



**WICHITA STATE
UNIVERSITY**

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

**The effects of collaborative oral presentation
on comprehension: A project approach to
historical thinking in middle school social studies**

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Ulbrich, Valerie E.
Publisher	Wichita State University
Rights	Copyright Valerie E. Ulbrich, 2013.
Download date	2026-05-20 04:59:41
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10057/6844

THE EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE ORAL PRESENTATION ON
COMPREHENSION: A PROJECT APPROACH TO HISTORICAL THINKING IN
MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

A Thesis by

Valerie E. Ulbrich

Bachelor of Science, Bethel College, 1982

Submitted to the Department of Curriculum & Instruction
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

May 2013

© Copyright 2013 by Valerie E. Ulbrich

All Rights Reserved

THE EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE ORAL PRESENTATION ON
COMPREHENSION: A PROJECT APPROACH TO HISTORICAL THINKING IN
MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction.

Jeri Carroll, Committee Chair

Dan Krutka, Committee Member

Patricia Dooley, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To my husband for all his support and encouragement

To my daughter, Ashley, who desired to have me join her as a colleague in this adventure

And most importantly, to my Father, whose Strength sustained me through it all

Tell me and I forget,
teach me and I may remember,
involve me and I learn.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most sincerely grateful to my professor and advisor, Dr. Jeri Carroll, for her patient guidance and direction in this two-year master's degree pursuit. She saw in me strengths that simply needed encouragement in order for me to achieve far beyond my own expectations. My thanks also go to Jennifer Kern whose belief in me and technological enthusiasm inspired me to explore beyond my technological comfort zone and thus to pass on this same enthusiasm to my students. In addition, it is a pleasure to thank Scott Dellinger in joining our group as such an encourager. His genuine interest through questions and suggestions has been most valuable. I also extend humble appreciation to Dr. Dan Krutka for helping me to refine and clarify my research ideas and procedures. And finally, I offer my deepest gratitude to Monty Schreiner for the use of the school broadcast room, video equipment and technology, and especially for his patient guidance in their use. His enthusiasm in collaboration was critical to the success of my students' projects and instrumental in promoting their engagement in learning.

ABSTRACT

History has typically been taught using textbooks and rote memorization of facts. The Common Core State Standards Initiative, which has focused primarily on reading and math curriculum, has incorporated the content areas of science and social studies within English and language arts as a means of helping students develop reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language skills. This shift in academic focus provides opportunities to explore history in authentic learning methods that emphasize more critical thinking. In this study, middle school sixth-graders recorded news broadcasts from an ancient Greek point-of-view as a way to practice historical thinking through multiple language arts components. Scripts were written by students after conducting research and then performed orally in a news studio setting. Students worked collaboratively to produce their broadcasts using computers and a movie-making program. They then analyzed them in class for content and contextualization. Results indicate positive outcomes for cross-curricular learning and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: project-based learning, historical-thinking skills, Common Core, media literacy, social studies, middle school

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	6
Historical thinking skills	6
Media literacy	7
Communication skills	8
Project-based learning.....	10
III. METHODOLOGY	13
Participants.....	13
Assessments	15
Procedures.....	16
IV. RESULTS	21
Quantitative analyses	21
Qualitative analyses	27
V. DISCUSSION.....	32
Overview.....	32
Challenges of project-based learning.....	33
Communication skills	35
Media literacy skills.....	37
Historical thinking skills.....	38
Limitations	40
Conclusion	41
REFERENCES	43

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter	Page
APPENDIXES	47
A. Individual Learning Preferences Survey.....	48
B. Pre- and Post- Assessment.....	50
C. Observation Checklist.....	51
D. End of Unit Assessment.....	52
E. Project Reflections Survey.....	59
F. Newscast Elements Graphic Organizer	60
G. Knowledge Graphic Organizer	61
H. Broadcast Instructions.....	62
I. Broadcast Video Evaluations.....	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. School Statistics for the Academic Year 2011-2012	13
2. Descriptive Statistics.....	14

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	A comparison of pretest to posttest mean change scores from four social studies classes	21
2	A comparison of remedial and non-remedial readers pretest to posttest change scores	22
3	Greek influences quiz, overall mean change scores for four social studies classes	23
4	Results from the knowledge-level question	24
5	Results from the analysis-level question.....	24
6	Analysis of the evaluation-level question	24
7	Overall end-of-unit essay test results for four social studies classes	26
8	A comparison of mean scores for remedial and non-remedial students on an end-of-unit essay test	26
9	A survey of preferred learning and methods of demonstrating knowledge	27
10	A comparison of four social studies classes for preferred learning and working methods	28
11	Student reflections from four classes on group work	29
12	Student reflections from four classes on the effectiveness of a broadcast project	30

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As one of the core curriculum areas, social studies may be perceived as a subject that is less “important” than science, math, and language arts. Since the Russian launch of Sputnik in 1957 and the subsequent passing of the National Defense Education Act, panic at being academically outdistanced in science and mathematics has often put social studies on the back burner (Houser, 1995). The United States government found the Soviet Unions’ apparent lead in science and technology to be a potential threat. “[T]here was a growing fear the United States was losing its political and technological standing in the world. As a result, failures in education became closely associated with weaknesses in national security” (Steeves, Bernhardt, Burns, & Lombard, 2009, p. 73).

Standardization of education to increase the numbers of scientists and mathematicians became the goal.

Similarly, over 40 years later, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) was signed in order to expand the federal role in education as a means of maintaining “global economic competitiveness” (Steeves, et al., 2009, p. 83). Although one of its initial aims was to target educational improvements for disadvantaged students, the program put academic accountability requirements into place that affected nearly every public school in America. Yearly gains in reading and mathematics, and then later in science, had to be documented and directly affected school funding. Once again, social studies curriculum was de-emphasized. Even though social studies state assessments were required, failure to make gains did not affect Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for schools.

The social studies curriculum generally encompasses both government and

history among other subjects (e.g., sociology, economics, etc.). Educating American students about United States government as well as world governments is important as they are being prepared for responsible citizenship. Thomas Jefferson stated, “Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government” (Thomas Jefferson to Richard Price, 8 January 1789). In learning about the framework and functions of our government, students will be enabled to participate, change, and protect the constitutional principles of the United States of America.

So why is it important to study history as part of a social studies curriculum? According to Dr. Peter Stearns (1998), “History should be studied because it is essential to individuals and to society and because it harbors beauty” (para. 5). Stearns explains that the study of history has two basic critical functions: (1) to help us understand how societies function in order to “run their own lives,” and (2) to help us understand changes within societies.

Stearns (1998) elaborates:

Only through studying history can we grasp how things change; only through history can we begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and only through history can we understand what elements of an institution or a society persist despite change” (History Helps Us Understand Change section, para. 1)

History connects individuals to personal pasts as well as to the successes and failures of bygone societies. It stimulates critical thinking skills through examination of the interconnectedness between yesterday and today. Lessons can be applied to every aspect of our lives, whether as guidance in the functions of society, as inspiration from historical figures, or as admonition from their mistakes and cruelties.

According to author and historian David McCullough (2008):

History is of the utmost importance. I think it's probably more important than any other one single subject because it's about the human experience. It's about life and consequences of one's actions, and it's about the role of personality of character in events passed. And we can learn from it. We can learn infinite number of lessons from history. And we can also take strength from it... [video file, March 12].

Ultimately, history defines humanity. It provides "a real grasp of how the world works" (Stearns, 1998, History Helps Us Understand Change section, para. 1).

The study of history and its relevance to the world today requires more than just the foundational reading skills that enable basic comprehension. As students get older, reading materials become progressively more advanced, often with reading levels of textbooks significantly above grade levels. "Reading comprehension becomes increasingly more important... Information derived from text becomes a primary source of knowledge (Smagorinsky, 2001, as cited in Hagaman & Reid, 2008, p. 222). The depth and complexity of content may exceed the comprehension skills which many students bring to social studies classes especially as they enter middle school. Lack of ability to synthesize textbook information may then result in lack of engagement, motivation, and even enjoyment of social studies curricula. Teachers in content areas must therefore have knowledge of strategies to effectively guide students through learning and understanding. According to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects,

“teachers of ELA, history/social studies, science, and technical subjects [must use] their content area expertise to help students meet the particular challenges of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in their respective fields” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 3).

As an educator for 30 years in the public school system, with 20 of those years teaching social studies to sixth graders, it has been important to me to share knowledge and try to motivate interest in a subject I have always enjoyed personally. But the demands of increasing numbers of academic standards has inadvertently drawn history teachers like myself into covering as much material as possible in a very short period of time. This pocketing of knowledge into tidily assigned time frames rarely leads to depth and retention of learning, even when the content is of high-interest value. How then can I move away from a textbook-reading, teach-and-test mode of working with students to engaging them in critical thinking and authentic learning?

The study of history, government, and other social studies curricula offers unlimited opportunities to engage and motivate students in learning content material while promoting comprehension skills essential to college and career readiness for the 21st century. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) has laid out some promising expectations for the field of social studies as it attempts to step away from assigning information-to-know and moves toward integration of literacy.

Of particular interest to me is the academic incorporation of communications skills, something that I rehearse repeatedly as I prepare lessons for my students. As I present concepts orally to classes, information becomes very familiar and more thought-

provoking. How might incorporating the Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) components of oral and written communication skills into lessons enhance critical thinking? The thesis continues in chapter two with further review of literature on historical thinking, media literacy, communication skills, and project-based learning, topics that duly address a Common Core focus on achievement rather than a set curriculum to be taught.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical-thinking Skills

Historical thinking can be defined as the cognitive process of analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information from the past as it relates to the present (Wineburg, 2010). Traditional teaching of history typically is centered on textbook reading, note taking, and memorization of facts, a practice that has existed in this country for many years. And yet these common practices have not proved to be effective in the development of historical thinking. Studies would indicate that lectures and memorization of historical facts do not build the capacity to think historically.

In his article on historical-thinking, Bruce VanSledright (2004) states:

“[W]hat occurs in the classroom needs to involve source work, investigations into the traces and shards of the past, and much of it. Students—even the young ones—need opportunities to engage these sources, to learn to assess their status, and to begin building and writing up their own interpretations of the past. That way they engage the activity because they come to own the end product—their own histories...” (p. 232).

By thinking critically about the past, students “transform the act of reading from passive reception to an engaged and passionate interrogation” (Wineburg, 2010, sec. 3, para. 2).

Students should be engaged in activities that allow them “to create new knowledge or apply previously learned concepts to new situations” through the processes of analyzing, interpreting, explaining, and solving problems (Bolinger & Warren, 2007, p. 73).

Authentic experimental or research-type exercises should be a central part of instruction.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Thematic and Disciplinary Standards “refer repeatedly to enabling learners to predicting, constructing, explaining, investigating, interpreting, developing, exploring, applying, and analyzing new information to advance their own ideas about a particular subject” (Bolinger & Warren, 2007, p. 73).

Media Literacy

The 21st century is a media- and technology-reliant world. The majority of our information and entertainment sources are multimedia in format, thus requiring new skills in production and critical thinking for living in a media culture. Students today “are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). These “digital natives” have spent their entire lives being surrounded by and immersed in the newest technologies of the age. And yet students are frequently expected to leave behind their native world when they enter school, whether due to lack of district funding for current technologies, or to educators’ efficacy in using them.

According to Hammond & Manfra (2009), there is “growing interest in exploring technology-mediated instruction, [but] rates of technology integration in social studies education have remained low” (p. 161). Classroom instruction based solely on textbook reading and lecture potentially lays a foundation for student disengagement and lack of motivation to learn. Fertig (2005) states, “The traditional way history is taught—as a series of lectures, textbook reading, note memorizing, and test taking—is not only boring to students” (as cited in Waring & Robinson, 2010, p. 22), it is an ineffective way to teach the skills involved in historical thinking (Scheuerell, 2007, as cited in Waring & Robinson, 2010, p. 22). Technology and content should be blended in ways that will

promote strong performance in meeting state objectives on standardized tests (Wetzel & Marshall, 2011, p. 79). By partnering appropriate pedagogy with varied forms of technology, critical-thinking skills can be fostered.

Communication Skills

Oral language skills are essential to the learning process. The communication skills of speaking and listening form the basis for thinking (Fisher & Frey, 2007, sec. 2, para.1). Speaking is the process of orally sharing ideas and information. Those who exhibit strong skills in speaking are able to organize and efficiently convey their thoughts to varied types of listeners. The act of listening involves interpreting both spoken and nonverbal messages. But talking and hearing do not indicate that high levels of speaking and listening are occurring. While the development of oral language is a natural process for children, higher levels of articulation require training and modeling as they get older.

Students must be taught to express themselves well, especially as they are being prepared to enter college and the workforce. According to Hansen and Hansen (n. d.), in their article on top skills most sought after by employers, communications skills are mentioned most often because effective listening, writing, and speaking skills are critical for success in business (“Skills Most Sought After by Employers,” para. 1). Mottet (2006) reported from a survey of human resource officials that only a quarter of college graduates entering the workforce today are equipped with well-developed speaking skills and that 95% of these officials considered oral communication to be of high importance in entry workplace skills (para. 1).

One method of focus for early higher-level communications skills development is to begin with academic conversations. Zwiers and Crawford (2011) suggest that

academic conversations fit into five core skills: “elaborate and clarify; support ideas with examples; build on and/or challenge a partner’s ideas; paraphrase; and synthesize conversation points” (p. 2). These skills help in a variety of real-world situations and especially in careers that require high-quality academic writing and reading. Practice for each of these five core skills can be implemented across the curriculum, and especially within the content area of social studies. Students can connect and engage with events in history through conversations, much the way historians do, based on historical thinking skills such as inferring cause and effect, recognizing bias in evidence, and empathizing through different perspectives. This type of dialogue personalizes the information in such a way that greater understanding and learning can be achieved, as well as increased motivation to pursue further knowledge.

Interestingly, studies have been conducted on teacher responses to student demographics with regard to amount and type of talk within the classroom. Flanders (1970) found that teachers in classrooms of higher-achieving students talked only about half the time, encouraging conversation with critical thinking questions, whereas teachers with greater numbers of low-achievers spent the majority of class time in lecture and direct instruction (as cited in Fisher & Frey, 2009, sec. 4, para. 3). In other words, teachers who have greater numbers of struggling students tend to focus more on drill and basic skills instruction while teachers of higher-achieving students provide more interactive critical and creative thinking opportunities. Implications would suggest that more opportunities for implementation of critical thinking through dialogue would benefit all learners.

Project-Based Learning

Inquiry project-based learning is a student-centered approach to pursuing knowledge. “In this approach the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator of learning, while students actively build their knowledge base as they raise questions and find answers through information search” (Chu, Tse, Loh, & Chow, 2011, p. 237). Students are guided through research that culminates in creating a project to be shared with a select audience (Bell, 2010, p. 39). These investigations and projects usually involve finding answers to real-world problems in collaborative efforts, often supported by technology (Chu et al., 2011, p. 237). Throughout the process, students are actively engaged with their peers. They must learn to share, negotiate, and problem-solve in their collaboration with others.

Project-based learning stimulates engagement and motivation and can effectively increase comprehension of content area knowledge. By actively constructing knowledge through activity and teacher-designed learning experiences, a deep understanding is promoted rather than short-lived, superficial memorization (Hernandez-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009/2010, p. 152). In project-based learning, children construct knowledge and build on their background knowledge, and this enables them to retain more information (Bell, 2010, p. 42). Consequently, they are enabled to become lifelong active learners.

In addition to increased comprehension and understanding of content, project-based learning encourages critical thinking skills. Through problem solving, creativity, analysis, and synthesis, students develop awareness of learning and learning strategies (Jones, 2012, para. 1). They may move beyond the rote memorization of facts to deeper understandings through learning to pose their own higher-level questions and explaining

or defending their thinking. Fostering critical thinking in this way requires shifting from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered learning environment. A teacher must relinquish his or her role “as the sole disseminator of knowledge and structuring lessons to allow for student inquiry, research, and collaboration” (Jones, 2012, sec. 10, para. 1).

Studies on the academic proficiency of project-based learning (PBL) show greater student understanding of content area concepts. In their examination of standardized testing results, Geier et al. (2008) report that “students engaged in PBL outscore their traditionally educated peers” (as cited in Bell, 2010, p. 39-40). Similarly, Boaler (1999) states, “Research supports that students using PBL perform better on both standardized assessments and project tests than students in traditional direct instruction programs” (as cited in Bell, 2010, p. 42). Standardized testing in its typical multiple-choice format is limited in its assessment of critical thinking skills. However, project-based learning can provide integral connection to critical twenty-first century skills essential for success, a foundational principle of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The CCSS provide a framework from which teachers can instruct and students can apply skills and knowledge of content to authentic learning opportunities. The Kansas Standards for History, Government, and Social Studies (KSHGSS) within this framework outline several guidelines for promoting inquiry in social studies. Both long- and short-term projects should include basic components of reading, writing, and communication. Instruction should include reading a variety of primary and secondary sources for the purposes of complex text comprehension, analysis, and evaluation. Appropriate technologies should be applied in writing to clearly and coherently express information and arguments. Effective communication can be developed by “preparing

and collaborating with diverse partners in conversations about topics within the discipline” (KSGHSS, 2013, p.7). These guidelines suggest a project-based approach as a practical and productive means to learning. Therefore, this thesis attempts to address the following research question: What knowledge, skills, and dispositions could be gained by having students create newscasts in a broadcast studio? Using a project-based approach, four sixth grade social studies classes explored ancient Greece topics in small cooperative groups by preparing news broadcasts from a Classical Greece perspective.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study took place in a middle school in a school district with a student enrollment of 6,758 in the Midwestern United States. The district is located in a small town of approximately 3,400 residents that is adjacent to the outskirts of a large Midwestern city. The majority of the student population comes from the middle- to upper middle-class neighborhoods of this suburban region (see Table 1, *School Statistics for the Academic Year 2011-2012*).

Table 1

School Statistics for the Academic Year 2011-2012

Total Students	Gender		Economic Disadvantage	Race			
	Male	Female		White	African American	Hispanic	Other
803	51%	49%	177 (22%)	634 (79%)	32 (4%)	88 (11%)	48 (6%)

Four sixth grade social studies classes were included in this study. The third hour sixth grade social studies class had been selectively studied, initially as a sample of convenience because the broadcast studio and equipment were readily accessible during this class period, and it was also the broadcast teacher's planning period which allowed him to be available as needed for assistance. This class period was also the last class of the morning making it more advantageous for timely documentation of data. However, upon discovering from the broadcast teacher that a portable "green screen" could be set up in my classroom to create a broadcast studio in the classroom, we decided to include all four social studies classes in the study. An even more critical factor in including all

the students was my belief in the potential high levels of student engagement in the project. I could not exclude three classes from something I anticipated being a much better way of learning. The school district has a strong focus on the use of technology in the classroom and in communication between teachers and families. Allowing all students the opportunity to utilize the technology was in keeping with the district’s commitment to academic excellence in its use.

Each of the four social studies classes was predominantly white with nearly equitable gender division in three of the classes (see Table 2, *Descriptive Statistics*).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Sixth Grade Social Studies Classes	Number of Students	Gender		Race				Remedial Reading
		Male	Female	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	
A (3 rd period)	24	9	15	4	1	1	18	10
B (5 th period)	25	13	12	0	1	0	24	6
C (6 th period)	25	13	12	1	1	2	21	4
D (7 th period)	24	11	13	1	2	1	20	5
Totals	98	46	52	6	5	4	83	25

The study included 98 students, 25 of whom received remedial reading services or “reading improvement,” as their regular sixth grade reading class. It is important to note that of the 24 students, 9 males and 15 females, in Class A, ten students received these services. Each of the three other classes had approximately half as many reading improvement students as Class A.

Placement criteria for reading improvement was based on the Rasch unIT (RIT score) on Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) tests from both Spring and Fall 2012 in combination with the Kansas State Reading Assessment. The criteria included student RIT scores of 207 or less as well as scores below the 48th percentile (Approaching

Standards) on the Kansas State Reading Assessment. When a discrepancy was found between these scores, other determining factors included a student having been served in a reading improvement class the previous year, and his/her overall in-class performance as observed by the sixth grade teaching team.

Assessments

Students were surveyed concerning individual learning preferences prior to the investigation (see Appendix A). This self-assessment provided information for assistance in team building for their projects. Attempts were made to include a blend of learning preferences in order to promote collaboration and encourage exploration of different learning modes outside of students' self-perceived strengths.

Given the extensive possibilities for topic research, the textbook information provided parameters for measuring comprehension of required reading. Students were able to further explore and expand their topics through the internet and digital encyclopedias, but the basis for comprehension comparison came from the textbook. A pre- and post-assessment (see Appendix B) similar to previous tests that students had taken was administered in order to evaluate the students' understanding of an "Essential Question" regarding influences of ancient and classical Greece in the world today. The purpose of this quantitative assessment was to see if the change in learning method, a collaborative oral presentation, provided measurable improvement in students' comprehension. This test was given twice, first as a pretest at the beginning of the unit to determine students' baseline knowledge of ancient Greece, and then a second time at the end of the unit as a posttest.

During the process of information gathering and project preparation, students were monitored with an observation checklist (see Appendix C), including two types of information. First, evidence of historical thinking in student conversations was recorded based on four strategies suggested by Sam Wineburg (2010) in his article, “Thinking Like a Historian:” (1) sourcing, (2) contextualization, (3) reading the silences, and (4) corroborating. In addition to the knowledge-based posttest, another post-assessment that incorporated these historical-thinking skills was provided at the end of the unit (see Appendix D). In contrast to the short, specific answers required on the first posttest, students were allowed to exhibit their deeper understanding in essay format.

Additionally, student engagement was recorded in a rating from one to four, with a “four” rating being high involvement in both discussion and productivity, and a “one” rating indicating lack of involvement in project activities. Intermediate ratings of two or three suggest corresponding levels of passive or improving involvement.

Following completion of the projects and assessments, students reflected on their learning in a qualitative survey (see Appendix E). Questions addressed students’ personal opinions regarding the project format, group dynamics, and overall usefulness of this type of learning process. They were also given an opportunity to offer suggestions for improvement of projects, research methods, and the effectiveness of group collaboration.

Procedures

The procedures for this investigation took place in four stages over a six-week time period. Stage One involved a week of news media exploration. First, students participated in a news story writing activity using *TweenTribune* (Jacobson, 2013), an

interactive daily news website designed to encourage students to be well-informed, daily news-readers. Students were directed to “be a journalist” by reading a news story of their choice and then answering the six questions “Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?” This was followed by group discussion and sharing of news stories as a means of preparing for the writing they would be doing for their news media projects.

To introduce the “broadcast” project, students were assigned to watch national and local newscasts at home. They were to observe elements such as order of events (e.g. national, international, sports, entertainment), approximate amount of time for each, points of view, and tone and style of reporting (see Appendix F). Classes viewed an “On-Air Interview” through a local television station website. Whole group discussion included several guiding questions: Was it local, national, or international news? How did the tone and style change between serious news stories and human-interest reports? How might decisions have been made about what stories to share?

In Stage Two, each of the classes were provided basic introduction to the study of Greece over a period of about two weeks. Students began by individually identifying prior knowledge about Greece on a graphic organizer (see Appendix G) and then participating in whole group discussion of their chart responses. Next, students were directed to the textbook question, “What advances did the Greeks make almost 2500 years ago that still influence the world today?” (McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009, p. 206). They wrote this question and added predictions to their graphic organizers about what information might need to be researched, based on their prior knowledge of Greece and their studies of how other civilizations have influenced the world. This was followed by a basic introduction to Greece through traditional

instruction. Students read textbook sections along with teacher-directed instruction and lecture. They completed written assignments with specific focuses on the location, geography, and resources of the country and the problems encountered by its early peoples. Students continued to review and add information to their knowledge graphic organizer as they worked through the lessons.

Stage Three, a period of two weeks, required the students to prepare a news broadcast from ancient Greece viewpoint. They were selectively divided into broadcast teams of four or five students, heterogeneously, with attention given to achievement levels as demonstrated by Fall 2012 NWEA reading scores. Discussion with our team reading teachers helped to define scores used for determining those students who required remediation. The NWEA scores for all students within each social studies class were collected from the school records and sorted according to low, average, and high scores. In addition, students' previous social studies unit test scores from throughout the current school year helped determine group placement mainly as substantiation for the NWEA scores. Attempts were also made to evenly group with mixed gender and varied learning styles based on the learning preferences survey results. A coding system was used to identify those who preferred to work with others or more individually. This allowed for placement of students who had strong interpersonal skills with those who preferred to work more isolated. At the same time, special consideration was given in the separation of those with known problematic interpersonal relationships. Students were also identified by their comfort levels in types of work (e.g. digital/non-digital projects, written products, oral presentation, etc.) in effort to have a blend of abilities and interests

and with the intention of encouraging effective communication by collaborating with diverse partners.

Once groups were organized, general instructions were provided (see Appendix H) and expectations were discussed. Using the textbook chapter on “Classical Greece,” the pretest questions, and the prior knowledge graphic organizers as guides, students collaborated to discuss possible news stories as if they lived in that time period. Individual news story assignments were determined by broadcast team members. Specific age-appropriate websites and search engines were set up on a free web space “hotlist” for further research of the chapter topics (Filamentality, *It’s all Greek to me!*, [Hotlist], December, 2012). After a week of beginning research in this preparation stage, groups divided for “jigsaw” meetings in which team members with similar story assignments could confer with each other and share their findings (*Instructional Strategies Online*, 2004-2009). Students then began writing their stories from the perspective of life as it was in ancient Greece.

Finally, in Stage Four, each news team prepared for the production of its broadcast. The news teams collaborated with the broadcast teacher in becoming familiar with digital camera operation and practicing with a script they created using *CuePrompter* (Hannu Multanen, 2012), a free online teleprompter. A week of class time was devoted to refining written scripts and rehearsing. During class, students practiced reading their scripts in their groups multiple times in order to familiarize each other with their content. They also practiced operating and reading from the teleprompter for the sake of matching their reading fluency to the teleprompter speed. Greek costumes were provided, and the classroom was set up as a broadcast studio with a green screen, studio

lighting, and Greek décor in order to film individual news stories. Students took control of all videotaping and then assembled their newscasts in the school broadcast studio using moviemaking software under the collaborative guidance of the broadcast teacher and the social studies teacher.

Finished productions were organized by classes on the school computer network server in preparation for viewing first by parents during student-led conferences. As part of their discussion on progress in social studies class, students were able to show their team's broadcast to their parents. As continued interaction with the content of the material, the videos were viewed the following week by students as part of whole-group discussion during class time. Additionally, students in each class watched the broadcasts of another class using a video evaluation form (see Appendix I). Individual stories within each broadcast were evaluated on the amount of factual information provided, evidence of contextualization (historical perspective), and evidence as a continuing influence in the world today. Students took the short-answer posttest over ancient Greece and the end-of-unit essay test on the following two days.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Quantitative Analyses

Students were given two different tests to assess what they had learned about ancient Greece, a short-answer pre-and posttest and an end-of-unit essay test. The first of these two tests was a ten-question quiz over ancient Greek influences found in the world today. This quiz was given as a pretest prior to any reading or discussion of ancient Greece. After the broadcast projects were completed, students viewed and evaluated them. The quiz was given as a posttest to indicate knowledge gained.

Figure 1 illustrates the mean change scores from pretest to posttest for knowledge of ancient Greece influences in the world today. Most of the students had very limited knowledge of historical Greece since they are first introduced to world history studies in sixth grade. The change scores shown in this figure indicate an average increase ranging from 4.17 to 5.36 across the four classes.

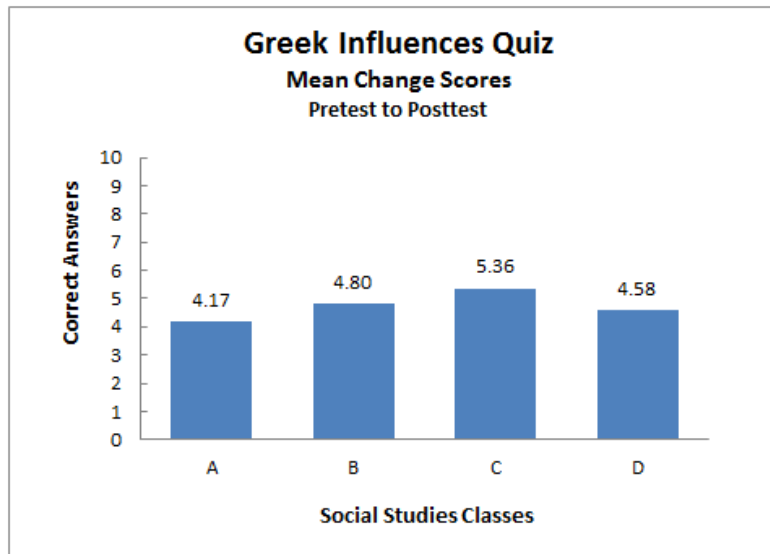


Figure 1. A comparison of pretest to posttest mean change scores from four social studies classes.

It should be noted in Figure 1 that the class with the highest number of students on reading improvement (Class 1) had the lowest change scores.

In preparation for the posttest, students had opportunities to rehearse their news stories with their peers a minimum of three times over two days as they practiced with the online teleprompter. Each student performed his or her news story in front of the whole class twice as they were being videotaped. Additionally, students watched and actively listened to some of the broadcasts from other classes using a broadcast video evaluation. Students took the posttest after all broadcasts were completed. Because not all information on the “Greek Influences Quiz” was efficiently covered in the student projects, it was expected that students would give correct answers to seven of the ten questions only. The scores in Figure 1, although appearing to be low, are actually representative of better results when considering a score of seven as reasonable. In this comparison of the mean change scores from the pretest to the posttest, Class A showed the least gains of the four classes (see Figure 2) for the remedial readers than the other three classes.

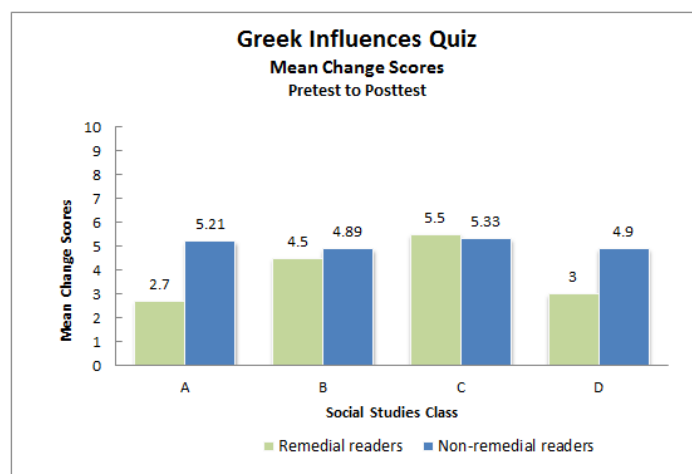


Figure 2. A comparison of remedial and non-remedial readers pretest to posttest mean change scores.

The pattern of changes directly correlates with the numbers of remedial reading students in each of the classes. The non-remedial reading students' mean scores in all four classes hovered near an average five correct answers. The remedial reading students' mean scores show greater fluctuation between classes. Class A has ten students (42% of the class) in remedial reading while each of the other three classes has approximately half as many. Class C shows higher mean scores for four remedial readers compared to the other 21 non-remedial reading students in the class. In each of the four classes, those remedial reading students who scored higher on the posttest were actively involved in group work and discussion on a daily basis.

Overall, non-remedial readers in all four classes scored an average of at least one more correct answer than the remedial readers, as shown in Figure 3.

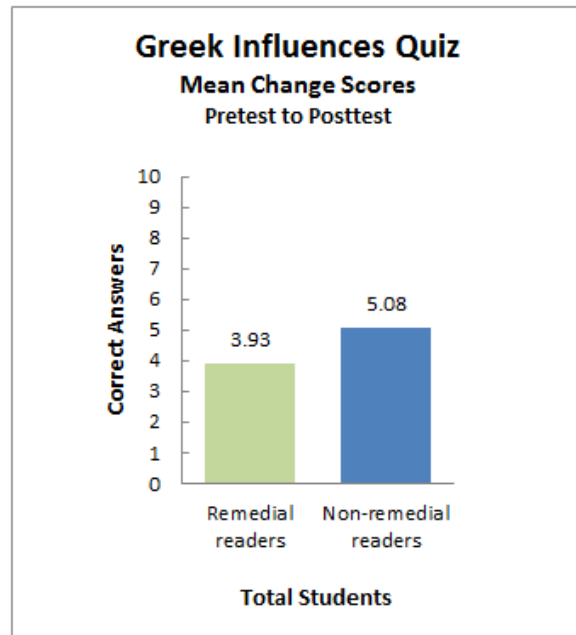


Figure 3. Greek influences quiz, overall mean change scores for four social studies classes.

An end-of-unit essay test attempted to measure students' understanding of Greek concepts at three different Bloom's Taxonomy cognitive-thinking levels (See Figures 4, 5, and 6).



Figure 4. Results from the knowledge-level question.

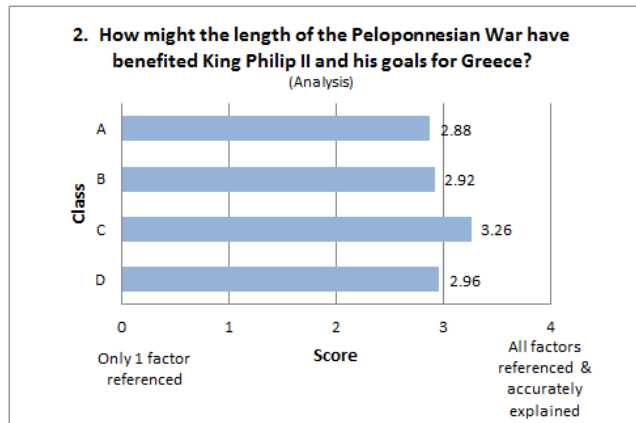


Figure 5. Results from the analysis-level question.



Figure 6. Analysis of the evaluation-level question

The knowledge-level question (see Figure 4) revisited the topic of evidence of ancient Greek influence in the modern world, allowing students opportunity to supply information that was not addressed on the original knowledge comprehension test. Students should have been able to list a minimum of three Greek influences and explain their importance in the world today. Those who listed only one or two influences without discussion received the lowest score.

The analysis-level question (see Figure 5), required students to analyze the effects of a 27-year-long war between Greek city-states and enemies who sought to conquer them. Students who received the highest score addressed and analyzed each factor in the question—the lengthy Peloponnesian War, King Philip’s intention to conquer Greece and spread its culture, and how the Peloponnesian War may have assisted him. The lowest scores indicate a reference to only one factor.

An evaluative question (see Figure 6) involved evaluating whether or not Alexander of Macedonia was worthy of being called “great” based on information in four primary source documents (see Appendix D). These documents had previously been examined and discussed in class so individual reading skills should have been less a factor in students’ ability to provide their own evaluations. Students scored highest by citing at least three pieces of information from the primary source documents and providing explanation as to how this information would lead to “greatness.” Responses with no primary source citations and reasoning received the lowest score.

While mean scores on individual questions for each class are shown to have minor fluctuations, an overall gradual increase of mean scores can be seen in Figure 5.

As the questions became more cognitively complex, students scored higher in their answers.

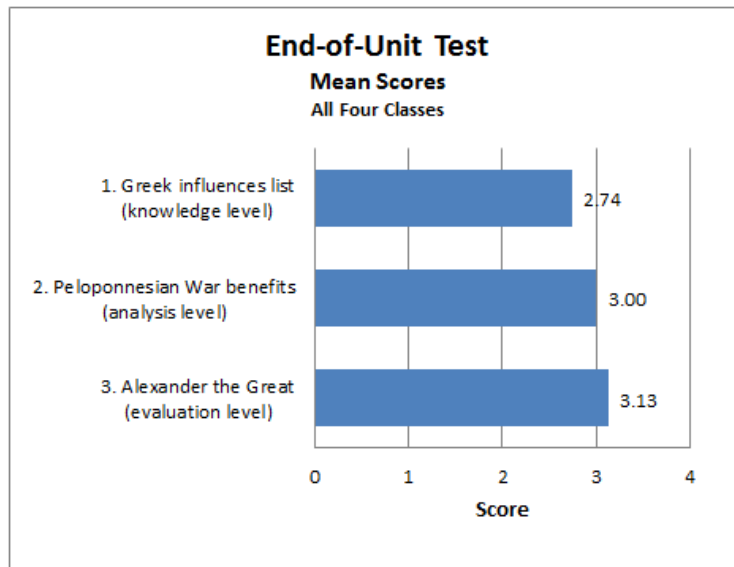


Figure 7. Overall end-of-unit essay test results for four social studies classes.

When these averages are further disaggregated, the remedial reading students demonstrated notable increases in mean scores as the cognitive levels of questions become more complex (see Figure 8). The non-remedial students maintained more similar mean scores although still with gradual increase.

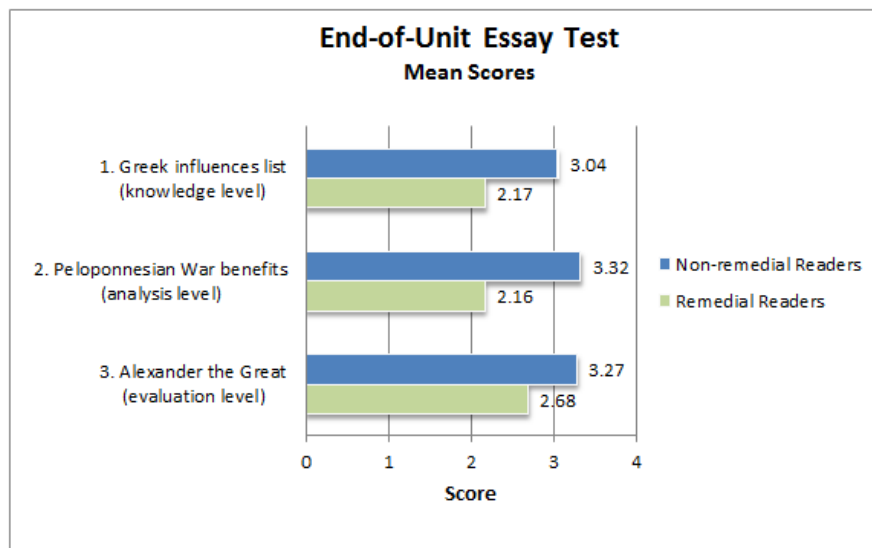


Figure 8. A comparison of mean scores for remedial and non-remedial students on an end-of-unit essay test.

Whereas these students typically struggle with reading and recall, they were able to achieve marked success with higher cognitive level questions. The analysis and evaluation questions appeared to allow for greater student achievement in exhibiting their understanding.

Qualitative Analyses

In a survey given prior to beginning this research, students reflected on preferred methods of learning and working in a classroom environment. In general, about 34% of the students from all four social studies classes prefer working in small groups. Approximately 1% more of the students responded that they like to learn through participation in projects (see Figure 9).

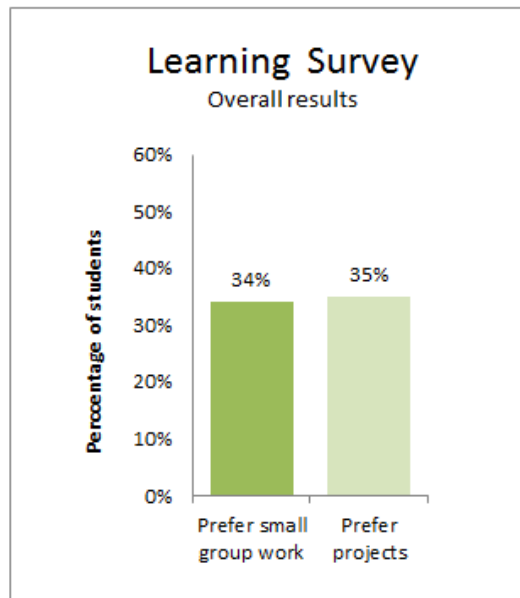


Figure 9. A survey of preferred learning and methods of demonstrating knowledge.

Of the four social studies classes, Class A had the most students who expressed that working in small groups helped them to learn better. Projects, especially digital or artistic in nature, were also more popular than in the other three classes (see Figure 10). This is also the class with nearly twice as many remedial reading students as each of the

other three social studies classes. Even though the comparison is not diaggregated into remedial and non-remedial readers, it can be inferred that several of the remedial reading students perceive higher self-efficacy when allowed to learn through discussion and collaboration with their peers rather than being more reliant on their individual reading comprehension skills. Zwiers and Crawford (2011) support this type of academic conversation in their suggested five core communications skills. Learning to elaborate and clarify, support ideas with examples, build on a partner's ideas, paraphrase, and synthesize (p. 2) can lead to greater understanding and motivation to learn.

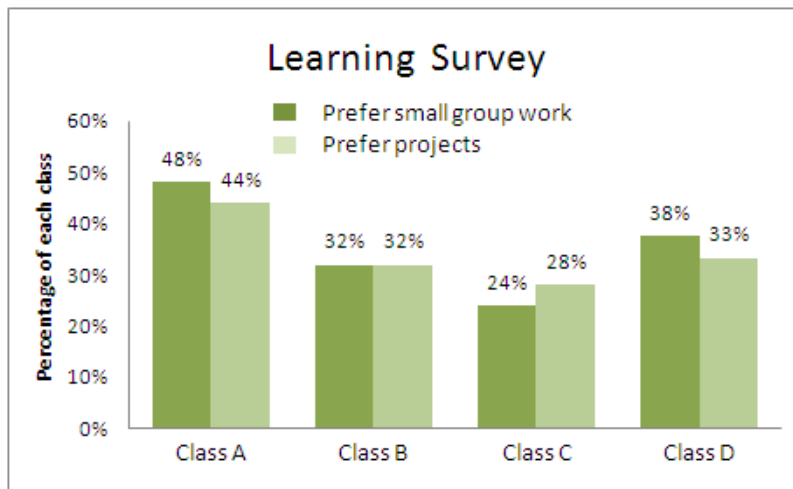


Figure 10. A comparison of four social studies classes for preferred learning and working methods.

Conversely, Class C had the lowest percentages on preferring group work and project-based learning. Several of these students, including both remedial and non-remedial readers, specifically noted that they would choose traditional methods of learning such as reading the textbook and completing worksheets. This class had more students who were typically successful in memorization of content material. It also had a history of being the least productive in required collaborative efforts.

Another survey was provided following the completion of the entire Greece research and broadcast projects. Students were asked to reflect on their projects and share their experiences and suggestions with regard to group work, the research process, and their creation of a news broadcast in a historical setting. Group work was rated based on its effectiveness in learning about ancient Greek influences as well as the interpersonal and working dynamics (see Figure 11). While approximately 90% of all four social studies classes gave positive ratings on learning within their groups, roughly a fourth of the total number of students experienced difficulty with their team members. Three students suggested that groups would work better if they were allowed to choose their members. Several students commented on problems related to technology issues. But most difficulties in group dynamics were related to lack of communication, especially in research and writing news stories. Students reported not getting help from teammates who were involved in or had completed their own research and news story writing. Other issues centered around disagreements on what stories and topics to include in their broadcasts.

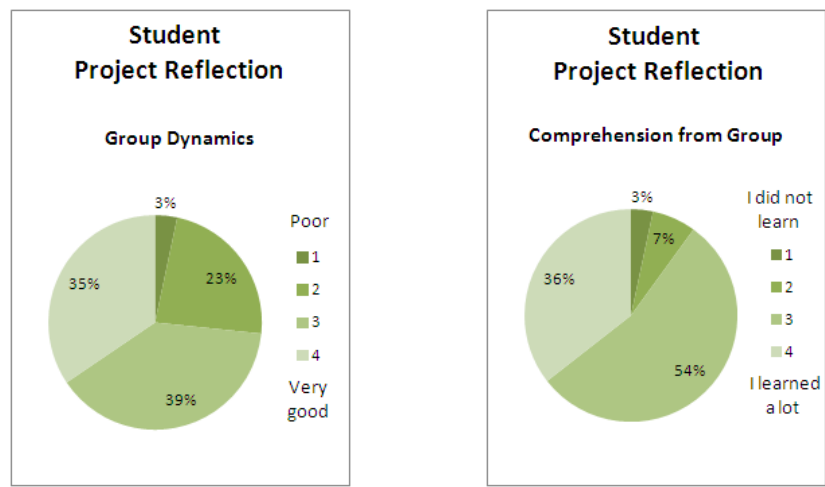


Figure 11. Student reflections from four classes on group work.

Students in each of the four classes also shared their thoughts on the effectiveness of a news broadcast project in helping them to learn about ancient Greece. As shown in Figure 12, most found the project useful in understanding the Greek concepts that they researched. Several students expressed frustration narrowing their research topics while still staying within a seemingly short amount of time allotted for the productions. Working with unfamiliar computer programs provided special challenges, and internet and network issues were reported as most irritating. A notable concern for at least 20% of the students was the need for more contextualization of ancient Greece events and people. Rather than being a helpful tool, the teleprompter was cited as a hindrance in many cases. Students reported being too caught up in the reading, which did not allow them to communicate in ways that conveyed each story's tone and emotion. Another concern brought up by four students was the lack of communication about each team member's news stories. Individuals were familiar with their own information but did not have enough time to really learn from their group partners.

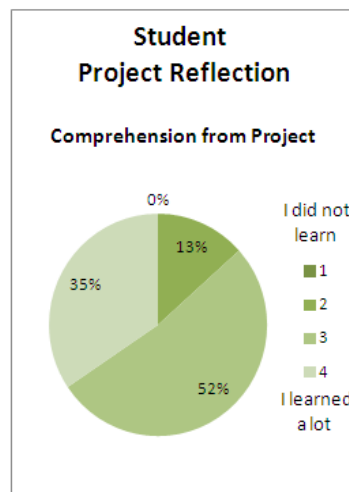


Figure 12. Student reflections from four classes on the effectiveness of a broadcast project.

Students' reflections also offered suggestions for improvement. Approximately 43% of the students from all four classes expressed that they needed more time to complete the project. Most of these suggestions included having more time for research of information and preparation of "news" in contextualized format. Several students wished for more rehearsals and practice in speaking on camera so that they could hear themselves and, as one student wrote, "make it a little more exiting instead of sounding like your reading on a telopromter [sic]." Another student said that if they had had time to watch themselves in video rehearsals, "We also could have used more expressive faces and our pronunciation [sic] could be improved." Still another student remarked that they "were sometimes rushing to get information...and did not get time to really understand the facts that were being put down." The general consensus among all four classes, however, was that doing a broadcast project was fun and should be repeated.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview

The goal of this research was to explore the effects of collaborative oral presentations on students' comprehension and engagement in historical thinking skills. It was hypothesized that through knowledge gathering and sharing in oral presentations, students would be able to comprehend more historical content material as they practiced critical analysis and evaluation using contextualization thinking skills. This hypothesis was supported through written assessment as well as recorded observations during the study.

Initially, the pretest reflected very little background knowledge about Greece and its influences. Because the information was so new, it was difficult for students to connect to what they were researching. However, once the students became engaged in contextual research and preparing news stories from the perspectives of the ancient Greeks, knowledge retention increased as demonstrated on the Greek influences posttest. Although these gains were not markedly substantial, the broadcast projects did provide a solid foundation of knowledge from which students could rehearse critical thinking skills. Stephanie Bell (2010) recommends in her writing that project-based learning helps children construct knowledge, build on their background knowledge, and retain more information (p. 42). This is also supported by this study's test results. Students were able to recall and synthesize information they had researched by successfully exploring questions that required event analysis and evaluation.

Challenges of Project-based Learning

While overall outcomes were generally positive, the different stages and tasks of this study had challenges that sometimes seemed to threaten its outcomes. Frustrations and dilemmas in each of the major study components served as essential factors in the concerns as well as the successfulness of the research. Group projects require a great deal of thought, planning, and preparation on the teacher's part. Based on students' preconceptions of group work and also on their project reflections, interpersonal relationships play a major part in collaboration, especially for these middle school adolescents. Students expressed in a learning survey that they work best with their friends and chosen colleagues. With this in mind, groups were selectively teacher-assembled. However, group diversity is also a reality in a democratic society. In group projects, "[s]tudents learn the fundamental skills of productive communication, respect for others, and teamwork while generating ideas together" (Bell, 2010, p. 41). Groups were set up to include a blend of personalities. Friendships were considered and placed in such a way that all students would potentially be comfortable in their groups. Likewise, additional care was given to separating known problematic interpersonal relationships in attempt to promote productivity and engagement for all. A final and critical consideration in grouping was to facilitate the inclusion of the few students who either prefer to work alone or who would likely be isolated in not being included by student-selected grouping.

In spite of the careful group assembling, many students felt that group dynamics were still a critical component to the success of their projects. Approximately half of the students wrote comments in their reflections about the positive and/or negative effects of

working with their teammates. One student wrote, “Let us pick our groups. I actually work best with people I pick. I would be more comfortable with people I choose to be in a group...I could easily agree with those people, and finally I would have more fun.” This was a student in Class A, the one with the greatest number of academically challenged students, which may have accounted for his adamancy in student-selected groups. By and large, most students’ comments agreed with the student who responded, “The toughest challenge at first was kind of getting along with each other and choosing to let each have the subject you wanted in the first place. But the farther we went into the project the more cooperative we became.”

Another challenge in the learning process was the pressure to finish the broadcast projects in time to present to parents at conferences. This goal provided added engagement and enthusiasm because the final product was intended for an authentic audience. It had purpose beyond the scope of the grade book. According to Bell (2010), “Accountability to an audience coupled with a due date keeps students on track” (p. 40). Time constraints were additionally affected by technology problems as an Internet connection was disrupted, causing difficulties with final edits. In spite of these problems and a few videos still in need of further editing, all presentations were available for student-led “parent-teacher conferences.” It is worth noting that we had an exceptionally high percentage of attendance for these conferences. Ninety-five of 99 students were able to share their team broadcasts with their parents. Conversations between teachers on our team and the parents of their homeroom students indicated that being able to see the Greek news broadcasts was an added incentive to coming to conferences.

Communication Skills

Collaboration as a communication skill was a critical component throughout the study and the students' projects. Students experienced teacher-modeling of collaboration. The school librarian/media specialist and I worked together to present research lessons in conjunction with Greek topics as well as discussions of appropriate citing of information. The sixth-grade students in the study became more acquainted with the broadcast teacher, who teaches solely seventh and eighth grade classes, as we jointly instructed them in the use of broadcast media and technology.

The effectiveness of student collaboration was evident in their final broadcast products. Those groups that interacted well by helping each other with research, clarifying information, and technology use achieved generally higher scores in assessment. The importance of group collaboration was demonstrated in both negative and positive situations. Two students, both of whom were in a reading improvement class, showed the least overall gains in comprehension from the Greece research and projects. They were in two different ill-functioning groups, both of which experienced visible lack of collaboration. Each of these groups had at least one other student who chose to work more independently. The self-isolating individuals were instrumental in the establishing of uncooperative dynamics within their respective groups. In addition, both students were very quiet and lacking in self-efficacy. While the absence of group collaboration cannot be the sole cause of lower scores for those students, greater cooperation of all group members could have encouraged their participation and abilities and thus potentially increased their self-efficacy.

Conversely, positive results of collaboration can be seen with several of the other

remedial readers. Two students in particular were members of groups that set clear goals and were able to redirect themselves when individuals were occasionally off-task. Group members each came to the table expecting to participate equally. Disagreements were settled through group discussions or with teacher moderation. Even in heated disagreement, project goals and understanding remained more important than individual personality differences. The increase of cognitive thinking levels of one student is particularly noteworthy in that he had the second lowest RIT score in all four social studies classes. He struggled frequently with remaining on task and focusing on immediate goals. Yet through group collaboration and redirection, he was able to express above average understanding of concepts. This is supported by Bell (2010) as her research found that “[s]tudents learn accountability with PBL through daily goal setting, as well as through expectations of their peers” (p. 40). Peer accountability can be more motivating than merely completing work just for the teacher. Additionally, this type of critical thinking dialogue is beneficial for all learning levels, rather than just for the higher-achieving students (Fisher and Frey, 2009, sec. 4, para. 3).

Preparation of written and oral communication within the broadcast projects brought its own set of challenges. Students typed ancient Greece news stories in script form so that they could be read from an online teleprompter while recording their broadcasts. They practiced independently using their script on their computer, using the teleprompter software, often adjusting it to a speed with which they apparently felt comfortable. Although helping to reduce the need for memorization which would have required more time, students became dependent on the teleprompter for telling their news stories. This resulted in two problems. First, dependency on a teleprompter inadvertently

focused on students' ability to read fluently. This was compounded by lack of rehearsal time with the teleprompter and cameras. Secondly, several students were distracted enough by trying to read the words of their reports that they were not relaying their news in an informative way, with expression in their voices or faces, an essential part to the learning of others as they participated in active listening to the broadcasts at the end of the unit. These factors may have hindered greater understanding of the concepts being presented.

Media Literacy Skills

The use of varied forms of technology in this study promoted high levels of student engagement. Students actively sought to show their command of digital cameras and broadcast equipment. The introduction of software for producing their news programs was highly motivating. Rather than being intimidated, most students had enough computer-comfort to jump into its exploration. They were anxious to produce their own individual news segments, so much so that presenting the software components required minimal explanation before they were thoroughly engrossed in production. Those few who chose to partner with a team member in working with the software did so primarily due to time constraints of broadcast room availability and approaching parent-child conferences.

Media literacy inherently involves the inevitable problems that accompany technology. These problems for us included an unusually slow internet connection and a virus that had infected the district computer servers, all occurring the last week of production. Most projects had to go through final saving that took several hours after school when the broadcast teacher and I could work with them. A few still needed some refining, but all were available by the time the first parent-student conference took place. Students' technology frustrations were limited to these situations which were beyond their control. Even with the

complexity of the digital media program, which was easily the most challenging technology in this study, students were able to observe, explore, and learn its components in what amounted to about one class period. This illustrates well that “[d]igital natives are used to receiving information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task” (Prensky, 2001, p. 2).

A highlight for me in the production phase of the project was to be more of an observer and guide. Deliberately waiving my role “as the sole disseminator of knowledge” (Jones, 2012, sec. 10, para. 1) allowed students to enthusiastically explore and learn while connecting and adding to their own technology knowledge. After brief instruction, students eagerly assumed the roles of directing, camera teleprompter operators, set and lighting management, costume preparation, and organization of segment filming. Their control of the broadcast processes provided ultimate ownership of the final products.

Historical Thinking Skills Development

Bridging the gap from knowledge gains to critical thinking about the knowledge within the parameters of a specific project is indeed a challenge. The study of ancient world history holds promising high-interest levels for middle school students. However, it also requires significant baseline learning of information in order to begin formulating connections and contextualization. According to Anderson & Schönborn, “[I]t is important that the memorization precedes any other higher-order cognitive processes, such as transfer and application, because all cognitive processes require ‘something to process’—in this case—memorized information” (2008, p. 312). The bulk of the content material is new and originates in faraway, unfamiliar parts of the world for most sixth

graders. In addition, facts and information are typically very complex and often depend upon direct instruction or explanation for understanding. Therefore, students in this study began their research with the limited textbook summarizations. Quantitative pretest and posttest results from students' initial research were included in the study primarily to show probable limits of knowledge-based-only learning. Both students and teacher alike experienced frustration at an apparent lack of comprehension as indicated on a simple, knowledge-based test, especially since the test information was informally but frequently reviewed prior to testing. Nevertheless, the preliminary findings in the case study were expected and not overly disconcerting.

More positive qualitative learning results began to occur with the beginning of the broadcast project. At first, students were actively engaged in online research and small group discussions with regard to delegation of specific topics and finding information. Once again, though, focusing on knowledge alone resulted in shallow understanding of ideas and concepts. Teacher intervention in the form of a "jigsaw" lesson was essential in redirecting students from merely locating information to understanding the importance of contextualizing historical events, places, and people. Authentic engagement in critical thinking skills began as students met in small groups with similar topics, shared research information, and discussed teacher-provided questions on how to contextualize the information. Questions such as "How might an interview with Socrates have sounded?" and "What differences of opinion would there be between one of Alexander the Great's foot soldiers and one of his governors?" provoked lively conversations. Students actively participated in planning imaginary scenarios and conversations that could be incorporated into a creative ancient history broadcast. Interestingly, once broadcast organization and

production commenced, focus generally reverted back to knowledge levels, even when presenting in a more contextual format. In the process of trying to “be the Greek,” students still struggled with the idea of connecting to people and events in a presentation rather than just writing reports about them.

It was not until after the Greece unit was finished and we had moved on to the study of ancient Rome that evidence of students’ historical thinking about ancient Greece was manifested. Students were instructed to write a newsletter about the accomplishments of Julius Caesar and then construct an editorial section regarding their opinion of him as either a good or bad ruler of Rome. Group discussions included references as to what had made other leaders “great,” like Alexander of Macedonia. In a subsequent lesson about Augustus Caesar, most students made a direct correlation between his desire to beautify the city of Rome as a sign of power and a similar decision made by Pericles with regard to the city-state of Athens. Student discussions included unsolicited comparisons between the two events along with speculation as to whether the outcomes of the beautification projects were similar. Additionally, more connections were made to leaders and events from much earlier in the school year, knowledge which is typically only a vague memory. Students were exhibiting “engaged and passionate interrogation” of the past rather than merely passive reception of information (Wineburg, 2010).

Limitations

Two limiting factors within this study were related specifically to the production of the broadcasts. First, the completion of projects was dependent on a computer program that was available only on computers in the broadcast studio. Access to the

studio was limited in that special arrangements had to be made for the broadcast teacher to take his class to a different classroom while we used the studio computers. Because his classes were dependent on these same computers for their work, we could only use the studio for four days.

The computers and software problems directly led to the second limiting factor of a non-negotiable deadline for the broadcasts. Having an authentic audience, parents and family members at student conferences, gave meaningful purpose and energy to student endeavors. Their work could have been shared later in a take-home format or by being available online. However, this could likely have been interpreted as optional and may not even have been seen by some parents. Showing the broadcasts at conferences became part of the oral presentation as students described to their parents what they had done and what they had learned. This deadline caused some distress for students as they rushed to get their news reports finished and then were slowed by technical problems. Several student reflections discussed the need to have more time to fully understand what they had written about and to convey it more believably.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that knowledge-based instruction combined with oral presentation skills in project-based learning can provide substantial foundation to more critical thinking and thus improve students' comprehension. While preliminary attempts at research can be tedious at times, discussions and collaboration in producing a major project prepare a base from which to springboard historical thinking questions. Students gain an appreciation for the complexities of history. Once a critical thinking pattern develops, students can continue to make similar connections in subsequent topics

of study. They learn by engaging in their own interpretations of history.

Based on these findings, I learned that teaching through typical methods of lecture and reading textbooks, while potentially flat and monotone, is still a worthy approach as a foundation to learning. However, its effectiveness is certainly strengthened and personalized through the depth and complexity of a purposeful learning project. I also discovered the importance of introducing basic components to historical thinking skills early so that they can be practiced frequently and built upon throughout the school year. Guided, thought-provoking discussion of history is much more invitational than only rote memorization of historical facts and will likely be more enduring.

The purpose statement of the Kansas Standards for History, Government, and Social Studies (2013) states that effective instruction includes authentic intellectual work. “Learning that supports realistic situations and college and career-ready pathways has value beyond the classroom, engaging students in the construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and connection to the real world” (p. 5). Using a project-based approach to learning, such as the Greece broadcast project in this study, provided a plethora of possibilities for these college and career-ready pathways. Students must be prepared for the rigors of a citizenship in which they will be required to analyze, problem-solve, and evaluate. Effective instruction should promote comprehension and evaluation of content area text. Communication skills must be taught in order for students to write coherently, collaborate productively, and creatively utilize digital media. In so doing, students can better understand how the world works as they also become a functioning member of it.

LIST OF REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Anderson, T. R., & Schönborn, K. J. (2008). Bridging the education research-teaching practice gap. *Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Education*, 36(4), 309-315.
- Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House*, 83, 39-43.
- Boaler, J. (1999). Mathematics for the moment, or the millennium? *Education Week*, 17(29), 30-34.
- Bolinger, K., & Warren, W. J. (2007, Spring/Summer). Methods practiced in social studies instruction: A review of public school teachers' strategies. *International Journal of Social Education*, 22(1), 68-84.
- Chu, S. K. W., Tse, S.-K., Loh, E. K. Y., & Chow, K. (2011, May 6). Collaborative inquiry project-based learning: Effects on reading ability and interests. *Library & Information Science Research*, 33, 236-243. doi:10.1016/j.lisr.2010.09.008
- Filamentality. (n. d.). *It's all Greek to me!* [Hotlist]. Retrieved from AT&T Knowledge Network Explorer website:
<http://www.kn.att.com/wired/fil/pages/listancientvu.html> [Cited: December 2012]
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2009). Using oral language to check for understanding. In *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for Your Classroom* (chap. 2). Retrieved from
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/107023/chapters/Using-Oral-Language-to-Check-for-Understanding.aspx> [Cited: October 2012]
- Geier, R., Blumenfeld, P. C., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Fishman, B., Soloway, E., & Clay-Chambers, J. (2008, October). Standardized test outcomes for students engaged in inquiry-based curricula in the context of urban reform. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 45(8), 922-939.
- Hagaman, J. L., & Reid, R. (2008, July/August). The effects of the paraphrasing strategy on the reading comprehension of middle school students at risk for failure in reading. *Remedial and Special Education*, 29(4), 222-234.
- Hammond, T. C., & Manfra, M. M. (2009). Giving, prompting, making: Aligning technology and pedagogy within TPACK for social studies instruction. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 9(2), 160-185.
- Hannu Multanen. (2005-2012). *CuePrompter* [Computer software]. Retrieved from
<http://www.cueprompter.com/> [Cited: March 2013]

- Hansen, R. S., & Hansen, K. (n. d.). What do employers really want? Top skills and values employers seek from job-seekers. *Quintessential Careers*. Retrieved from http://www.quintcareers.com/job_skills_values.html [Cited: October 2012]
- Hernandez-Ramos, P., & De La Paz, S. (2009/2010, Winter). Learning history in middle school by designing multimedia in a project-based learning experience. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 42(2), 151.
- Houser, N. O. (1995, Spring). Social studies on the back burner: Views from the field. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 23(2), 147-168.
- Instructional Strategies Online*. (2004-2009). Retrieved from Saskatoon Public Schools website: <http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/DE/PD/Instr/strats/jigsaw/index.html> [Cited: November 2012]
- Jacobson, A. (2008-2013). *TweenTribune* [Current events website]. Retrieved from <http://tweentribune.com/> [Cited: January 2013]
- Jefferson, T. (1789, January 8). [Letter to Richard Price]. The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827 (Image 744 of 1182). Retrieved from American Memory, Library of Congress website: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib004021> [Cited: September 2012]
- Johnson, B. (1997-2012). *Historical investigation-Alexander the Great: Defining "great"* [Maryland school performance]. Retrieved from Maryland State Department of Education website: http://mdk12.org/instruction/curriculum/social_studies/alexander.html [Cited: November 2012]
- Jones, R. A. (2012, March). What were they thinking? Instructional strategies that encourage critical thinking. *The Science Teacher*, 79(3), 66+.
- Kansas State Department of Education. (2013). *Kansas standards for history, government, and social studies* [Standards draft]. (2013, February 26). Retrieved from <http://ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1715> [Cited: February 2013]
- McCullough, D. (2008, March 12). Do Americans misunderstand the Founding Fathers? [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://bigthink.com/ideas/2130> [Cited: October 2012]
- McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin Company. (2009). *World History: Ancient Through Early Modern Times* (D. Carnine, C. E. Cortés, K. R. Curtis, & A. T. Thompson, Eds.). Evanston, IL: Author.

- Mottet, T. P. (2006, November). *Proficient enough?* Retrieved from National Communication Association website: <http://www.natcom.org/CommCurrentsArticle.aspx?id=1122&terms=communication%20skills> [Cited: October 2012]
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common core state standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf [Cited: February 2013]
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants, pt. 1. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.
- Stearns, P. N. (1998). *Why study history?* Retrieved from American Historical Association website: <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm>. [Cited: November 2012]
- Steeves, K. A., Bernhardt, P. E., Burns, J. P., & Lombard, M. K. (2009). Transforming American educational identity after Sputnik. *American History Educational Journal*, 36(1), 71-87.
- VanSledright, B. A. (2004). What does it mean to think historically...and how do you teach it? *Social Education*, 68(3), 230-233.
- Waring, S. M., & Robinson, K. S. (2010, September). Developing critical and historical thinking skills in middle grades social studies. *Middle School Journal*, 42(1), 22-28.
- Wetzel, K., & Marshall, S. (2011). TPACK goes to sixth grade: Lessons from a middle school teacher in a high-technology-access classroom. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, 28(2), 73-81.
- Wineburg, S. (2010, Winter). Thinking like a historian. *The Teaching With Primary Sources Quarterly Journal*, 3(1). Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/article.html [Cited: February 2013]
- Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic conversations*. Portland ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PREFERENCES SURVEY

Learning Survey



Think about how you learn in school. Answer each of the following as best you can. Use the "Other" space to tell of another choice or to tell about your choices.

1. How do you like the teacher to teach?

(Choose all that apply to you.)

- Telling information and whole-class discussion.
- Showing instructional videos.
- Guiding small-groups work.
- Giving me choices of assignments to do.
- Assigning projects.
- Other:

2. When working, how do you learn best?

(Choose all that apply to you.)

- On my own.
- With a partner of my choice.
- With a partner chosen for me.
- In a small group of 3 or 4.
- Other:

3. What kind of assignments help you learn best?

(Choose all that apply to you.)

- Answering questions on a worksheet.
- Completing a graphic organizer about the lesson.
- Creating a written product (like a poem or song).
- Designing a digital product (like a PowerPoint).
- Creating an artistic product (like a poster or diorama).
- Writing a report.
- Other:

APPENDIX A (continued)

4. How do you like to demonstrate what you have learned?

(Choose all that apply to you.)

- Paper test
- Online test
- Project presentation
- Verbally (telling what you know)
- Other:

5. When working in a small group, how do you usually participate?

(What are you most comfortable doing?)

(Think about roles or jobs in group work.)

APPENDIX B

PRE- AND POST-ASSESSMENT

EARLY GREECE

Pretest / Post-test

Please write the answers to the following questions.

1. What Greek government idea influenced the development of U.S. government?

2. The ancient Greeks explained beliefs about their world through stories called _____.

3. The Greeks then developed _____, a system of basic truths about knowledge, values and the world.

4. How did Socrates believe that people learn best?

5. What type of Greek architecture is found in buildings and structures worldwide today?

6. How are ancient and modern Olympics the same?

7. How are early Greek and modern U.S. juries alike?

8. The early Greeks invented drama as a type of art. What two forms of drama did they create?

9. Who is known for spreading Greek culture throughout the early known world?

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

	Observations: historical thinking / participation	Sourcing	Contextualizing	Reading Silences	Corroborating	Engaged (1-4)
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
25						

Sourcing: Often at the end. Who created the document? When? For what purpose? How trustworthy?

Contextualizing: Situate in time and place

Reading Silences: Whose voices or perspectives are left out/missing?

Corroborating: Comparing multiple accounts

APPENDIX D (continued)

ANONYMOUS AUTHOR of the 4th century A.D.
Excerpts from “Itinerarium Alexandri”
Translated by Iolo Davies, 1998

Alexander’s campaigns

...Alexander boasted that he had won his victories for himself alone, and became the more cruel to his friends as his success increased...

...Alexander went straight on to found the Macedonian empire, by his kingly skills, bringing the whole Peloponnese under his rule.

...Accordingly Alexander first settled the affairs of the whole kingdom of the Persians, giving it his own laws and appointing its administrators...

[Alexander] founded for himself a city (not unequal in size to the other cities named after him), Alexandria. He did this as a practical precaution in case he ever had to campaign in that region again. [Some] continued to intrigue against Alexander, however, calling him the oppressor of the world...

...Alexander’s behaviour and extravagant life-style... were causing intense disgust among large numbers of his men... They took offense at his luxuries at table, his expensive attire, his vanity in assuming the royal Persian head-dress... This cast a shadow over all the former glorious achievements of his spirit...

...the fault in him grew worse: he now wanted himself worshipped as a god and would have none of being saluted in the manner of mortals.

Developed by Betsy Johnson, MSDE, 10-02

APPENDIX D (continued)

ARRIAN

Soldier, governor, and philosopher

Excerpts from “The Anabasis of Alexander,” A.D. 171

[Alexander] was ... very [famous] for rousing the courage of his soldiers, filling them with hopes of success and dispelling their fear in the midst of danger by his own freedom from fear ...

For I myself believe that there was at that time no race of mankind, no city, no individual [to whom] the name of Alexander had not reached. And so not I can suppose that a man quite beyond all other men was born without some divine influence.

He was ... very heroic in courage, ... He was very clever in recognising what was necessary to be done, when others were still in a state of uncertainty; ... In ... ruling an army, he was exceedingly skillful; and very renowned for rousing the courage of his soldiers, filling them with hopes of success, and dispelling their fear in the midst of danger by his own freedom from fear. He was likewise very [dedicated to] keeping the agreements and settlements which he made.

His adoption of the Persian [way] of dressing also seems to me to have been a political device in regard to the foreigners, that the king might not appear altogether alien to them.

...what a height of human success he attained, becoming without any dispute king of both continents,” and reaching every place by his fame.

Developed by Betsy Johnson, MSDE, 10-02

APPENDIX D (continued)

DIODORUS

Greek historian, 1st century BCE

Excerpts from his writings “World History,” Translated by M.M. Austen

The Destruction of Persepolis

As for Persepolis, the capital of the Persian kingdom, Alexander described it to the Macedonians as their worst enemy among the cities of Asia, and he gave it over to the soldiers to plunder, with the exception of the royal palace.

It was the wealthiest city under the sun and the private houses had been filled for a long time with riches of every kind. The Macedonians rushed into it, killing all the men and plundering the houses, which were numerous and full of furniture and precious objects of every kind. Here much silver was carried off and no little gold, and many expensive dresses, embroidered with purple or with gold, fell as prizes to the victors.

But the great royal palace, famed throughout the inhabited world, had been condemned to ... total destruction. The Macedonians spent the whole day in pillage but still could not satisfy their inexhaustible greed. [...] As for the women, they dragged them away forcibly with their jewels, treating as slaves the whole group of captives. As Persepolis had surpassed all other cities in prosperity, so she now exceeded them in misfortune.

Alexander went up to the citadel and took possession of the treasures stored there. They were full of gold and silver, with the accumulation of revenue from Cyrus, the first king of the Persians, down to that time... Alexander wanted to take part of the money with him, for the expenses of war and to deposit the rest at Susa under close guard. From Babylon, Mesopotamia and Susa, he sent for a crowd of mules, ... as well as 3,000 pack camels, and with these he had all the treasure conveyed to the chosen places. He was very hostile to the local people and did not trust them, and wished to destroy Persepolis utterly...

APPENDIX D (continued)

DIODORUS (continued)

The Olympic Games of 324 BCE

Not long before his death Alexander decided to bring back all the exiles in the Greek cities, partly to increase his own glory and partly to have in each city many personal supporters to counteract the risk of revolution and revolt among the Greeks. ... Consequently, as the celebration of the Olympic Games [approached] he [sent] Nicanor of Stagira to Greece with a letter...; his instructions were to have it read out loud to the assembled crowds. Nicanor carried out the order, and ... read out the following letter.

'King Alexander to the exiles from the Greek cities. We were not the cause of your exile, but we shall be responsible for bringing about your return to your native cities, ...'

This proclamation was greeted with loud approval by the crowds; ...those at the [Olympic games] joyfully welcomed the king's favor and repaid his generosity with shouts of praise. All the exiles had gathered together at the [Olympic games], being more than 20,000 in number. The majority of Greeks welcomed the return of the exiles as a good thing.

Developed by Betsy Johnson, MSDE, 10-02

APPENDIX D (continued)

PLUTARCH

Historian, Ancient Greece

Excerpt from writings, A.D. 90, Translated by John Dryden

... For when any of his friends were sick, he would often prescribe them their course of diet, and medicines proper to their disease... He was naturally a great lover of all kinds of learning and reading; ...

... While Philip [Alexander's father] went on his expedition against the Byzantines, he left Alexander, then sixteen years old, [in charge] in Macedonia, ... not to sit idle, [he] reduced the rebellious ..., drove out the barbarous inhabitants, and plant[ed] a colony of several nations ..., [He] called the place after his own name, Alexandropolis.

...When he came to Thebes, ... the city ... was sacked and razed. Alexander's hope being that so severe an example might terrify the rest of Greece into obedience, ... thirty thousand, were publicly sold for slaves; and it is computed that upwards of six thousand were put to the sword.

Alexander, by founding more than seventy cities among the barbarian tribes, ... suppressed their savage and uncivilized customs ... Those whom Alexander conquered were more fortunate than those who escaped ... [He desired to give] all the races in the world ... one rule and one form of government, making all mankind a single people.

...And that the Grecians might participate in the honour of his victory he sent a portion of the spoils home to them particularly to the Athenians ..., and [with] all the rest he ordered this [message] to be sent: "Alexander the son of Philip, and the Grecians, ... won these from the barbarians who inhabit Asia. All the plate and purple garments, and other things of the same kind that he took from the Persians, except a very small quantity, which he reserved for himself, he sent as a present to his mother.

APPENDIX D (continued)

PLUTARCH (continued)

...For when his affairs called upon him, he would not be detained, ... either by wine, or sleep, spectacles, or any other diversion whatsoever...

...and Alexander, who was now proclaimed King of Asia, returned ... and rewarded his friends and followers with great sums of money, and places, and governments of provinces. Eager to gain honour with the Grecians, he wrote to them that he would have all [cruel governments] abolished, that they might live free according to their own laws... He sent also part of the spoils into Italy, ... to honour the zeal and courage of their citizen[s].

...Meantime, on the smallest occasions that called for a show of kindness to his friends, there was every indication on his part of tenderness and respect.

Provided by the Internet Classics Archive.
Available online at <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarc/alexadnr.html>

Developed by Betsy Johnson, MSDE, 10-02

APPENDIX E

PROJECT REFLECTIONS SURVEY

On a 1-4 scale, how did this kind of PROJECT affect your UNDERSTANDING of ancient Greece? *

Do you know how many ways ancient Greece has influenced today's world?

1 2 3 4

Doing a broadcast did not help me learn. Presenting a broadcast helped me learn a LOT!

On a 1-4 scale, how well did your group work? *

1 2 3 4

Poorly Very well

On a 1-4 scale, how did working in a GROUP affect your UNDERSTANDING of ancient Greece? *

Please explain.

1 2 3 4

Group work did not help me understand. Group work helped me learn a LOT!

How could this PROJECT be improved? *

What changes would you make?

What were your toughest challenges? *

What would have been helpful?

APPENDIX F

NEWSCAST ELEMENTS GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Newscast Observations

Choose an evening news broadcast to watch and complete the graphic organizer.

Newscast information:

Date: _____

Time: _____ p.m.

Channel #: _____

Station letters: _____

News story topic <i>(Main idea of the story)</i>	Type of news <i>(local, national, international)</i>	Style <i>(report, interview, human interest)</i>	Tone <i>(funny, serious, factual)</i>	Length <i>(minutes)</i>

APPENDIX G

KNOWLEDGE GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

GREECE

Essential Question:

What I Know	What to Explore

APPENDIX H

BROADCAST INSTRUCTIONS

GREECE BROADCAST

Instructions

Your news team has been transported back to Classical Greece, and you are going to report the important events of the time period!

KEY COMPONENTS

Working with your team, plan a 5-minute broadcast with the following:

1. News team name
2. Individual job/role assignments
 - ☞ Each person must contribute to report writing.
 - ☞ Each person must have a meaningful speaking part in the broadcast.
3. Important news stories related to Classical Greece.
 - ☞ People
 - ☞ Events
 - ☞ Government
 - ☞ Accomplishments

PROCESS

Begin by locating the main ideas from information in your textbook. You may then look for additional information about these main ideas using the websites in the O:drive. You can also get to these websites at home using this address:

<http://www.kn.att.com/wired/fil/pages/listancientvu.html>

As you write for your newscast, consider the following:

- 📖 What are the “breaking news” stories that you might encounter?
- 📖 Who are the people you might interview?
- 📖 How will your newscast be identified and set up?
- 📖 What news segments should be included?
- 📖 What will the tone/mood be for each story?
- 📖 How will the information be presented? (interview, report, commercial, etc.)
- 📖 Which team members will present each story?
- 📖 How long will each story be? (How important is the information?)

REMEMBER:

This project is not just a written *report* about Greece.

It is to be presented as if you actually *live* there.

Be an ancient Greek news reporter (in a modern broadcast studio! ☺)

APPENDIX I

BROADCAST VIDEO EVALUATIONS

Student Name _____ Team # _____

1=Very little 2=OK 3=Pretty good 4=Well done!

_____ Amount of factual information—The whole news story shows important, true facts.

_____ Historical Point of View—The story is told as if the person is living in ancient Greece.

_____ Essential Question: The story addresses the question:
What advances did the Greeks make almost 2,500 years ago that still influence the world today?

Student Name _____

1=Very little 2=OK 3=Pretty good 4=Well done!

_____ Amount of factual information—The whole news story shows important, true facts.

_____ Historical Point of View—The story is told as if the person is living in ancient Greece.

_____ Essential Question: The story addresses the question:
What advances did the Greeks make almost 2,500 years ago that still influence the world today?

Student Name _____

1=Very little 2=OK 3=Pretty good 4=Well done!

_____ Amount of factual information—The whole news story shows important, true facts.

_____ Historical Point of View—The story is told as if the person is living in ancient Greece.

_____ Essential Question: The story addresses the question:
What advances did the Greeks make almost 2,500 years ago that still influence the world today?

Student Name _____

1=Very little 2=OK 3=Pretty good 4=Well done!

_____ Amount of factual information—The whole news story shows important, true facts.

_____ Historical Point of View—The story is told as if the person is living in ancient Greece.

_____ Essential Question: The story addresses the question:
What advances did the Greeks make almost 2,500 years ago that still influence the world today?