a lot of questions about if our nation is still divided by region. Where are most of the red states today and what are most of the states that seceded? I think that’ll be a good exercise for them.

During the next class session in which she implemented this teaching strategy, she asked students, “What if states decided to secede after President Obama’s election?” One student pointed out that this was essentially occurring as residents in some states were signing petitions for secession. She, then, projected a map of states that seceded in 1860 and the electoral map from the recent election and challenged students to complete an extra credit assignment by comparing the political climate surrounding the two maps addressing the
questions – “Should states be allowed to secede? Why or why not?” As we reflected on the lesson later, she stated, “I think it was a great connection for them because a lot of the students brought that information to me. Like, they were the ones that were telling me about the secession petitions.” This indicated that students understood the curriculum and were making connections outside of the classroom.

Community Involvement

Ms. Jordan also incorporated community-based topics and resources into instruction in ways that enhanced the relevance of the content. A prime example of this occurred as students learned about the conclusion of the Civil War. Ms. Jordan was sure to include the fact that the largest surrender of southern soldiers occurred at a family farm that is located about eight miles from the school. Students also had to create blog posts about how Reconstruction benefited and restricted the lives of African Americans in general and in their city. To prepare for this part of the project, students had to analyze political cartoons that depicted some of the political and social challenges African Americans faced. One of these cartoons was an image of President Andrew Johnson kicking a dresser that represented the freedman’s bureau to demonstrate his opposition to that group and African American rights. They also read an article from the NC Civic Education Consortium website about growth within their city during Reconstruction despite Jim Crow laws. This article specifically referenced the advancements that were made in businesses, education, medicine, and entertainment in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. The article also referenced positive descriptions of the city that had been written by the likes of W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington. Finally, they completed a graphic organizer, which helped them to visualize the
positive and negative aspects of Reconstruction for African Americans, and wrote a draft of their blog posts.

After the project based unit was completed, Ms. Jordan challenged students with an extension activity in which they had to create proposals for how to revitalize a historic neighborhood in the city. Similar to the project itself, students received an entry document from a local agency, the city council, to make a presentation on how to develop the area. Ms. Jordan actually made arrangements for students to present their ideas at a county redevelopment meeting. Thus, this activity was a prime example of culturally relevant pedagogy, as students were encouraged to analyze a social issue and take real, political action. It also directly connected to the project because the neighborhood referenced in the activity rose to prominence during Reconstruction. In our interview, Ms. Jordan noted, “The area (of the city) has been left undeveloped for the past 10-15 years. So, the city is constantly having board meetings and making contracts on how to develop it. But, it never actually materializes.”

After Ms. Jordan informed the students of the context of the assignment, she invited another teacher at EHS to speak to the class about her experience in the city as it underwent urban renewal in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Ms. Jordan stated, “She talked about the area before the expansion of the highway, which destroyed a lot of the black community.” Next, students worked in the same groups from the previous project to brainstorm ideas for revitalization. The four groups focused on four different aspects of urban renewal - business development, historic relevance, energy, sustainability, and healthy living, and diversity.
The students quickly focused on the task at hand. Ms. Jordan equipped each group member with a marker and required that everyone make a written contribution to the group’s brainstorming paper. I listened as the group whose focus was historic relevance entertained the idea of opening a museum to capture the history of the neighborhood. The energy, sustainability, and healthy living group debated over the types of restaurants that are currently in the neighborhood and what would be ideal. One African American male student commented that, “All they have are fast food places (in the neighborhood). I’m trying to think about how we can include healthy living. People don’t like to have fast food all the time. Some people want salad. Or, you know, we could help bring a Subway over there.” Once students were done brainstorming their ideas, they created their proposals and presented their ideas in front of their classmates. Ms. Jordan reported, “They presented and all the classes voted on which groups are going to represent their class in one of the county meetings.”

When asked about the role of social activism in the social studies classroom, Ms. Jordan enthusiastically responded, “It is definitely essential. It’s important for students to understand civic identity. And, when a social movement happens, it’s because of people who are taking a stand against something they disagree with.” She provided an example of how she incorporated social activism last year when students were learning about the Progressive Era (1880-1914) and muckraking. Ms. Jordan had been told that a convenience store across the street from the school was selling moldy food to the students. She went to the store and took pictures of food that had traces of mold on it. Students used this information to publish articles in the school newspaper on the problem. Ironically, the store, which had been open
for years and had been the location of many altercations between students, closed a few months after this article was published. Ms. Jordan concluded, “I think giving students opportunities like that to look within their own community and to find things that they want to change - I think that’s what social studies is all about.”

Opportunities to Learn Outside of the Classroom

Ms. Jordan also created opportunities for students to learn outside of the classroom. As mentioned earlier, Ms. Jordan contacted the county redevelopment commission and arranged for students to present their proposals for neighborhood revitalization at a redevelopment meeting. Although ultimately a conflict in scheduling prevented the selected groups from participating, it was still an invaluable learning experience for students to work on a project that had real world significance. Ms. Jordan also organized a field trip for students to go see the movie Lincoln, which was directly related to the content they were covering. About half way through the project, Ms. Jordan began telling students that they would have a chance to go on the trip if they had a passing average in her class. She would cover transportation, but students would have to get funding to pay for the movie. She scheduled it on a Tuesday, because the movie theater had lower, $5.00 pricing on Tuesdays. Ms. Jordan spoke about her passion and rationale for organizing this trip during our interview at the mid-point of the project:

I don’t feel like I could be a history teacher and not take them to see this. I feel like I have to. I mean, I could just say, ‘Everybody, go on your own to go see it.” But, you know, I think it’s times like this where you have to say, “Okay, let me break my neck
so that they can have this experience, because (there’s a possibility) they’re not going to go (on their own).”

As the deadline approached, more students began to return their permission forms for the movie. The actual field trip took place after the project was complete, but Ms. Jordan informed me that it was a huge success.

**The Utilization of Scaffolding Strategies**

Ms. Jordan utilized a number of cognitive scaffolds to ensure her students mastered the curriculum. This is a technique often implemented by teachers of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) and schools that utilize project based learning (NTN, 2013d). Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, and Chinn (2007) explained the necessity of some traditional approaches to teaching in the midst of innovative strategies like project based and inquiry learning:

> A mini-lecture or benchmark lesson presenting key information to students is used when students understand the necessity of that information and its relevance to their problem-solving and investigational practices. Such just-in time direct instruction promotes knowledge construction. (p. 100)

From the first day of the project, Ms. Jordan incorporated teaching strategies that could be considered traditional, such as literacy activities, graphic organizers, visual aids, questioning, and discussions to engage students in the historical content (Table 4).
Table 4

*Scaffolding Activities Utilized by Ms. Jordan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Activities</th>
<th>Graphic Organizers</th>
<th>Image Analyses</th>
<th>Questions and Discussions</th>
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*Literacy Activities and Graphic Organizers*

There was a strong emphasis on literacy skills in Ms. Jordan’s classroom throughout the unit. She explained her passion for including literacy in her instruction during an interview as she asserted, “That’s something I’m continually working on – how to incorporate literacy into the social sciences.” The first example occurred as students read the entry document that provided the background and purpose of the project. As students read the document, they learned that they would have to create a website intended to appeal to high school students and educate them about historic sites in the city. Students also had to
record what they knew about the project and what they needed to know about the project on post-it notes. After recording this information on post-it notes, the students placed these notes in the appropriate column on a white board in the room that was divided between “Know” and “Need to Know.” When they were asked to verbally share what they knew about the project, students offered responses like “the project is intended to reach a younger audience,” “it is about the role of the (city) in the Civil War,” and “the project will include battles of the Civil War.” When asked about what they needed to know to complete the project, students inquired, “What is webs.com?” “How do we build a website?” “What parts of NC will we study?” And, “Are there certain slaves to research?” This use of reading, writing, graphic organizers, and verbal participation seemed to help the students truly understand the content of the entry document. This was evident as they posted notes that were meaningful for the project and discussed these ideas with Ms. Jordan.

Ms. Jordan also distributed a graphic organizer that featured a series of boxes aligned with arrows intended to show how the Civil War developed. This organizer, or timeline, was used to record notes from a PowerPoint presentation that Ms. Jordan gave in segments for the first few classes of the unit. The document was formatted in a way that would help students visualize the order of events that led to the Civil War. There were a number of culturally relevant topics for African American students covered on the timeline including the Fugitive Slave Law, the Underground Railroad, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the Dred Scott case, and John Brown’s raid. Ms. Jordan spoke about her use of PowerPoint presentations to help students grasp the material in our post-interview. She explained, “I hate to be solely using PowerPoints. But, sometimes with this level of content I think that was necessary... (Also) I
think they learned the most when I did the direct instruction.” I agreed that there were times when it seemed that the PowerPoint presentations should be abandoned for instructional strategies that might allow students to better engage with the content. For example, Ms. Jordan could have allowed students to work with partners to analyze texts, as opposed to relying on her to present the information. However, despite these concerns, she generally utilized strategies that were effective for students. Based upon my observations, it appeared that students were highly attentive and learning during Ms. Jordan’s presentations. The majority of the students in the classes consistently took notes and gave Ms. Jordan verbal and nonverbal feedback to demonstrate their understanding of the content.

While the completion of the timeline turned out to be a time-consuming process (it took portions of four different class sessions to complete it), Ms. Jordan was sure to weave in various teaching strategies to enhance the experience. In terms of graphic organizers, she used a map activity to help students get a better grasp of the Compromise of 1850; students had to use information from the textbook to provide explanations on a map of how the compromise impacted different parts of the country. I noted that all students actively worked on this assignment and were confident in sharing answers aloud when prompted by Ms. Jordan. Specifically, a Latino American female, an African American female, and a Latino American male correctly shared the most important components of the compromise.

She also utilized her captivating story-telling skills to tell her “favorite story in U.S. history.” The story was about “The Crime against Kansas” or the bloody conflict between a northern senator and a southern congressman in 1856 that erupted after a senator spoke negatively about a congressman’s cousin. Ms. Jordan had a propensity for telling this story
because of her ability to help kids see the similarities of the conflict between the senators and the common experiences of teenagers. After telling this story, Ms. Jordan distributed a pre-writing activity for a homework assignment in which students would write newspaper articles about the conflict from either a northern perspective or a southern perspective. In the pre-writing activity, students were given excerpts from two opposing primary source documents on the conflict and were instructed to pull out words/adjectives where the writers described the event. Then, students completed a T-Chart that was divided between north and south. I noted that all of the students worked on the T-Chart independently and quietly until it was completed. Then, Ms. Jordan let them know that they could transition into their homework, if time permitted.

The students were also given opportunities to read other documents that enhanced their understanding of the content. Ms. Jordan distributed an excerpt of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to the students, which she read aloud, in a southern accent. Students followed along as she read and one student summarized the passage when she finished. By following this procedure, Ms. Jordan was actually implementing a literacy strategy that had been promoted by the school district – modeling fluent reading. After she read the passage and the student summarized it, she asked the students about how the writing may have impacted whites that lived in the north. Some students responded that it would have disturbed many northerners because of its depiction of slavery. Then, Ms. Jordan helped students summarize the vital information for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, so that they could add it to their timeline.

Ms. Jordan also assigned students to read various portions of the Gettysburg Address aloud in an appropriate and lively manner. Periodically throughout the reading, Ms. Jordan
asked students to pause so that she could ask the class probing questions about the text. Students also had accompanying questions to answer about the text. Following the unit assessment, Ms. Jordan engaged the students in an extension activity where they had to analyze articles on a neighborhood in the city that grew immensely after Reconstruction and create a proposal for how to revitalize that area. Students were able to display their understanding of the text through their revitalization presentations.

The graphic organizers that were used within the project were diverse and included T-charts, maps, and timelines. However, Ms. Jordan also prompted students to create a continuum diagram in which they plotted the Reconstruction plans of Abraham Lincoln and the Radical Republicans in terms of strictness. This helped them to see the dichotomy between the stance of Lincoln and other Republicans over the re-establishment of the Union. On the opposite side of the timeline sheet, students had a graphic organizer to describe the advantages and disadvantages of the north and south during the Civil War. Ms. Jordan helped students complete the organizer as a class by writing notes on the white board as students shared information to populate the different areas.

There were also times where Ms. Jordan reduced the use of graphic organizers and utilized a question and answer format and multiple choice questions. At the beginning of class, the warm up exercises typically included open-ended questions that prompted students to reflect on information that was covered during the previous class and make plans for the tasks that would be completed that day. Very often, students would use the previous day’s notes to complete their warm up exercises and review the project rubric to make plans for the day’s responsibilities. Occasionally, Ms. Jordan would allow a student to lead the rest of the
class in the review of warm up items to increase engagement. On one particular occasion, an African American male student led the class through the warm up and a number of African American males were raising their hands eager to participate. By the conclusion of the warm up, African American males, an African American female, and a Latino American male had all verbally responded to the journal prompts. In this project, multiple choice questions were only used on the unit assessment. This was intended to be preparation for the entirely multiple choice assessment that would be administered at the end of the year through the Department of Public Instruction.

Students would also use information from graphic organizers to complete writing activities. For example, students shared ideas as a class to identify the mixed feelings for blacks in terms of politics, social life, and economic life during Reconstruction and completed a chart. Then, they were given the prompt, “Was Reconstruction Beneficial for Blacks? Why or why not? Give 3 reasons,” and had to write 5-7 sentences on the topic. All students were focused as they completed this assignment, individually and quietly. Eventually, students used these paragraphs as the foundation of their blog entries for the project website.

Class Discussions and Verbal Participation

Class discussions and verbal participation was a vital part of Ms. Jordan’s class. Typically, at the start of class, Ms. Jordan began by asking students to take out their homework assignments so that she could come around to check them. As she checked the homework, she asked the class questions to assess their understanding. Students would also respond to warm up questions during this time. Occasionally, Ms. Jordan would lead
students through the process of responding to the questions, aloud. Or, a student volunteer would come to the front of the room and engage the rest of the class in an exchange in which answers were shared. Ms. Jordan also utilized an activity called “2 minute debates” to encourage class discussions. She began this activity by dividing the students into four groups to learn about a historical character (small southern plantation owner, poor white farmer, northern abolitionist, or northern manufacturer), then having them get back into their project groups to debate issues, she had identified. For example, southern plantation owners and northern manufacturers were prompted to argue over the helpfulness of tariffs in the economy while northern abolitionists and poor white farmers debated the morality of slavery. Because of the content that was covered in this activity and the scaffolding that was used, it was a great example of culturally relevant pedagogy. All students were engaged and participating.

Discussions also ensued during student presentations. Ms. Jordan prompted these conversations by requiring students to record and share their likes, suggestions, and questions regarding their peers’ presentations. During the extension activity, this culminated in a wonderful discussion of urban renewal.

For example, the student group assigned to focus on business development proposed their idea of bringing a shopping center to the neighborhood and a community center to deter crime. One of the points that they emphasized regarding the shopping center was the need to remove smaller, less successful businesses from the area to make room for larger, more established franchises. Jada, as the primary spokesperson for the group explained, “For example - (store name) - no one really shops there. But, if you put in a more (popular) brand,
more people are going to shop there.” One of her group members added, “Some of these businesses are what’s weighing down the area.” One of the students in the audience raised his hand and expressed his concern that bringing an expensive brand to an area with low socio-economic status could be problematic if the residents cannot afford to purchase the goods. As the conversation between the business development group and the audience continued, the group refined their proposal in a manner that provided more support to current local businesses, while also attracting new businesses to the area.

Ms. Jordan also pulled the students into conversations during her PowerPoint presentations. For example, as she prepared to tell her “favorite story in U.S. history,” Ms. Jordan asked the students if they knew anyone who talked about people behind their back. Most students were highly responsive to this question as they provided verbal and nonverbal feedback to Ms. Jordan. Some students also started to engage in conversations with each other on this topic. After a few seconds of allowing students to respond to this prompt, Ms. Jordan proceeded to tell the story of the conflict between Charles Sumner and Preston Brooks in a manner that inspired them to want to discuss the matter more. However, instead of moving students to talk about the issue further, she directed their attention to a writing activity to express their thoughts. Students were allowed to verbally summarize their perspectives on this situation during the warm up activity that occurred during the following class.

As Ms. Jordan encouraged students to interact with her during her whole-class presentations, she received varying responses from students. As she read aloud from an article about a historic district in the city and its growth during Reconstruction, she paused
periodically to ask probing questions about the text. For example, she stopped to ask students if they were familiar with a landmark that was referenced in the article. One student responded, “Yeah, that’s my church.” She engaged them multiple times in this manner as they deciphered the reading. After finishing the article, the class collaborated to share verbal descriptions of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments as an “exit ticket” to end class. This activity was linked to content that was covered earlier in the class period.

In the midst of another lesson, nine of twelve students were actively interacting with her by analyzing the quote “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” defining popular sovereignty and describing the political views of Republicans during the 1860’s. However, the remaining students simply took notes and did not engage much, verbally. On a separate occasion, Ms. Jordan gave a “passionate and energetic lecture” and that all students worked on the packet while she was presented. During this presentation, one African American male student gave a very detailed account of how the Union’s blockade strategy worked during the Civil War. Yet, a few minutes into the lecture, one student looked totally disengaged in the presentation (was staring at the wall), but took notes when prompted by the teacher.

While all of Ms. Jordan’s efforts to incorporate verbal participation and collaboration were not as successful as she hoped, she continued to make attempts. For example, during the review activities that followed the project presentation, Ms. Jordan allowed students to ask questions from the review guide before distributing the test. Many students took advantage of this opportunity. Ms. Jordan also directed students to arrange themselves into their project groups so that they could play a Jeopardy review game entitled “Crisis, Civil War, and Reconstruction.” During this game, groups selected categories and money amounts
and Ms. Jordan read the answers aloud. Groups had a few seconds to speak amongst themselves and write their question on a dry erase board. As they held up their dry erase boards, Ms. Jordan evaluated answers and recorded their scores. This was a particularly engaging activity. Students were highly collaborative, sharing and debating answers within their groups and challenging other groups when they felt they had violated rules of the game.

Use of Images and Visual Aids

Ms. Jordan consistently integrated images and visual aids into her lessons. She used maps to illustrate different events that occurred during the Civil War and Reconstruction. For example, Ms. Jordan displayed a map of the secessions of states following the election of Lincoln in 1860 and helped students to compare this to the electoral map of the 2012 presidential election. Students also completed a graphic organizer to explain the impact of the Compromise of 1850 on different parts of the country and, importantly, it was a project requirement that students create a map of the major Civil War battles as part of the project website.

Images were also used in abundance throughout the lessons. Ms. Jordan included visual aids on all of the slides in her PowerPoint (i.e. maps, images, etc.) and this seemed to capture and maintain student interest in the presentation. Some of the memorable images from the unit included images that depicted the firing on Fort Sumter and Pickett’s charge (pivotal events during the Civil War), and the aforementioned picture of Mary Tepe. Students also analyzed two political cartoons that depicted some of the social and political issues surrounding Reconstruction. The first cartoon featured Andrew Johnson kicking a (Freedman’s) bureau as a symbolic gesture of his attitude towards civil rights, while the
second cartoon showed members of the White League and the Ku Klux Klan using weapons and violence to frighten African Americans. Students worked together to answer questions about the details and purpose of these images. Additionally, Ms. Jordan used what she called “amazing artwork” to illustrate the content of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. First, she wrote the numbers 13, 14, and 15 on the white board. Then, she transformed the “13” into the letters “AB” for abolishment. Next, she changed the number “14” into a 1 and a flag for citizenship. She explained that when she transformed the 4 into a flag, the flag was backwards because it took so long to get people these rights. Finally, she turned the “1” in 15 into a pole (1) and the “5” into a man in a wheelchair racing to vote. After witnessing this, the students agreed that it was interesting artwork and were able to verbally explain the content of all three amendments at the conclusion of class.

Video images were also used to draw students into the content. For example, students were able to watch a portion of the movie Glory and had to complete a viewing guide in which they were asked to focus specifically on the vivid visual images they noticed. Ms. Jordan also included a video of herself at the site of Stonewall Jackson’s death in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She filmed the video the previous summer with a personal camera, and explained the history and significance of Stonewall Jackson, in the video. Students had an opportunity to view a PBS video on Reconstruction, during which they had to complete a viewing guide. I noted that as she showed the ten-minute video clip, all students completed the viewing guide. After the video, Ms. Jordan engaged the students in a conversation on the video and their responses to the viewing guide questions. This was yet another example of
how Ms. Jordan was able to utilize visual information with a writing activity and pull the students into meaningful discussions, simultaneously.

**Accountability and Structure in Student Collaboration**

Within her classroom Ms. Jordan embedded a strong sense of accountability and structure to support student collaboration. There were various levels of support she included to ensure students were held accountable and were responsible for each other’s learning. These levels of support included accountability measures by the teacher, group contracts and division of responsibilities in classroom assignments, meetings to reinforce group roles, the requirement that students had to complete their homework to continue the project in groups, and various project tasks and responsibilities that were vital for the finished product.

**Group Contracts and Division of Responsibility**

On the first day of the project, Ms. Jordan instructed students to create groups and draw up their own group contracts. The students were familiar with this process as group contracts are a regular part of the PBL model utilized by the NTN schools. The purpose of the group contract is to communicate and agree on expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Students are also expected to share reliable contact information. The groups in Ms. Jordan’s class were able to write up these agreements within 10-15 minutes. Once students chose the roles for the different group members (i.e. leaders, liaisons, tech liaisons, and timekeepers), Ms. Jordan called the liaisons forward to speak with them about their role in communicating expectations from the teacher to the group. While she was having this conversation with the liaisons, she directed timekeepers to make sure contracts would be finished within the allotted time period. Later in the project, when I interviewed Ms. Jordan, she stated that,
“holding students accountable to their group contracts” had seemed to contribute to higher homework completion rates. The importance of including reliable contact information in the group contract was also demonstrated later in the unit, as I witnessed a group of students calling an absent group member to check on her portion of the project.

The process of creating the group contract was also indicative of how tasks were divided throughout the unit. For instance, on the second day of the unit, students were divided into secondary groups to prepare for 2 minute debates. Within these secondary groups, students had to read a passage and answer questions on a particular character’s perspective on a Civil War topic (small southern plantation owner, poor white farmer, northern abolitionist, or northern manufacturer). Then, students returned to their original, project groups to engage in short debates on pre-determined topics. For example, the first debate was between a southern plantation owner and northern manufacturer over their opinions of whether or not tariffs helped the economy. The group members who had other roles took notes during the debate and determined the winner. This was a prime example of a well-structured activity that held students accountable by dividing responsibilities into meaningful tasks.

Similarly in the review game - “Crisis, Civil War, and Reconstruction” jeopardy, Ms. Jordan put measures in place to ensure all students participated and benefited from the game. Each group was given a dry erase board to record their answer to each question. Ms. Jordan required them to rotate the board among the group members to make sure every person in the group had multiple chances to listen to the responses of their group members and write the answer. Again, this was an example of a larger assignment being divided into multiple,
meaningful tasks. When review games were not utilized, Ms. Jordan had students quiz each other to prepare for assessments. When this type of activity was structured, it often consisted of one student asking the rest of the group questions that may appear on the quiz or test that they were about to take.

*Techniques to Reinforce Homework Completion*

Ms. Jordan also used student accountability to reinforce homework completion. If students failed to complete their homework twice within a project, they would be removed from their group and would have to complete the project individually. At the beginning of class, she circulated around the room to check homework. As she documented the students that completed the homework and the students that did not complete the homework, she would inform the class if she was not seeing 100% homework completion and remind them that this was a part of the contract. Occasionally, she directed students to have 2 minute group meetings to discuss homework completion and how students would encourage each other to complete homework so no one would be removed from their group. I listened to students converse about various accountability methods (i.e. sending text messages and email reminders).

At the mid-point of the project, I observed Ms. Jordan circulating and speaking to students to let them know if they were in danger of being removed from their group due to lack of homework completion. She announced that the class had been doing well on homework and she believed it was due to the fact that people did not want to be removed. In my interview with her after this class, she stated that closer attention to the group contract had been “very effective with getting students to complete homework.” She had “seen much
higher completion rates.” This evidence of student achievement further substantiated the idea that culturally relevant pedagogy was occurring in her classroom.

Ms. Jordan also used classroom activities as accountability measures for homework. It was a common practice for Ms. Jordan to review homework assignments at the beginning of class. During these review sessions, she would ask students about specific topics from the homework and expect accurate responses. In our third interview, she explained how a student who was normally quiet in class was able to speak about the Union blockade strategy during the Civil War because he had viewed a flipped classroom video for homework. This was the type of engagement and understanding she hoped to reinforce through homework assignments. The final out of class assignment for this unit was a review packet that helped the students prepare for the unit test. The accountability was high for this assignment as students took the unit assessment after submitting this packet.

Meetings to Reinforce Group Roles

Ms. Jordan also held meetings for different group members to reinforce group roles within the project. She did this on a number of occasions and it really helped to drive home the importance of students fulfilling their purpose within the group. For example, on the first day of the project, she called the liaisons to the front of the room to speak with them about what their role would be throughout the project. Essentially, the role of the liaison was to serve as the primary communicator with the teacher about the content and structure of the project. While she was having this meeting with the liaisons, Ms. Jordan would also speak to the timekeepers throughout the room about keeping their group on task because of the limited time to complete the contract.
After spending the first three classes of the unit learning some of the content that would be vital for the project, Ms. Jordan called group leaders to the front of the room for a meeting. In this meeting, Ms. Jordan explained the project rubric to the leaders including details about her expectations for the interactive timeline, battles map, and blog entries. Immediately after this meeting, she called the tech liaisons forward and explained to them that they needed to go to www.webs.com to create a website with the input of their group. During this meeting, she also showed them an example of how a website could be created on webs.com. It was a fairly intuitive process for students that were accustomed to utilizing an online learning system. They had to enter an email address, password, and choose the type of website they wanted. From that point they could make decisions about the format, title, and content of the website. Tech liaisons returned to their groups, leaders divided specific responsibilities up with the members, and everyone began preliminary work for their projects.

As the project progressed, Ms. Jordan held meetings on more specific responsibilities. For example, she held a meeting with group leaders to discuss detailed goals for the project work time. She spoke also with liaisons to get feedback on who accomplished what in their group in regards to the interactive timeline. Later, she held a workshop for students that were assuming the responsibility of creating the battles map for their group. During this workshop, she gave a tutorial on how Microsoft Paint could be used to show locations of various battles that occurred in the U.S. during the Civil War. She commented during her post interview that she felt engagement could have been enhanced with more tutorials. She stated:
I think I could have done a lot more scaffolding as to how to build the website using webs.com. I just didn’t feel like I had enough time to really show them how to use the website. (I would) like to create tutorials that they could watch online.

Ms. Jordan’s comments demonstrated the fact that she was reflective over her practice and thinking of ways to better reach her students. Specifically, she found the electronic tutorials to be helpful reference tools for students as they constructed their projects and wanted to be sure to expand this support in the future. Once students reached the latter portion of the project, Ms. Jordan held a meeting for group leaders to emphasize the importance of incorporating information about their city into the blog post. At this meeting she encouraged them to review the requirements communicated through the project rubric and make sure their website aligned with those expectations.

Ms. Jordan conducted various other meetings throughout the project for more generalized concerns. For example, she would often call group leaders together to check their understanding of the project and to ensure they were moving in the right direction with their work. She would also periodically ask group leaders or liaisons to send her an email explaining the group’s progress or updates on what each group member was working on. Before the project presentations, Ms. Jordan called a meeting for the group leaders in which she reviewed the presentation rubric with them. She wanted to ensure that groups were aware of the information they were expected to cover in their presentations.

*The Importance of Project Tasks for the Finished Product*

Ms. Jordan also structured the project in a way that made various tasks important for the finished product and presentation. Again, the different portions of the project included an
interactive timeline, an interactive battles map, and two editorials or blog posts. Throughout the project, Ms. Jordan continually emphasized the importance of the different portions of the website through instructional strategies and reminders of the project expectations.

Ms. Jordan modeled instructional strategies throughout the unit to prepare students to create the different parts of the project. For example, the first graphic organizer that students used to compile their notes on the events that led to the Civil War was a timeline. Although this timeline was completed on paper, and ultimately students had to create an interactive timeline via the internet, Ms. Jordan set the stage for effectively utilizing this kind of tool through her instruction. She also used maps at various points in the unit to show the location of different events and to have students analyze the impact of legislation on different parts of the United States. The skills needed to write editorials were incorporated through various writing assignments including the students’ newspaper article responding to the beating of Charles Sumner from the perspective of a northerner or southerner. Students also did a pre-writing assignment on the impact of Reconstruction on African Americans that directly prepared them to write their blog entry on the same topic. Thus, the instructional strategies utilized by Ms. Jordan were helpful for emphasizing the importance of all parts of the project.

Ms. Jordan also exemplified the importance of the different portions of the project by continually reminding students of her expectations for the website and the need to revisit the rubric. At the onset of the unit, she introduced the rubric and used it to communicate the basic expectations for the project. From this point, students were able to divide tasks and utilize project work time to complete their responsibilities. On various occasions throughout
the unit, students referenced the rubric to see what the group needed to accomplish. Ms. Jordan frequently prompted students to refer to the rubric for the minimum requirements as well as opportunities for additional points. For example, an interactive timeline was considered “advanced” and received additional points if students embedded videos that aligned with their events from the Civil War and Reconstruction. Additionally, project work time was organized to allow Ms. Jordan the opportunity to provide assistance to group members that were working on each of the components of the website. Again, she wanted to be sure that she communicated her expectations for the project and provided the necessary support to ensure their success.

At the mid-point of the project, Ms. Jordan reflected on the work of the students. She stated, “I would say students are very engaged in that they are really taking ownership of their roles. They are very task driven. I believe that they have been holding each other accountable.” Figure 2 reflects the various ways that students utilized project work time during the last three class periods to prepare for presentations. This information was
collected as I circulated the classroom and recorded the activities that different students were engaged in on those three dates. Unless students were experiencing technical difficulties, they were all engaged in some sort of task related to the project.

Ms. Jordan also had measures in place to ensure that all students were involved in the presentations of the projects. She required every student to speak on one of the following topics – two events from the timeline, two battles from the battles map, or an editorial/blog post. Students were prepared and confident as they gave their presentations on the Civil War and Reconstruction. After the first group successfully presented their website, the second group came forward to do the same. Jada started the presentation by providing a general overview of the website they created. A Latino American female student described two of the events that they placed on their timeline – John Brown’s raid and the secession of South
Carolina from the Union. Two African American male students projected the battles map they created and paraphrased information on the Battle of Bull Run and the Battle of Gettysburg. Jada was tasked with the responsibility of explaining the blog posts on the positive and negative aspects of Reconstruction for African Americans. In her explanation, she elaborated on the complexities of the time period:

In some cases Reconstruction was beneficial and in others it wasn’t. Having the right to vote benefited African Americans, but it was also hard and could cost them their lives. If they wanted to vote, they would have to take literacy tests. And, if they didn’t know how to read or write, there’s no way they could pass the test in order to vote. Whites also threatened their lives by purchasing guns. The KKK would take a black man or woman and hang them as an example of what would happen if you tried to vote.

Students continued to present in a similar manner throughout the remaining presentations. Everyone was aware of their responsibilities based upon the work that had been completed during the previous weeks. At the conclusion of the unit, Ms. Jordan supported my observations as she explained:

I would say that this was one of the best projects in terms of student engagement because students each had a different part of the project. And, so, they were all very, very enthusiastic about the portion that they had to contribute.

Accountability Measures by the Teacher

The majority of the methods that Ms. Jordan used to hold students accountable involved accountability within groups. However, she did also include measures where she
would hold students directly responsible. For example, when students did not perform well on a quiz, they had to attend mandatory re-takes during lunch. This was a means of accountability that did not involve other students. Ms. Jordan coordinated and facilitated these types of meetings. Also, as students worked on classroom assignments, Ms. Jordan was sure to circulate the room and check on student progress. Whenever she noticed a student who was off task or not completing an assignment in a timely manner, she would either speak to the student, personally, or address the class to encourage a strong work ethic.

Ms. Jordan would also seek student feedback as a means of accountability. For example, at the end of a class where students worked extensively on the project, she asked students to give her a “Thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumb sideways” to indicate their level of comfort with the project. Once she noticed some that some of the students had their thumbs sideways (everyone else gave her a thumbs up), she asked them to see her at lunch to receive further guidance on the project. Also, during project presentations, each group had to complete a Plus/Delta evaluation of other groups to record what went well with each presentation and what they would have changed. This helped to maintain a sense of focus in the audience throughout the presentations.

Additionally, quizzes and tests were used to hold students accountable for learning the content. Occasionally, if Ms. Jordan noticed that students were not completing an assignment as instructed, she would remind the students that this information would resurface on a test or quiz. Ms. Jordan knew the value that many students placed on tests and quizzes, so she used this value to reinforce a high work ethic. And, this practice produced positive results. During our interview at the mid-point of the unit, Ms. Jordan reflected on
the fact that one of her measures of student achievement, quiz scores, had risen from previous years:

I can honestly say this year my Road to the Civil War quiz had the least amount of retakes that I’ve ever had. And, I think it has to do with the fact that I revamped it. This year most of them got a 10/15 or higher. So, that made me happy. I have to grade these Civil War quizzes, but I can’t imagine having a lot of failures with that. Again, the accountability measures enacted by Ms. Jordan resulted in higher achievement, engagement, and task completion.

**Teacher/Student Interactions**

The nature of the communication between Ms. Jordan and her students was another important theme. Culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes the important of positive, caring relationships between students and teachers (Irvine, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ms. Jordan constantly encouraged students, engaged them in discussions to help them learn content, and used conversations as a means of evaluating their understanding of content.

Ms. Jordan encouraged students to perform at their best throughout the study with the use of positive reinforcement. The primary practice she used to support students was public affirmation and acknowledgement when they were on task. For example during a mini-review activity on the Compromise of 1850, she circulated and announced that one student was “on it!” and another student was doing a great job and staying focused. At another time, Ms. Jordan’s technique for reminding students to turn in an assignment was by acknowledging that she had just received a “really nice remediation packet” from a student and other students would have until the end of the day to turn it in. Also, on a separate
occasion, Ms. Jordan was sure to state that a student had “started on his warm up” and another student was “on task.” These types of statements kept students encouraged and established a positive tone in the classroom.

The positive vibe in the classroom seemed to work wonders for the relationships that Ms. Jordan was able to establish with her students. As she spoke about her experiences with her students over the years, she said:

I would say that when I first started teaching it was way too familial. Like, they thought I was their sister. One of them just came back to visit me, and she calls me her sister and that worked for that year. You know, that was okay. But, then the next year it turned into a problem because it was a classroom management problem. Because they were way too familiar with me. So, last year I totally changed my persona. I was very mean in the beginning of the year. Because I could not have another year of disrespect that I felt I had my second year teaching. And, so my relationship with my students from that year forward is one (where) I think they like me, but I think they also respect me a lot more than my first two classes of students did.

The more structured relationship between Ms. Jordan and her students likely enabled her to be able to effectively use discussions as a teaching technique to help students learn content. When she delivered a lecture, she typically invited students to interact with her through questioning. For example, soon after Ms. Jordan started her PowerPoint presentation on the events leading to the Civil War, she asked the students about the states that had been annexed to the United States around that time period. This was a review from the previous
unit that gave students a foundation to learn the new material. At least six different students were able to respond with correct answers. Ms. Jordan would also ask students to be involved in illustrations of historical concepts. At one point, she borrowed a student’s car keys and described a scenario where the student wanted to go to a step show, but the student’s parents had requirements (i.e. cleaning room and washing dishes) before the student would be allowed to go. Ms. Jordan likened this to the Emancipation Proclamation because President Lincoln offered states their slaves (keys) back if they agreed to re-join the union (clean their room).

Proximity was another key factor in the interactions between the students and Ms. Jordan. Whenever she gave a PowerPoint presentation, she would ask the students to move close to the projector so that they could interact in a closer capacity. This also helped her to monitor the notes that were being taken and make sure the students were engaged in the material.

Ms. Jordan also used conversations to evaluate student understanding and to help students learn material if they were confused. There were various occasions in the unit where she gave students an assignment and reviewed their responses aloud. As she reviewed their responses, she would make efforts to involve as many students as possible to ensure there was a general understanding of the content. For instance, when students were asked to explain advantages and disadvantages the north had during the Civil War, she allowed students that were eager to participate to offer their feedback, but she also called on two female students that seemed hesitant to speak. As she asked them about the disadvantages the north had, she coached them and supported them to a point where they were able to voice
correct answers. This was a prime example of her belief that all students had the ability to learn.

When Ms. Jordan and I spoke for the mid-project interview, she expressed her feelings that conversations allowed for formative assessment of student understanding. She gave the specific example of a talk she had with a student on the depictions of John Brown in various images. She stated:

One girl found (a) picture (of John Brown), brought it in and (talked) to me about it and how it portrayed him as a mad man. And, I was like ‘this is awesome.’ That made me feel like ‘Okay, she got what I was trying to say about John Brown.’

At another point during the project, a student with limited English proficiency demonstrated understanding of the northern blockade strategy during the Civil War as he responded to a question Ms. Jordan prompted from the homework. As she spoke about this in our third interview, she was beaming with happiness at his participation in class. Ms. Jordan was confident that this student was able to experience success because of the flipped classroom video that he viewed for homework. In the video Ms. Jordan explained concepts, such as the blockade strategy, in detail to help students gain a better understanding of the material. This effort was proving to be helpful for students with diverse learning needs as they were able to view the videos at their own pace and pay extra attention to the images that she incorporated.

Ms. Jordan also noted how students were able to introduce innovative interpretations of history when asked. For example, students proposed that total war may have been used as a northern strategy because of the fact that they had less experienced military leaders and not necessarily because it was a purposeful tactic. One student argued that the idea of total war
really did not make much sense in a civil war where the goal was to re-establish the union. As students shared ideas like this, Ms. Jordan was sure to encourage their critical thoughts with positive feedback.

**Benefits and Challenges of Technology**

Technology is listed as one of the three primary elements of the New Tech Network model. Specifically, the NTN website (2013b) states:

The smart use of technology supports our innovative approach to instruction and culture. All classrooms have a one-to-one computing ratio. With access to Web-enabled computers and the latest in collaborative learning technology, every student becomes a self-directed learner who no longer needs to rely on teachers or textbooks for knowledge and direction. We use *Echo*, an online learning management system to create a vibrant network which helps students, teachers, and parents connect to each other, and to student projects across the country. (para. 3)

Despite the positive perspective of technology touted in the website, through my interviews and observations, I quickly realized that Ms. Jordan was not able to utilize technology in a manner that reflected the ideals of this statement. There were a number of broken laptops throughout the project that prevented a one to one student to computer ratio. This lack of working computers hindered Ms. Jordan’s ability to utilize the New Tech Network online learning system and technological teaching strategies she wanted to use. Despite these challenges, Ms. Jordan found other ways to use technology as a collaborative and instructional tool.
Technology as a Collaborative and Instructional Tool

Technology remained the primary tool that students used to create their projects in the unit on the Civil War and Reconstruction. As Ms. Jordan reflected on the project, she stated, “I think they (the students) were engaged the most when (they worked on) the creating of the website.” The rubric for the final product was housed in Echo, the online learning system of NTN schools. Throughout the project, students were instructed to open the rubric and review the elements that were required. I noted that early in the unit, “Ms. Jordan explained the rubric to leaders (different technological parts – interactive timeline, battle map, blog/editorial, etc.)” and asked group liaisons to email two things that the group would accomplish during the remainder of the class period. Following her meeting with the group leaders, she met with each group’s technology liaison to go over the process for creating a website. Essentially, each group was directed to go to www.webs.com (a free website) and create a basic webpage by the end of class. For the remainder of the period, all students were engaged in some sort of technological task related to the project. Some students were collaborating and providing ideas on the title and layout of the website, while others were using websites like www.timetoast.com to create interactive timelines for the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Later in the unit, Ms. Jordan asked students to get into groups with computers and she went over the goals of their project work time. On this particular day, the focus of the work time was to start on the battles map that would be created with Microsoft Paint. Ms. Jordan held a workshop/tutorial for group members that were designated to work on the map to provide assistance on how to create it. During this work time, the technology was being
utilized in a variety of ways – in one group all of the students were typing information into a Google document that could be used on the website; in another group, all students divided up responsibilities and started working on different technological tasks (i.e. timeline, battles map, research). With about 12 minutes left in class, all students (except one) remained “focused and engaged” in technological tasks. These tasks mostly included working on the previously mentioned project requirements. However, there were also two students watching a video from a previous class that they had missed in an attempt to review. There was one student who kept his head down and was not engaged for the majority of class.

During a separate class period, students began using computers to work on their websites with about 30 minutes left in class. About two minutes into this project work time, 14 of the 17 students were engaged and actively working on the project. The remaining students were still looking for working computers. A few moments later, when those students were able to obtain working computers, or at least collaborate with group members that had working computers, they divided project responsibilities and began working on those tasks. The tasks included researching information for the timeline and battles map, revising the timeline, typing the blog/editorial, creating the battles map, and reviewing the project rubric.

For the last class period that students had to prepare for project presentations, Ms. Jordan made special arrangements with another teacher for a group of students to be able to go to her classroom to finish working on their project. Students also had the option of working on a review assignment for the upcoming unit test. This created an ideal situation where everyone was able to have access to a computer that needed one. With 37 minutes left
in class, all students were either engaged in working on general project revisions, blog entries or their unit review.

For the actual presentations of the websites, students met in the regular classroom, then moved to the presentation lab, which housed a large presentation screen that was connected to a computer and sound system. After about 20 minutes were used to set up and prepare, the first group began their presentation. They gave an overview of their website and played a short video related to the Civil War that was embedded in their home page. Four minutes into their presentation, the screen went black, but after the group did some troubleshooting, they were able to resolve the matter. The group proceeded to explain information that was included on the timeline, battle map, and blog posts. Essentially, all groups utilized technology in a similar fashion during presentations. The differences consisted of the web applications used to created timelines and present images, and the occasional addition of video and music to enhance the presentation.

Following the presentations and unit tests, students also completed an extension assignment in which they created proposals via Microsoft PowerPoint to revitalize an area of the city that rose to prominence during Reconstruction. After Ms. Jordan informed them of the context of the assignment, students conducted research via the internet to learn more about this historic area and watched a video from a local news website, before creating the actual proposal. Once the proposals were created, students presented their ideas in front of their classmates. Ms. Jordan explained, “So, they presented and all the classes voted on which group they liked the best. And, they picked groups, which are going to represent their class in one of the county meetings.”
Aside from using computers to create the projects, students also used technology to learn material that was relevant for the unit. For example, they were able to watch a Camtasia video that the teacher created on the Civil War. Ms. Jordan posted the video on Echo and distributed guiding questions to the students to be answered while watching the video. Most students had their own computer to complete this assignment, while others paired up and watched the video together. In my research journal, I noted that, “all students (were) engaged, watching (the) video, and answering questions.” Later in the project, Ms. Jordan incorporated a video that she filmed when she visited the site of Stonewall Jackson’s death in Fredericksburg, Virginia, the previous summer. In the video, she explained the history and significance of Stonewall Jackson. This was, yet, another example of how Ms. Jordan used technology as a teaching tool.

Ms. Jordan also had an expectation for her students to be able to access web-based information at home and through other devices. During my first observation, I noted that students were assigned homework that included viewing a “flipped classroom” video on events leading up to the Civil War and responding to questions. When I asked Ms. Jordan about this video, she stated that, “the flipped classroom videos are about 1-2 minute, 2-3 minute videos in which I go in depth with concepts that I have found students really don’t quite understand.” Ms. Jordan recorded these videos herself and included information that supplemented the content provided in class. Students were tasked with finding ways to view this material outside of the classroom.
**Technological Concerns/Limitations**

During our interview following the start of the unit, Ms. Jordan stated that the “biggest limitation is I don’t have computers. I really don’t know what I’m going to do, tomorrow… There’s no technology.” She elaborated:

The technology is really becoming an issue because I would like to use a tool called Camtasia. I have actually already recorded myself teaching this entire Civil War portion and I have a worksheet for them to do. It really helps me with students that are a step behind. But, I don’t know how I’m going to be able to utilize that because at this point, I don’t have any technology. So, it’s gonna have to be direct instruction. I would really like to use the technology piece, because I think that it helps them when they can pause and rewind what I said and look at the picture in more depth. So, I really don’t know what I’m gonna do about that.

Ms. Jordan seemed to have grown a bit frustrated with the use of computers in her class. She had instructional ideas that she wanted to implement, but felt that she could not because of technology that was not functioning properly. Her thoughts on technology were supported by my observation of her first class as I noted, “They [students] had to write [on paper] because technology was not working.”

After my first observation and interview, I spoke with Ms. Jordan and let her know that I would provide assistance to try to fix any computers that were not working. I began to spend time before the start of the school day or after class turning on computers and identifying which ones were not working. I would let Ms. Jordan know approximately how many working computers she had, so she could plan accordingly for her upcoming lesson.
Throughout the remainder of the study she had enough computers for at least a 1:2 computer to student ratio.

Ms. Jordan started to implement a practice where she would ask students to get a computer at the beginning of class and log on, even if they would not need it for another hour. She did this because it helped to have students turn computers on early as the log-in process could take up to fifteen minutes for some laptops. Furthermore, students could make sure that the computers were actually working and would have an opportunity to get another laptop if any were still available.

One class period, in particular, captured many of the technological issues that students occasionally faced throughout the project. At the beginning of the period, Ms. Jordan asked students to get laptops and log in. Again, they did not need the computers until later in the class. With about 40 minutes left in class, Ms. Jordan asked students to start logging into Echo to access information for today’s lesson. Some students needed to log into their computers first, because they did not do so at the beginning of class. Some students bypassed logging into Echo because they felt they needed to go straight to the expected task, which was to work on the project. Ms. Jordan had to reprimand a student in Group 1 for being at the wrong site, while two students in Group 3 were arguing about what needed to be done to finish the project. With 32 minutes left in class, one student in Group 2 had his head down, one student was still trying to log in to her computer, and one student was working on her part of the project. At this point, Ms. Jordan called for a tutorial for tech liaisons at the front of the room and had to wait for her computer to load. While one of their group members was at this meeting, the other three members of Group 4 were talking about non-
curricular topics and trying to log into timetoast.com. For the remainder of the class approximately 9 of the 16 students were able to make progress on their project. One student never found a working computer, one student spent an extended amount of time trying to download Google chrome, 2 students continued to try to get computers to work that never did, 1 student’s computer screen went black, and two students showed no interest in participating. With five minutes remaining in class, Ms. Jordan asked group leaders to send her an email about their progress and publicly encouraged groups that were reaching for the advanced technological goal of embedding a video into their website, despite technology issues.

During the post-interview, Ms. Jordan expressed her appreciation for the efforts I made to address technology issues throughout the project:

I was very thankful… for you… going through and… helping me get all the technology. Because, really, my plan was to do a lot of the front loading and then borrow a set of computers… I just didn’t have faith in my own computers. And, often times when you’re teaching… you really have to have that lesson work that day; you just don’t have time to go through all the computers and see which ones work, which ones don’t, because they change everyday. So… I had just grown… really frustrated with the technology. So, I had kinda… given up.

Overall, Ms. Jordan did a great job of adapting to her technological situation. Of course, it would have been helpful to have the appropriate number of working computers so that she could implement PBL with high fidelity. However, she was able to make effective adjustments so students would still have an engaging, highly educative experience.
Hopefully, the technological issues that she identified in this study can be raised with the proper individuals so that they can be addressed and corrected.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described the findings from my study of the 2012-2013 EHS Teacher of the Year, Ms. Olivia Jordan. In this case study, I conducted four interviews, twelve 90-minute class observations and analyzed classroom documents. I found that five themes emerged from the study – the presence of real world application and relevance, the utilization of scaffolding strategies, accountability and structure in student collaboration, positive teacher/student interactions, and the benefits and challenges of technology. Culturally relevant pedagogy served as the analytical framework for the study as I sought to understand how Ms. Jordan promoted academic achievement while empowering students with cultural competence and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). In Chapter 5, I will synthesize the themes that emerged from my findings with culturally relevant pedagogy, describe implications of the study, and make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to research how a social studies teacher in an urban school enacted the New Tech Network model, engaged students, and ensured student mastery of curricular content. My central research questions were:

1. How does a social studies teacher in an urban school enact the New Tech Network educational model with her students?
2. Which teaching strategies does she use to engage students and gauge achievement?

This study was important for a variety of reasons. First of all, there was a need to address the issue of engagement in the social studies. Many researchers have documented the lack of interest in social studies amongst students (Goodlad, 1984, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2001; Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985, as cited in Heafner, 2004). This lack of interest has often been linked to the passive nature of instruction in many social studies classrooms (Howard, 2004) and the absence of cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Specifically, the teaching methods have often consisted of direct lecture, reading from the textbook, and taking tests and quizzes that assess a student’s ability to retrieve memorized information (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010). Furthermore, social studies content has often lacked an acknowledgement or celebration of student culture (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

After conducting literature reviews on authentic instruction, project based learning, and culturally relevant pedagogy, I found that they were all sound methodologies that were possible remedies for the teaching methods that have failed to garner students’ attention in
social studies. In order to better understand how a teacher enacted an instructional model which centered on authentic instruction and project based learning, I conducted interviews and observations, and collected documents from Ms. Olivia Jordan, the 2012-2013 Teacher of the Year at Engagement High School. During this study, I used culturally relevant pedagogy as my theoretical framework and focused on how Ms. Jordan engaged students in U.S. History and gauged academic achievement. As discussed in Chapter 4, five themes emerged from this study – the importance of real world applications and relevance, the utilization of scaffolding strategies, the role of accountability and structure in student collaboration, the use of positive teacher/student interactions, and the importance of technology in the NTN model. Specifically, it was notable to find that Ms. Jordan was able to incorporate project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy into her instruction, simultaneously. In this chapter, I will discuss the manner in which the themes from Chapter 4 address the research questions and the implications of this study for future research.

Overview and Significance of Findings

The five themes that emerged from this study demonstrate how a successful social studies teacher was able to integrate culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) into project based learning (BIE, 2009) via the New Tech Network model (NTN, 2013c). The following table (Table 5) illustrates the qualitative themes that summarize the findings for my study. Specifically, I illustrate the extent to which these findings connect to the frameworks of project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy. I reference key characteristics found in the literature and their connections to my findings.

Previously within the social studies there has not been much of a connection made
Table 5

**Five Emergent Themes and Connections to Project Based Learning and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Themes</th>
<th>Project Based Learning (NTN, 2013c)</th>
<th>Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Gay 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real World Application</td>
<td>• Teacher creates a project scenario that simulates ‘real world’ problems.</td>
<td>• Teacher utilizes the interests of the students, concerns of the community, or social issues to inform instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding/Teaching</td>
<td>• Teacher provides data/resources for students to use to conduct research.</td>
<td>• Teacher utilizes pedagogy that builds upon the knowledge of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers scaffold to enhance learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>• Teacher requires students to use self-management and work organization skills.</td>
<td>• Teacher has an expectation that all students will be academically successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Student</td>
<td>• Teacher provides consistent feedback to students.</td>
<td>• Teacher develops a fluid student/teacher relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>• Teacher upholds school culture that centers on trust, respect, and responsibility.</td>
<td>• Teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits and Challenges</td>
<td>• Teacher structures projects in ways that allow students to use online learning systems and web-based research.</td>
<td>• Teacher should utilize technology to ensure students develop vital 21st century skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
between project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy. In my study it was the successful implementation or joining of the two that seemed to contribute to the teacher’s overall success.

I developed five assertions to further organize and refine my findings regarding the manner in which Ms Jordan enacted the NTN model and the strategies she use to engage and support student achievement.

1. The use of real world applications that were culturally relevant ensured that the content focused more deeply on the culture and community of the students.

2. The scaffolding strategies that were utilized provided differentiation for a diverse group of students.

3. The accountability measures incorporated into the project by the teacher led to high completion rates and opportunities for authentic civic engagement for all students.

4. The teacher/student interactions created a classroom community that was highly collaborative.

5. Operational technology was an effective tool for securing student engagement.

Below I provide a more detailed discussion about each assertion and the implications for students.

The use of real world applications that were culturally relevant ensured that the content focused more deeply on the culture and community of the students. Project based learning within the NTN model seeks to address real world problems that would likely be addressed by adults, as well (NTN, 2013c). With this approach teachers are able to connect students with people outside of the school that would be interested in the students’
solutions and ideas. This aligns with a culturally relevant pedagogy, which utilizes the interests of the students, concerns of the community, and social issues to engage and educate students (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Specifically, culturally relevant teachers tend to embody a conception of self in which they see themselves as members of the students’ community, moving them to incorporate issues or concerns from the community into the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

In her teaching, Ms. Jordan was able to successfully blend project based inquiry and culturally relevant pedagogy in a way that made real world problems culturally relevant. Ms. Jordan saw herself as a member of the students’ community as she made their city and community a focal point of the project. The entire project on the Civil War and Reconstruction was focused on the role and growth of their city during that time period. The city was a hub of African American progress in the late 1800’s, which provided an important cultural anchor for the students. Ms. Jordan was able to incorporate community members into the project, including a colleague who spoke to the class about her experience growing up in the city during urban renewal. Ms. Jordan also set up an opportunity for students to present their ideas for revitalizing a historic part of the city to a county redevelopment team. She was effective in taking the idea of a real world problem and situating it in the lives of her students.

Ms. Jordan was able to successfully adapt existing curriculum content of the unit for the benefit of her students. The North Carolina standard course of study competency goal for this U.S. History unit states that students should “analyze the issues that led to the Civil War, the effects of the war, and the impact of Reconstruction on the nation” (North Carolina
Ms. Jordan adapted the content inferred in this competency goal to accommodate the racial and gender demographics of her students. For example, she incorporated learning opportunities about the roles of women during this time period as she highlighted the importance of individuals like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Tubman, and Mary Tepe. It is also important to note that Ms. Jordan did not ignore the experiences of white males as she sought to include multiple perspectives about the past. As she helped students to “identify political and military turning points of the Civil War” (NCDPI, 2013), she was sure to include a wide range of people and event, both well known and not so well known. Overall, the adjustments she made to the curriculum led to a deeper and richer understanding of the content by the students.

The scaffolding strategies that were utilized provided differentiation for a diverse group of students. Culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching strategies to fit the needs or interests of the students (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). In Ladson-Billings’ (1995a) study, this resulted in a teacher creating an assignment in which students chose the topic they would present. Students created presentations on subjects like basketball, cooking, singing, reading, or mathematics.

Project based learning, as promoted by the New Tech Network, stresses the importance of students obtaining information through diverse sources of information (NTN, 2013c). These sources might include data from the teacher, online services, guest speakers, or other students (NTN, 2013c). There is also a great deal of student choice built into the content and process of the project to differentiate based on student needs.

Ms. Jordan used a number of pedagogical strategies to diversify the learning
opportunities for her students. Very similar to the example provided in the Ladson-Billings (1995a) study, Ms. Jordan allowed students to choose an area of interest within the scope of the project. Students were able to decide whether or not they wanted to specialize in creating the battles map, blog, or timeline for the website. She also provided additional tutoring to help the students develop their skills in creating their portion of the final project. Ms. Jordan used diverse instructional strategies to help students with varying learning styles grasp the content of the unit. She provided opportunities for students to analyze primary sources and images, view flipped classroom videos, engage in discussions, conduct online research, and complete graphic organizers to visualize information. The variety of learning activities gave students ample chances to enhance their understanding of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

The variety of scaffolding strategies that Ms. Jordan used provided students multiple opportunities to learn the content. When students were being exposed to information in a variety of ways it increased their opportunities for developing understanding. For example, Ms. Jordan spoke about one of her students with limited English proficiency being able to learn the concept of the northern blockade strategy in one of our interviews. She stated:

So, for instance, two classes ago they did a flipped classroom video (for homework) on what a blockade was and we broke down what it meant and we talked about the Anaconda plan. Michael (pseudonym) was able to answer the question about the Mississippi River (and the blockade). That’s because he did the homework and he knew what that meant.

Ms. Jordan had gone over the blockade strategy in class via a PowerPoint presentation, but the flipped video really helped Michael to understand the concept.
There were a number of instances in the unit when Ms. Jordan would engage in short discussions with students to ensure they understood the material. At one point, Ms. Jordan was working with students to complete a graphic organizer of the advantages and disadvantages of the north and south during the Civil War. One of her female students did not understand some of the information. Ms. Jordan asked her simple, probing questions to scaffold her understanding up to a point where she internalized the relationship of the advantages and disadvantages.

The accountability measures incorporated into the project by the teacher led to high completion rates and opportunities for authentic civic engagement for all students. The NTN project rubric, which outlines how teachers should structure projects, encourages teachers to provide opportunities for students to organize their work in teams, communicate with group members, and develop work plans and deadlines (NTN, 2013c). These accountability strategies support opportunities for student success.

Similarly, proponents of culturally relevant pedagogy explain the importance of teachers believing that all students can learn and “they accept nothing less than high-level success from them” (Gay, 2002, p. 109). Ladson-Billings (1995a) described the various means that teachers used to hold students accountable for learning in her study, including standardized tests, project presentations and encouraging “students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another” (p. 480). These accountability measures helped to ensure that students did, indeed, learn the material that they were supposed to learn.

Ms. Jordan incorporated multiple accountability strategies that helped to ensure the success of all students. First of all, Ms. Jordan required that students consistently complete
their homework assignments to remain in their project groups. The project was structured in a way that would have made it very difficult to complete, individually. This served as motivation for students to do what they needed to do to remain in their groups, and resulted in some group members calling students at home when they were absent to check on their project progress. Ms. Jordan also gave quizzes through the project to check for understanding. If students did not perform well on the quizzes, they were required to re-take them during lunch so they would have an opportunity to receive a higher grade. Students also had the opportunity to go on a field trip to view the film *Lincoln* if they maintained a passing grade in the class.

The implications of these practices were numerous and noteworthy. The rate at which students completed homework increased from earlier in the school year. Students had internalized the idea that if they did not complete their homework, they could possibly lose the privilege of working in groups to complete their project. Quiz scores also increased from the previous year. When asked about the evidence of achievement in her class, Ms. Jordan commented on both of these positive changes as she stated:

> [There are] higher homework return rates. They’ve been turning in their homework on time. [There are] higher quiz scores. I can honestly say this year my Road to the Civil War quiz had the least amount of retakes that I’ve ever had. I think it has to do with the fact that I revamped it.

Students also demonstrated their achievement through the completion of the projects. All students in both classes were in groups that completed and presented the projects and addressed all of the requirements on the project rubric. As part of the extension activity,
students created proposals that could be shared at a county redevelopment meeting. Again, all students participated in the creation and presentation of the revitalization proposals, which indirectly taught students that they were not only accountable to each other, but also to their community.

Yet, all was not perfect in the world of achievement during this project. Although Ms. Jordan did a wonderful job of adapting content and pedagogy to make them culturally relevant, she failed to align her unit assessment with these practices. This resulted in a low average for students’ test scores. The test included multiple-choice questions that focused on more traditional information. And, as it was a multiple-choice assessment, students were not given an opportunity to explain the rationale behind their answers. Furthermore, about 20% of the material on the test was on information that was covered prior to the Civil War and Reconstruction unit. Students were not prompted to review individuals or topics like Dorothea Dix or the Seneca Falls convention to prepare for the test. I am certain all of these factors contributed to the lower test scores on the assessment. Yet, despite all of these concerns, Ms. Jordan had plenty of other structures in place to ensure students were successful in this unit.

The teacher/student interactions created a classroom community that was highly collaborative. Teachers that practice culturally relevant pedagogy should create classroom environments that encourage collaboration and demonstrate the fluidity of the teacher/student relationship (Irvine, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings (1995a) described how one of the teachers in her study would often ask students if they had consulted their peers before asking her a question. By using this practice, she was reinforcing the idea that the
students had valuable knowledge of their own and they were capable of teaching each other. Irvine (2009) explained how a teacher was struggling to explain “classification” to students, but succeeded after using an idea that was obtained from the students. Similarly, proponents of the NTN model encourage teachers to organize projects in ways that allow students to work with each other and utilize print and electronic resources to find information (NTN, 2013c). This takes the focus away from the teacher as being the sole source of knowledge in the classroom and creates a distributed learning environment.

Ms. Jordan utilized numerous techniques to create a positive and collaborative atmosphere in her classes. First of all, she always spoke to students in a respectful manner and celebrated instances when they mastered information. There were plenty of occasions when she would shout, “See, you know this!” or “Great job!” as a student completed an assignment. Through all of my observations, I did not witness Ms. Jordan say anything to students that would be considered disrespectful, condescending, or demeaning. She treated the students as equals. She also listened to the students and borrowed ideas for instruction from them. For example, she stated in an interview that the idea for comparing the secessions in the U.S. following the election of 1860 and the proposed secessions following the 2012 election originated with the students. She also provided opportunities for students to lead the class as they reviewed warm up questions and tutorials for selected group members so that they would be enlightened and empowered to inform the rest of their team. In so many ways, her classroom epitomized student-centered instruction.

The positive teacher/student interactions Ms. Jordan nurtured resulted in a productive learning environment in the classroom. Students followed Ms. Jordan’s positive approach to
interacting with them and spoke to her and other students in the same manner and worked with each other to solve problems that were posed in the project. Throughout my observations, I only noted one instance of disrespect towards the teacher. During one of Ms. Jordan’s PowerPoint presentations, she called on a student that appeared to be asleep and asked him a question about the content she was covering. The student responded with a sarcastic comment. Ms. Jordan proceeded to ask another student the same question and receive a correct response. After class, Ms. Jordan spoke to the student about the comment and how it could have been handled differently. Even with this challenging situation, she was able to address the student’s behavior constructively and respectfully.

**Operational technology was an effective tool for securing student engagement.** Technology is a vital facet of the NTN educational model. In the NTN model, students are expected to utilize the online learning system, Echo, to connect with their teacher and other students and find resources that are helpful for the implementation of project based learning (NTN, 2013c). When working on projects, students may use technology to conduct research and/or construct final products. NTN touts that project based learning combined with the effective use of technology leads to higher student engagement and academic success (NTN, 2013b). Culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes the need for students to develop technological skills to be able to actively participate in a democracy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). In contemporary classrooms, it is very likely that a teacher that is carrying out culturally relevant pedagogy is using technological tools, also.

Technology was a major part of Ms. Jordan’s instruction. Students used computers to communicate with each other, exchange resources, research information, create battle maps,
build timelines, craft blogs, and generate websites. Students also viewed videos that were created by the teacher to reinforce their understanding of historical concepts. Additionally, students used computers to research and draft proposals for how to revitalize a historic area of their city. This was, perhaps, the main method that Ms. Jordan used to tie culturally relevant pedagogy and technology together.

Of course, there were also some notable concerns with technology in Ms. Jordan’s class. During any given class period, there were at least five non-working computers in her laptop cart. While there was at least a 2:1 student to computer ratio, this proportion should have been higher. The NTN website states, “All classrooms have a one-to-one computing ratio” (NTN, 2013c, para. 3). Although there were enough computers in the room for all the students, for the NTN model to work well, there needed to be more reliable technology. Most importantly, Ms. Jordan was not able to utilize the Echo online learning system since all the students were not be able to access the materials or submit assignments.

Despite the concerns with technology, the classroom computers were still useful as tools of engagement for students. When asked about the parts of the unit that students exhibited the most interest in, Ms. Jordan replied, “I think the most exciting thing for them was putting the final thing (project) together that last day… They were engaged when we had to take the battles and put them onto the map and put them into the website.” Students were engaged as they worked on the different parts of their project websites throughout the unit. In sum, computer technology enabled higher levels of engagement when it was utilized in a collaborative manner.
Summary

The five themes that emerged in my study had various implications for the students. Table 6 illustrates the primary implications of each theme. Because of the manner in which Ms. Jordan implemented project based learning, her students, who were predominately African Americans and Latino Americans, were engaged and able to experience academic success in terms of higher quiz scores, homework completion, and project completion. In our increasingly diverse society, we must consider what the implications of this study could be for social studies, in general.

Table 6

Five Themes and Their Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Themes</th>
<th>Implications</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real World Application</td>
<td>- Content adaptation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scaffolding/Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>- Use of differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>- Higher homework completion rate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Higher quiz scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- All projects were completed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Civic Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher/Student Interactions</td>
<td>- Collaborative classroom community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits and Challenges of Technology</td>
<td>- Evidence of student engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Implications for Social Studies Instruction

For many years, there has been a concern about the lack of engagement and interest
amongst students in the social studies (Goodlad, 1984, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2001; Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985, as cited in Heafner, 2004). This is especially concerning because the social studies should be a place where students learn to analyze, evaluate, and effectively participate in our political and social systems (Parker, 2008). We should think critically about the future of our society if students are not being prompted to assess our democracy and develop ideas for how it may be enhanced.

Additionally, efforts are being made to transform the nature of schools via school reform movements. The use of the NTN educational model has multiplied tremendously over the past ten years. There were approximately 14 NTN schools in 2004 and there are over 120 NTN schools, today. This model is intended to increase the engagement and educational outcomes of students (NTN, 2013b). Thus, it may have potential for a subject area like social studies, where there have been concerns with student engagement.

In this study, Ms. Jordan had notable success as she utilized project based learning as promoted by NTN to teach students in an urban setting about the Civil War and Reconstruction. It also demonstrates the importance of ensuring that the assessment aligns with the pedagogy. Overall, Ms. Jordan provided a strong example for implementing project based learning in conjunction with culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure students from diverse backgrounds experience academic success and develop political and social awareness.

The primary goal of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was to close the achievement gap by increasing accountability measures on public schools. President Obama’s proposed reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
continued to address the goal of NCLB, but included incentives for states that agreed to enact suggested reforms. These reforms included innovative educational approaches that would result in students being ready for college and career (United States Department of Education, 2010). Yet, throughout all reform initiatives, we should keep in mind the important role curricular-instructional gatekeepers (Thornton, 1991 as cited in Thornton, 2001, p. 237). Ultimately, teachers are the individuals that enact the reforms and have the largest impact on students. Thus, it is important to support teachers with this implementation.

This study demonstrates the need for curriculum reform that responds to the specific needs of the students and the classroom setting. Project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy both begin with the student in mind. The tasks in project based learning develop from the desire to help students attain skills that will be vital in life after high school (NTN, 2013b). Culturally relevant pedagogy works to situate learning into the lives of the students (Gay, 2002). In our efforts to reform education and engage students, we must help teachers to develop these skills and school reform efforts must be adapted for the specific school setting.

The findings of this study confirm those of Halvorsen et al. (2012). In both cases, these teachers were strategic about implementing instruction that was inspired by the lives of the students. The methods that we might use to replicate these practices include utilizing teacher education programs to emphasize project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy and providing professional development to experienced teachers. Teacher education programs provide excellent opportunities for college professors to inspire future teachers to think about how education might impact the social and political lives of students.
Additionally, Avery et al. (2002) found that exceptional professional development sessions dedicated to authentic instruction helped teachers to utilize “higher order thinking” skills and develop “deep knowledge” of subject matter (p. 53).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study showed the possibilities of integrating culturally relevant pedagogy within project based learning. However, there are a number of ways that this research could be extended to further substantiate the findings. The sample size in this study was limited to one social studies teacher at an urban school that utilizes project based learning. Future researchers should continue to examine how teachers effectively use project based learning to educate diverse students in social studies. There are numerous schools in the United States that implement project based learning in a similar format to NTN. These schools could serve as sites to identify exceptional teachers with practices worthy of replicating. Furthermore, these practices could be included in the training that teachers typically receive when they start teaching at schools that use project based learning.

It would also be helpful if future studies included quantitative measures of student achievement to accompany qualitative descriptions. Halvorsen et al. (2012) used a mixed methods approach in their recent study. This enabled them to collect pre and post-test data on students and compare post-test results with students from high SES schools. The fact that students from low SES schools performed as well as students from high SES schools was a noteworthy finding for researchers concerned with closing the achievement gap. This also begs the point of including students and student data in research. This study focused on the practices of teacher. However, it would be very helpful to understand the impact of the
teacher’s pedagogy on the students by examining the students, themselves.

Lastly, research should be conducted on the various ways that project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy could be integrated into schools. In this study of Ms. Jordan, she was utilizing the model that the school had adopted and she inadvertently incorporated culturally relevant pedagogy as she was trying to address the needs of the students. However, there could be other ways of studying teachers’ use of project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy in social studies. For example, researchers could seek out teachers searching for innovative ways to educate diverse students in social studies. Then, they could work with these teachers to develop project based learning units aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy that could be implemented in their classes (Halvorsen et al., 2012). This would enable researchers to investigate the effectiveness of these approaches in any school. It might also be helpful to examine the integration of project based learning throughout schools that have adopted project based learning as its instructional approach.

Ms. Jordan noted in our study that:

I would say it (the NTN model) is a great model. And, I’ve seen it work where the entire school community has bought into the model… (However) if the kids don’t have the buy in, then (it could be a problem). Today, a kid was just telling me that ‘This is the only class I’m doing a project in.’ And, that really made me upset because I’m pulling teeth to get them to have enthusiasm about they’re presentation, and they’re just doing worksheets in their other classes. So, it’s like, if only one class a day they actually have to collaborate, that’s why every class is like starting from scratch.
Conclusion

The five findings that have been discussed in this chapter respond to the research questions framing this study.

1. How does a social studies teacher in an urban school enact the New Tech Network educational model with her students?

2. Which teaching strategies does she use to engage students and gauge achievement?

Ms. Jordan enacted the NTN model with her students by utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy within project based learning. This study helps to fill a void in the research literature regarding the integration of project based learning in the social studies in schools with a predominately African American population. In this age of school reform (that often impacts schools with high proportions of African Americans and/or Latino Americans enrolled), it is vital that researchers investigate the best practices that teachers are using to implement innovative educational approaches and to support student success. Again, this study yielded the finding that culturally relevant pedagogy and project based learning can work in a complementary fashion to ensure the engagement and achievement of diverse students.

The findings of this study on project based learning and culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrate how one teacher adapted existing social studies curriculum content and differentiated learning experiences leading to higher quiz scores, assignment completion, collaboration, and engagement. These implications were very encouraging. Perhaps one of the most inspiring realities that emerged from this study was the possibility of replicating the results. Ms. Jordan strategically utilized pedagogical practices that can be developed within
current and future teachers. From this point, I hope to continue to research how culturally relevant pedagogy and project based learning can be effectively blended and how to cultivate these instructional strategies with educators.
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APPENDIX
Appendix A: Teacher Interview Questions

Pre-Interview Questions

1. Describe the New Tech Network educational model.
2. How does the New Tech Network educational model compare and contrast with your philosophy of teaching?
3. Describe the content of the Honors U.S. History (HUSH) course.
4. What are some successes and challenges you have had in teaching the content of the HUSH course?
5. How do you utilize the New Tech Network educational model in your HUSH course?
6. What are some specific strategies you use to engage students and ensure academic success?
7. How would you evaluate the NTN model for increasing student engagement and achievement?
8. What types of successes and challenges have you had in implementing this model with HUSH?

Interview Questions:

1. How would you describe the project the students are creating at this stage?
2. What are some of the real-world connections that students can make/are making while completing this project?
3. How would you describe student engagement and achievement in the project, thus far?
4. At this point in the project, are there any adjustments that you plan to make?
Post-Interview Questions about the Project:

1. How would you evaluate this project in terms of student engagement and achievement?
2. Which particular teaching strategies did you think were the most engaging for students?
3. Which teaching strategies helped students to master the content?
4. What were some successes and challenges you faced while implementing this project?
5. If you were to use this project again in the future, what adjustments would you make?

General Post-Interview Questions:

1. What is the most important information you would like for students to leave your class knowing?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your students?
3. Describe your thoughts on the U.S. History curriculum. Do your thoughts impact your instruction? If so, how?
4. Is social activism essential in the social studies classroom? Why or why not?