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Understanding How Experienced World History Teachers in Minnesota Choose Course Content: A Mixed Methods Study

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By

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Abstract

Education in the United States has consistently utilized tests as well as a relatively standard curriculum to educate the youth. However, the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act and the subsequent implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, has created an educational environment focused largely on math and literacy skills. This mixed methods study discovered the primary factors experienced world history teachers in Minnesota utilize to balance historical thinking skills and the inclusion of current events against national and statewide curricular standards. Five experienced teachers were interviewed, and their responses coded using qualitative methods. These themes informed the creation of a survey administered to world history teachers across the state of Minnesota. The research determined that the factors included current events, colleagues, the Minnesota State World History Standards, students in the classroom, the Common Core, and textbooks.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background of the Research Problem

From its inception, the educational system in the United States has relied on tests and some level of standardized curriculum to demonstrate student mastery. However, today's educational climate of annual testing and a broad-based national curriculum can be most easily traced to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) during the presidency of George W. Bush in 2001. Designed to close the achievement gap between White students and students of color, NCLB failed to accomplish that goal. However, the act brought a significant transformation to the educational system nonetheless (Hursh, 2007; Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Kim & Sunderman, 2006). Among those changes were the implementation of strict accountability standards for schools as well the creation of measurable adequate yearly progress objectives (AYP) in the areas of math and reading (Linn et al., 2002). Schools that were unable to reach AYP across all subgroups: race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities for five consecutive years faced daunting punishments including reopening as a charter school, firing the staff, or turning over the operation of the school to the state or a private entity (Hursh, 2007). The high stakes associated with NCLB set a wide assortment of responses in motion.

After the implementation of NCLB, this assessment driven accountability changed both what was taught, and how teachers approached their subject matter

(Ravitch, 2016). For instance, teachers at the elementary level began spending more time teaching reading and math at the expense of other subjects, especially social studies (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Au, 2013). 71% of school districts reported reducing the amount to time devoted to other subjects in order to focus on those areas which would be tested (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Even the simple act of test taking became more time consuming with students spending between 20 and 25 hours a year during the 2014-2015 school year taking placement tests, graduation tests, national tests as well as those tied to NCLB (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015).

As an early adopter, the state of Minnesota first implemented K-12 academic standards in both reading and math during 1997, well before the passage of NCLB (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012). And, upon passage by Congress, the Minnesota Department of Education, (MDE) enforced NCLB immediately in 2002 (Minnesota Management and Budget, 2012). As the old standards were replaced, the state legislature went beyond the math and reading required by NCLB and developed additional academic standards in both science and social studies (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012). Concurrently, statewide testing and accountability began in 1998 with the establishment of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) which tested students in grades 3 and 5 in both reading and mathematics (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007). In response to NCLB, the state expanded testing and a new version of the MCA was created in order to determine AYP (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007). Despite Minnesota having developed broader

academic standards than simply math and reading, those academic areas were not a part of the testing process.

As criticisms increased and a new administration entered the White House, NCLB was replaced by what was described as a less prescriptive plan, the Common Core State Standards Initiative, often referred to as the Common Core (Wexler, 2014). Like the NCLB, the Common Core sought to eliminate the achievement gap and it also aspired to provide an education that made students both college and career ready (Tampio, 2017; Wexler, 2014). Within the Common Core, social studies serves as one of several ways to increase literacy as illustrated by reading the title, the Common Core State Standards for Literacy in Social Studies/History (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; Gilles et al., 2013). World history teachers were now expected to teach literacy skills despite perhaps having never been taught how to do so (Gilles et al., 2013). As they had in the past, Minnesota followed the lead of the national educational standards crafting benchmarks in the areas of Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The state chose to modify the national standards a bit to ensure local content was highlighted: "Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources, **including texts from various cultures and Minnesota American Indian culture**" (Minnesota Department of

Education, 2010, p. 83). But largely the skills surrounding Common Core language remained the same as the national standards.

In addition to cultivating those literacy skills, world history teachers across the state of Minnesota must also address 43 content specific academic standards spanning 8000 BCE through present day (Minnesota Department of Education, 2013). Both standards and benchmarks have been developed to provide assurances that students across the state will be taught the same information. For instance, all students should be able to "Analyze the emergence, development, and impact of religions and philosophies of this era, including Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity" (Minnesota Department of Education, 2013, p. 125). Although the breadth of material may be daunting, teacher candidate preparation programs are designed to equip their students with the tools to be deliver content successfully and have been doing so for a number of years.

In balancing the national, state and local requirements placed upon world history classrooms, teachers have been conferred with the title, curricular-instructional decisionmakers (Sloan, 2006) or gatekeepers (Thornton, 1991). "When teachers act as gatekeepers in the planning process, they transform some identified body of knowledge into curriculum and instructional strategies for some identified group of students" (Thornton, 1991, pp. 244-245). Research regarding how both standards-based instruction and accountability influence that role has most recently been directed toward the work of elementary and middle school teachers (Haefner, 2018; Pace, 2011; Gilles et al., 2013). Augmenting that work is

the research which has concentrated on the experience of novice teachers encountering standards and accountability, although much of that focused on the effects of NCLB. (Yeager & von Hover, 2006; Glaus, 2014; Cherry-McDaniel, 2014). Additionally, some research has been conducted exploring how the lack of testing has altered the teaching of social studies (Grant, 2007; Au, 2013; Haefner, 2018; Pace, 2011). However, analyzing high stakes testing and accountability within the high school world history classroom remains a largely untouched area of study.

Problem Statement

High school world history teachers in Minnesota must make numerous decisions as they balance both Minnesota's content laden academic standards for world history and the literacy skills present in the Common Core. Schools and districts are held accountable for both Common Core scores, which do not outwardly test world history, and the MCA scores. Additionally, students must also be prepared to participate in a United States where its citizens critically question the legitimacy of its government, media, and history. Understanding the present within the arc of the entirety of world history has arguably never been more important.

Research Question and Purpose

This mixed-method study sought to ascertain the following: What processes do experienced high school world history teachers utilize to determine which content specific knowledge, historical thinking skills, as well as both literacy and writing skills are presented in their classroom?

Subquestions

- How do experienced high school world history teachers balance their own pedagogical beliefs against the ever-present high stakes testing and both state and national curriculum standards?
- How do these same teachers decide whether to present current events in the classroom?
- How do teachers balance the required, but untested, content against the required and tested literacy skills?
- How do world history teachers ensure the course does not simply become how the rest of the world interacts with Western civilization?

Using a mixed methods approach, the qualitative data was gathered first through semi-structured interviews via online video conferencing with five experienced high school world history teachers from throughout Minnesota. After coding, analysis, and constant comparative analysis the initial factors present in the planning process were identified. During the next stage, a survey was created and distributed to a larger group of experienced world history teachers throughout Minnesota which through quantitative analysis further clarified the relative importance of each of these factors in the planning process for these Minnesota world history teachers.

Significance of the Research

As indicated previously, this research adds to the existing literature regarding teacher experiences during the age of standards-based curriculum paired with high stakes testing by calling attention to the high school experience

rather than the current research which has been largely focused on the elementary and middle school teachers' experience. By understanding the process used by experienced educators, school districts and others in the educational support network, should be able to design and provide the necessary professional development to help teachers be successful during the Common Core era (Gilles et al., 2013; Glaus, 2014). This research should also prove useful to teacher preparation programs providing instruction for high school world history teachers who may need to adapt curricular goals in order to provide additional support for candidates to learn how to weave literacy skills into their social studies content (Gilles et al., 2013).

Delimitations and Limitations

This research was limited to experienced world history teachers within the state of Minnesota.

Definitions of Key Terms

Experienced teacher – An experienced teacher is one that has been teaching for five or more years.

High stakes testing – High stakes testing is when tests are used to make important decisions about students, educators, schools, or districts, most commonly for the purpose of accountability.

Instructional Gatekeeper – A teacher who through both conscious and unconscious decisions determines what curricular material will be presented within the classroom.

Standards-based - Standards-based refers to systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating understanding or mastery of both content and skills often within a predetermined timeframe.

Accountability - Accountability represents a means by which policy makers at the federal, state and district levels monitor the performance of students and schools. Oftentimes parents and taxpayers are able to access this data as well.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

In order to understand the current state of education and specifically the teaching of world history in the United States as it relates to both standard-based reform and high stakes testing, an overview of the rich and complex history must be provided. This history highlights recurring tensions; many of which continue to be unresolved even today. Education has often been characterized as a struggle between maintaining social order and encouraging social reform (Symcox, 2002). Others describe it as a conflict between the concept of equality as sameness versus equality which recognizes differences and adjusts for them (Mathison et al., 2006). Yet another issue can be portrayed as trying to determine the relative importance of the needs of society and the needs of students (Tyack, 1975). Finally, each level of government: local, state, and federal have clamored for more control over the educational system at one time or another. These battles over the purpose of schooling seem to occur on a cyclical basis related to whether liberal reformers or conservatives hold more political power (Tyack & Cuban, 2001).

The evolution of the teaching of history appears more linear because as the ranks of historians grew and became more reflective of the entirety of the United States, subject matter typically became more inclusive and reflective of all peoples (Nash et al., 2000). However, this academic arena also experienced struggles with educators battling over the ideas of pluralism versus assimilation as well as the ideal of manifest destiny rather than a more critical reading of history

(Symcox, 2002). Historians spent several decades creating a comprehensive world history curriculum which represented more than the history of Western civilization plus a smattering of other nations (Nasaw, 1981; Symcox, 2002). And, of course, the debate continues regarding whether history should be learned purely for knowledge's sake or because the past can inform current situations (Nasaw, 1981). By the late 1980s standards-based reform also began to significantly alter the educational landscape bringing even more issues to the forefront. However, before the current state can be addressed, a brief, but thorough historical overview must be shared.

United States Schools prior to the Civil War

From its colonial beginnings, the educational system catered to wealthy, white males and appeared to be without significant areas of disagreement. Of those families choosing to have their children attend school, they often did so only through grammar school (Nasaw, 1981). Due to the homogeneity of those served by the system, essentially all accepted that students should receive a liberal education mirroring that which Europeans acquired (Nasaw, 1981). It was during this era that the first reformers, Horace Mann and Samuel Gridley Howe began to push for a professionalization of the teaching field, specifically requesting that all school districts hire superintendents and adopt uniform textbooks (Tyack, 1975). This pressure arose because during the 1850s ward bosses and local school boards sometimes created great disparity: one school may have had a full coal bin and the school two blocks away had nothing (Tyack, 1975). Dewey and Howe believed that having a professional leading the schools would help to create consistency

across school districts. Prior to the Civil War, history's role in the curriculum was clear, children would learn about American exceptionalism. Yet, it was patently understood that as adults, through conversation and active citizenry, the shades of gray would be introduced (Nash et al., 2000). This one size fits all period for the schools would not last forever.

United States Schools Civil War to 1880

As was true with many sectors of American society post-Civil War, the educational landscape began to change. After the country suffered the tragedy of brothers fighting against brothers, schools were no longer required to adhere to the traditional European educational model. Rather, the focus became teaching the morality of work and even more importantly the value of a loyal citizenry (Nash et al., 2000). Because the leaders were not interested in another revolution, they hoped the schools would create a population which was more docile, teachable, and less prone to disruption and civil disobedience (Nasaw, 1981). Please note that these efforts were still largely confined to the grammar schools accounting for nearly 10,000,000 children in attendance, while at that time only 110,000 students continued into the high school setting (Nash et al., 2000). Even without a formal national curriculum, those attending schools likely shared a very similar experience, the Lancastrian Model. In this configuration, the teacher stood at the front of the class lecturing, often on a raised platform, while students memorized, recited, and were tutored by the older students (Nasaw, 1981). Every morning each student's performance on homework and tests were visually reflected by

their new seat assignment. Students who performed well moved toward the front of class, while others were demoted (Nasaw, 1981).

In addition to the prevalence of the regimented Lancastrian model, many schools west of the Mississippi River were utilizing *A Graded Course of Instruction with Instruction to Teachers,* which not only outlined what information should be taught, but also provided the teachers with suggestions for how to present the material to the class (Tyack, 1975). Homogeneity, regarding the purpose of teaching history, began to lessen as some teachers began to move away from the ideal of American exceptionalism and instead teach historical relativism and perspective (Nash et al., 2000). Despite the nation's continued geographic expansion after the Civil War, the educational experience was relatively uniform, but it was clear that more significant change lay ahead.

United States Schools 1880-1930

The turn of the century in America can be characterized as one where progressives held enough political power to institute many changes, especially upon the rapidly expanding numbers of students attending school. In 1905 G. Stanley Hall released his book *Adolescence* where he described those aged 14-17 as "young savages" (Hall, 1905, as cited by Nasaw, 1981). This negative characterization led families and educators to push this age group off the streets and into classrooms. In 1900, roughly 600,000 people aged 14-17 were enrolled in school, but of those 600,000 only 8% graduated high school (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). However, by 1920 nearly 2.2 million students were enrolled in high school with a 17% graduation rate (Nash et al., 2000, Tyack & Cuban, 2001). Many of

these students enrolling in the urban schools were European immigrants so the ward bosses created the first bilingual schools to meet their educational needs and acclimate them to American culture (Tyack, 1975). The increased numbers of students led reformers, such as Charles Judd, to call for the abolition of local school boards run by average citizens as well as continued pressure for professionals to lead the school system (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). Also during this era, John Dewey and others decried the memorization and recitation of the 19th century educators and instead advocated for a classroom environment where students could learn together and therefore be able to work together in the work world (Nasaw, 1981). The metaphor used to describe schools moved away from the factory model and instead schools started to behave like corporations filled with numerous regulations and bureaucratic structures (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). When these new professionals entered the school systems, they also brought reforms to the fields of both curriculum and testing.

As the size of school systems expanded, the new bureaucrats focused more on formally standardizing curriculum as well as ensuring that students were learning. From very early on the National Education Association (NEA) supported the idea of using tests to determine if students were indeed acquiring basic information (Tyack, 1975). However, those leaders clearly stated that these tests should not be used to judge teachers (Tyack, 1975). Pursuing this new idea of educational measurement, in 1877 a superintendent in Portland, Oregon tested all the students in his district and published the results of the test score alongside the student's name in the local newspaper (Tyack, 1975). Interestingly, in seven

of the twenty-one classrooms tested, not one student passed the test and in only six of the classrooms did greater than 50% of the students achieve a passing mark (Tyack, 1975). These abysmal scores prompted the firing of that superintendent as well as businessmen advocating for the elimination of the old classical curriculum, believing that manual training would serve the students better (Nasaw, 1981). Parents, however, rejected this idea, convinced that the classical curriculum represented the only path upward for their students (Nasaw, 1981). In an attempt to end this debate, in 1893 the NEA commissioned Charles Eliot and the Committee of Ten to develop the first national curriculum which included eight years of elementary education and four years of high school; where all students would benefit from rigorous academics as well as studying careers in this increasingly "complex interdependent society" (National Education Association, 1893, as cited by Nash et al., 2000). The struggle between an academic curriculum versus career training seemed settled for the time being with both being pursued, but more work needed to be done within individual academic subjects.

To that end, an ancillary group, the History of Ten, created the first national history pedagogy where they determined that teachers should "train students to gather evidence, generalize upon data, estimate character, apply lessons of history to current events and lucidly state conclusions" (National Education Association, 1893, as cited by Nash et al., 2000). Just seven years later, the same group detailed that four years of history would be required in high school with freshman studying Greek and Roman history through the Early

Medieval era, while sophomores examined Europe from the Middle Ages through modern time, juniors would concentrate on the history of England, and seniors would focus on American history and government (Nash et al., 2000). These new reformers challenged the content of the classroom as well as the way the content was being delivered by teachers. G. Stanley Hall, among others, encouraged teachers to move away from lecture and instead have classrooms alive with debate, comparative analysis and mock trials (Bain et al., 2005). This push to have students actively engage with the subject matter rather than simply listen to a teacher pontificate on their favorite historical era would become a recurring theme moving forward.

Yet another dispute occurred within the ranks of academia, the use of the more inclusive term social studies rather than simply history and with it, the inclusion of classes like geography, economics and civics into the high school curriculum (Symcox, 2002). It was in 1921 that the National Council for the Social Studies organized around the goal of molding an active citizenry ready to think critically about modern social problems (Nash et al., 2000). These social scientists aligned themselves with John Dewey; desiring classes and topics that corresponded to the here and now as well as the unique interests of the individual students (Symcox, 2002). The innovative historian Charles Beard echoed this sentiment by requesting that instructors teach history that speaks to the present (Beard, 1934). These actions occurred against the backdrop of World War One, the Roaring ‘20s, and the stock market crash which led many people to consider

how to ensure that these events never occurred again. The solution: have schools use history as a lens to teach students how to avoid the tragic mistakes of the past.

United States Schools 1930-1960

Both the trials of the Great Depression and World War II, as well as the post war economic boom, were reflected in the transformations taking place in the schools from 1930-1960. In the face of the evils of fascism and the consequent rise of Communism, schools once again found themselves responsible for bolstering the democratic citizenry (Nash et al., 2000). Specifically, schools were encouraged to promote an international view of the world to help prepare for the crucial post-war planning in addition to promoting solid intercultural relations to prevent the atrocities which occurred across the globe from happening again (Nash et al., 2000). This era witnessed the most dramatic changes in schooling at colleges and universities as the government implemented the GI Bill in order to prevent a recession as the war ended and soldiers returned to civilian life (Bok, 2013). In fact, during 1930, institutions of higher education produced only 150 PhDs a year, but by 1960 that number had increased to 600 (Nash et al., 2000). This influx of new thought would continue to alter collegiate, primary, and secondary education in substantive ways moving forward.

With nearly seven million students attending high schools in 1940 (Snyder, 1993) and the graduation rate reaching 51% (Tyack & Cuban, 2001), the education of these students began to arouse more interest across a wide swath of entities. In the middle of World War II, as democracy appeared to be taking a beating, historians and politicians began to question the pivot away from studying

history in the high schools to the more inclusive ideas of the social scientists. In 1943, thirty-six different colleges tested seven thousand freshmen on their knowledge of American history and they "demonstrated striking ignorance" (New York Times, 1943 as cited by Tyack & Cuban, 2001). Doubting the validity of the test, The American Historical Association (AHA) developed and administered their own test and discovered similar results (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). These two tests not only demonstrated a step toward the idea of accountability in the high schools, but they also made evident yet again that American high school students do not score well on multiple-choice tests designed to exhibit a mastery of American history. Despite the displeasure in these disappointing scores, the focus on the history versus social studies debate abruptly ended on October 4th, 1957 as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) launched Sputnik. Math and science would now rule the day. Furthermore, this event led President Eisenhower to convene the President's Commission on National Goals in 1960 with the goal of developing a unity of purpose, not a unity of opinion, providing the first substantive national focus on education (Tyack & Cuban, 2001).

With the completion of two world wars and more Americans aware of places like the Philippines, Japan, Algeria, and the USSR, one might have expected a significant and immediate move away from world history as Western civilization toward a more inclusive curriculum, but that simply did not represent what occurred in most schools. Having earned its place as the standard sophomore history class, world history expanded its coverage of places like Africa and Southeast Asia, at least as they related to the world wars (Nash et al., 2000). But

any coverage beyond the contemporary era, continued to treat these nations, along with the Middle East and the pre-Columbian Americas, as sparsely inhabited and only semi-civilized (Nash et al., 2000). Historian L.S. Stavrianos, in 1958, presented a divergent view when he spoke at the annual meeting of the AHA indicating "that whatever the title might be, the course in almost all cases is European history, either naked or with a fig-leaf" (Stavrianos, 1959, p. 110). He advocated for a course that would provide the average student some understanding of the story of all mankind (Stavrianos, 1959). Additionally, he promoted the idea of providing a truly global perspective of history in order to help the citizenry appreciate the latest regional, national and international developments (Stavrianos, 1959). The historians in the room were clearly listening because significant transformation would materialize soon.

United States Schools 1960-1980

When the most singularly influential demographic cohort in the United States, the Baby Boomers, entered high school, they ushered in both diversity and accountability. In 1960 U.S. high schools already enrolled 8.3 million students and a mere 10 years later, the country reached near universal attendance with an astonishing 13 million students (Nash et al., 2000). The graduation rate increased as well to 67% by 1960 (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). In addition to sheer numbers, the surge reflected new groups of marginalized students, such as those with disabilities, who began to demand education after the seminal Supreme Court case of Brown v. Topeka Board of Education (1954) opened up all schools to Black children (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). Furthermore, the Immigration Act of 1965 led

to an increase in the numbers of students from Asia, Central America, and Mexico providing even more impetus for change in the schools. During this progressive, liberal era the objective of education turned back toward the ideology of access, equality and equity for all (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). At the same time, American psychologist Jerome Bruner authored *The Process of Education* where he put forth the idea that students were natural problem-solvers and that education should focus far more on process than product (Bruner, 1961). Many educators were excited by this support for active, engaged learning, but not everyone agreed with this transformation. In 1946, when polled, 40% of Americans found nothing wrong with the public schools (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). By the late 1960s only 36% of Americans though schools were getting better, while 36% now believed them to be getting worse (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). Clearly this educational revolution was not uniformly well received.

Another significant shift included the introduction of regular national testing of students which would eventually lead to measuring school quality. In the fall of 1965, the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey (EEOS) tested a sample of one million students in grades 1, 3, 6, 9, and 12 (Beaton et al., 2011). Although the Coleman Report, as it became known, contained significant statistical flaws, it led those at the national level to discover the appeal of monitoring student success (Beaton et al., 2011). Because the education of children had traditionally belonged to the states, the creation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and its inaugural testing of 9, 13 and 17 year old students in 1969 signaled a significant realignment of duties and

responsibilities between the state and federal governments (Beaton et al., 2011). After its official introduction, testing expanded rapidly, remaining a prominent fixture of education yet today.

Due to the GI Bill and a continued extension of civil rights, a wider variety of students entered the world of higher education, including more women and people of color (Nash et al., 2000; Tyack and Cuban, 2001). As college students they pursued unique areas of historical study, challenging the traditional canon (Nash et al., 2000). They scoured historical artifacts to amplify voices that had not traditionally been examined: women, the working class, slaves, and other oppressed peoples (Banks, 1992). One such scholar, at the University of Michigan, Gwendolyn Brooks developed the first multicultural teacher education program, which focused on including all countries and cultures, not simply those connected to Western Europe (Banks, 1992). Her goal was that each student would achieve multicultural literacy, "the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in a diverse world" (Banks, 1992, p. 283). Soon, the latest buzzword in the world of social studies became multiculturalism. Yet, historians denounced its usefulness (Nash et al., 2000). The grassroots popularity of this idea stirred controversy as people from the radical left felt that the idea of multiculturalism simply reinforced the status quo while those on the right decried that it promoted divisiveness and differences (McCarthy, 1988 as cited by Banks, 1992). Although the term multiculturalism eventually faded, these efforts at inclusion transferred to the realm of World History.

Notably, in 1963, historian William McNeill authored the first cohesive World History textbook, *The Rise of the West* (Nash et al., 2000). In his monumental tome, McNeil organized history as one of continuous cultural interaction and diffusion rather than focusing on the cultural isolation and uniqueness of past textbooks (Symcox, 2002). McNeill, as well as others, began to advocate that students could not effectively study world history without understanding the sum of its parts (Nash et al., 2000). Despite these gigantic steps forward, the book's title indicated that the focus remained squarely on the West. The broad transformation of world history textbooks was yet to come.

United States Schools 1980-2000

This latest progressive era ended with election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the pendulum quickly moved from encouraging social reform to maintaining social order (Symcox, 2002). Academic achievement became so clearly tied to business and jobs that by and large educators unquestionably accepted that schools were designed to prepare students for the competitive workplace of the 21st century (Lewis, 1995, Symcox, 2002). Many educational leaders advocated for a world-class school system that would increase both economic production as well as the prominence and prestige of the United States (Mathison et al., 2006). The reason for the preeminence of the belief that schools were designed to serve the economy can, in part, be tied to two key events. First, with 71% of students graduating high school by 1980, a high school diploma alone no longer served as a guarantee for a well-paying job as it had prior to World War II (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). Capturing the best jobs now required a college degree (Bok, 2013).

Secondly, a surge in competition from Japanese electronic and automotive sales created increased fear in both manufacturers and employees (Sousa, 1982). Clearly the American system needed to improve to stop the Japanese economic expansion. Economic recession and a lack of job security plainly influenced the educational landscape during the early years of Reagan's presidency.

However, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 and its biting critique of the American educational system ultimately provided the catalyst to marry education with accountability (Hamilton et al., 2008). Shortly after came cries for longer school days, more rigorous curriculum, expanded educational requirements for teachers and the wide-spread administration of tests to raise accountability (Mathison et al., 2006). In 1987, at the request of Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn, the NAEP administered a test to 17 year-old American high school students to gain evidence regarding the students' knowledge about history and literature (Nash et al., 2000). With an average score of 55% on the history portion of the test, which assessed only fact-based knowledge, Ravitch and Finn declared the students' knowledge to be "extremely weak" (Ravitch & Finn, 1987 as cited by Nash et al., 2000). In fact, this test did not establish that students knew less, but rather that the students were not able to remember as much as Ravitch and Finn believed they should be able to recall (Symcox, 2002). Remember, when the Portland superintendent tested his students back in 1877, less than 30% of classrooms tested had greater than half the students score over 50% (Tyack, 1975). One could argue that students one hundred years later were actually performing better. Nonetheless, these

disappointing scores led the American History Association (AHA) to once again construct and execute their own test in 1990; which yielded slightly better results, an average of 70% (Nash et al., 2000). Although many argued that neither of these tests accurately reflected the American educational system, the waves of change were simply too strong to stop.

Along with this interest in testing came a push for standards-based reforms, focused on the idea of creating common academic expectations for students (Hamilton et al., 2008). Building on an education summit with governors, in 1990, President George H. W. Bush presented six national goals designed not to impose specific curricular mandates, but rather to encourage state and local leaders to engender educational change designed to keep the American economy competitive (Nash et al., 2000; Hamilton et al., 2008). Clearly the education and economy would remain allied with one another. In 1991, having widespread public support, President Bush presented his America 2000 plan which promised significant and measurable improvement in the schools by the new millennium (Nash et al., 2000; Hamilton et al., 2008). This plan portrayed the federal government not as the creator of "world class" standards, but as the agent providing the synergy for states to develop such plans (Nash et al., 2000; America 2000, p. 11). However, representing a significant departure from just one year earlier, the federal government committed to developing "voluntary" national tests to be administered to fourth, eighth and twelfth graders in the core subjects (America 2000, p. 11). In a rare display of unity, liberals, conservatives, educators, and business leaders agreed on the efficacy of these goals (Vinson,

1998). Several years of widespread accordance had set this series of proposals in motion.

Between historians, however, discord and dissent prevailed as several disparate groups began developing history standards. Even before President Bush unveiled his America 2000 plan, amidst the despondency regarding Ravitch and Finn's test, the state of California unveiled their History-Social Science Framework (Symcox, 2002). As a backlash to the progressives, this framework eradicated the previous focus on current events and cultural relativism and instead provided a return to a focus on Western civilization and democratic values (Symcox, 2002). In the early 1990s other organizations also jumped on the bandwagon to create national standards for history including the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools, American Historical Association (AHA), and National Center for History in the School at UCLA (NCHS) each with their own unique perspective (Symcox, 2002; Nash et al., 2000; Hamilton et al., 2008). Somehow, America 2000, despite its stated focus, became a national rather than state effort.

In 1992, after much political wrangling, the National History Standards Project was established and several groups pushed for a seat at the table to ensure their voice would be heard (Nash et al., 2000). Historians were determined that these standards would include the unique voices of history which they had been unearthing and sharing for the past several decades (Nash et al., 2000). National leaders, like Diane Ravitch and Lynne Cheney were hoping to create a direct link between these standards and the implementation of required national testing

(Symcox, 2002; Hamilton et al., 2008). Many of the classroom teachers were interested in exploring ways to balance content and critical thinking, or as others framed it historical facts versus historical thinking (Nash et al., 2000). Over a period of thirty-two months groups and subgroups, outside experts and policy wonks conferred, considered, debated, and deliberated to arrive at a "consensus document" which would "materially advance the teaching of history at our nation's schools" (Symcox, 2002, p, 126). Sadly, that ambitious work would never come to fruition.

One of the sticking points, which plagued the National History Project, surrounded what became known as Criterion 13 (Symcox, 2002; Nash et al., 2000). The original wording from February of 1992 follows:

> Standards in world history should include both the history and values of Western civilization and the history and cultures of other societies, with the greater emphasis on Western civilization, and on the interrelationships between Western and non-Western societies. (Forum Meeting, February 1992 as cited by Symcox, 2002, p. 107)

The push and pull regarding the teaching of world history in the United States had reached a crisis. Would those promoting inclusivity or those arguing Western civilization's primacy win? A flurry of drafts and letters between historians and conservative President Bush appointees, some of which included multiple threats by the historians to pull out of the project entirely, resulted in the following compromise statement:

> Standards in world history should include both the history and values of diverse civilizations, including Western civilization, and should especially address the interactions among them. (Louise Tilly et al. to Charlotte Crabtree and Gary Nash) (UCLA – University Archives, Record Series #667, unprocessed records, box 54, as cited by Symcox, 2002, p. 110)

Not only did this statement decentralize Western civilization, it provided a resolution to the debate which had been percolating since the end of World War II and ultimately meant that students would be taught more than simply Western civilization in their high school world history classes.

The balancing of content and process proved far less factious. The experienced social studies teachers promoted the idea that a solid education should provide not only substantial background knowledge, but also utilize that knowledge to critically revisit the past and inform the future (Nash et al., 2000). To that end, in eight short months, the group was able to develop five standards of historical thinking: Chronological thinking, Historical comprehension, Historical analysis and interpretation, Historical research capabilities, and Historical issues analysis and decision making (Nash et al., 2000, Symcox, 2002). Following in the footsteps of the widely acclaimed National Math Standards, the group determined that additional guidance must be provided through the construction of illustrative teaching examples for these standards (Nash et al., 2000). Designed to simply provide examples, not to limit content, these examples would in large part lead to the downfall of this novel project.

The National History Standards Project, revealed to the public in 1994, suffered from the larger culture clash between liberals and conservatives brewing in the United States. Former supporters of the plan, like Lynne Cheney, thoroughly denounced the work declaring that the authors ignored American heroes in favor of multiculturalism and political correctness (Symcox, 2002; Nash et al., 2000). The Christian Right, conservative talk show hosts, and newspaper editorials picked apart the illustrative examples as well as the pivot toward a comprehensive presentation of World History (Symcox, 2002; Nash et al., 2000). Members of the NCHS pledged to revise and adapt, but once the Senate passed a non-binding resolution condemning the standards, the project no longer remained viable (Symcox, 2002). Since President Clinton had not authorized the development of the standards and was in the middle of a reelection campaign, he and his Secretary of the Department of Education refused to seriously consider the topic (Nash et al., 2000). Although Clinton would be reelected and in fact expanded higher education access as well as Head Start, his presidency chose largely not to engage with the idea of national standards (Parker, 1999) By 1995, the idea was dead (Ravitch, 2016).

No Child Left Behind Act

Newly elected George W. Bush quickly filled the vacuum left by the Clinton administration with the introduction and implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB); designed to narrow the achievement gap between high and low performing students (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). This watershed act represented the culmination of several decades of business executives driving

educational reform (Tyack & Cuban, 2001). NCLB also demonstrated "the largest intervention of the federal government into education in the history of the United States" (Hursh, 2007, p. 295). The law required states to develop content standards in reading and mathematics as well as create tests linked to those standards which would be implemented in grades 3-8 (Linn et al., 2002; Burroughs et al., 2005). By the beginning of the 2007 academic year, science was added to the mix (Burroughs et al., 2005). In addition to affecting curriculum and assessment development, the act also increased the qualifications for teachers and other professionals in the classroom (Hursh, 2007). However, perhaps the most defining characteristic of NCLB involved the concept of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In order for all students to reach proficiency by the 2013-2014 academic school year, each school would need to set measurable objectives for all students (Linn et al., 2002; Kim & Sunderman, 2005; Burroughs et al., 2005). And every year an increasing number of students needed to attain AYP, regardless of ability or English language proficiency, or a school would be labeled as one in need of improvement (Hursh, 2007). Schools unable to attain AYP for five consecutive years would be required to reopen as a charter school, fire the majority of the staff, or turn over the operation of the school to the state or other private organization (Hursh, 2007). Although one might argue NCLB improved education by forcing school districts to examine the achievement gap and helping schools align curricular goals, its shortcomings overshadowed any successes.

Although NCLB did not pertain to high school students, nor were history or social studies tested in the elementary and middle schools, the discipline

continued to evolve. Two events significantly altered the teaching of world history. First, the College Board introduced the Advanced Placement (AP) World History course requiring that no more than 30% of the course content should be focused on Western civilization (College Entrance Examination Board, 2001, p. 7, as cited by Burack, 2003). Textbook companies responded across all levels, creating books nearing 1,000 pages full of gorgeous pictures, maps, review questions, and teaching activities; an unbelievable amount of content covering the entire globe (Ravitch, 2004: Sewall, 2004). Although many applauded these efforts at inclusivity, requiring teachers to provide instruction across all cultures, others complained that World History had become impossibly broad (Burack, 2003). Further, they argued, because students simply cannot master all this information, teachers should instead focus on covering fewer topics, which would allow students to delve deeply and attain a "rich, complex understanding" (Newman, 1988, p. 346; de Oliveira, 2008). To add to the dilemma, high school teachers discovered that the intense focus on reading, math and science in the elementary schools due to the NCLB, meant that students no longer arrived with the requisite vocabulary forcing teachers to cover that in addition to historical content (de Oliveira, 2008). Despite achieving an all-encompassing world history course, discontent continued.

The other event, the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11th, 2001, reignited the debate surrounding the idea of multiculturalism. As some groups, like the NCSS and the NEA suggested taking a critical look at U.S. involvement in the Middle East as well as practicing tolerance

toward Arabs in studying the event, many chastised their stance as unpatriotic (Burack, 2003). Although a stated goal of multicultural literacy included helping students acquire knowledge in order to be an active participant in a democratic society (Banks, 1997), more conservative historians painted it as simply a move toward a global ideology, a move away from the primacy of individual nation states (Burack, 2003). The NCSS tried once again to settle the controversy in their 2004 standards as they outlined that social studies courses should encourage the development of "citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (NCSS, 2004, as cited by de Oliveira, 2008, p. 363). But that neither silenced the critics nor ended the debate.

Common Core State Standards Initiative

As disappointment and frustration with NCLB grew and President Obama entered the White House, a new movement arose, the Common Core State Standards Initiative, more commonly referred to as the Common Core. Like the NCLB, the Common Core sought to eliminate the achievement gap and it also aspired to provide an education that made students both college and career ready (Tampio, 2017; Wexler, 2014). As a primary goal, the Common Core hoped to correct a flaw of the NCLB by using open-ended questions and complex real-world problems to assess learning rather simply testing a student's ability to take a multiple-choice test (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Obama and his administration aspired to create a culture of "innovating toward success rather than regulating toward compliance" giving states and local school districts more flexibility in addressing the unique needs of their students (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 216).

Despite being created without significant input from academicians or experienced teachers, the Common Core was adopted rapidly due to the Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grant program which gave the Department of Education $4.35 billion to divide amongst the winners (Tampio, 2017; McGuinn, 2012). However, to be eligible to compete for these RTTP grants, states had to adopt the Common Core. Although the Common Core still exists today and provides guidance to states as they develop their own standards-based curricula, former President Trump's Department of Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos, appeared more focused on the privatization of education as she has worked to repeal various Obama era accountability rules (Kaplan & Owings, 2018). The new Biden administration has not clearly signaled where it stands regarding Common Core, focusing instead on early childhood education (Austin et al., 2021).

Another area where the Common Core mirrored its predecessor, NCLB, is that the social studies would not be explicitly tested. The Common Core represents "high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA)" (Common Core State Standards, 2012). The Common Core does delineate several ELA goals which can be achieved within various social studies classes, such as comparing the point of view of two different authors (Common Core State Standards, 2012). Specific content matter, however, is never mentioned. The social studies would not be ignored at the state level as the NCSS continued to encourage states and local districts to develop standards which would be drafted by social studies educators and reviewed by the public (National Council for the Social Studies, 2014). Additionally, the group recommended a

pedagogy which supported critical thinking as well as an opportunity to regularly revise the standards (National Council for the Social Studies, 2014). For now, national discussions regarding the ideals of pluralism versus assimilation and the purpose of history have largely been sidelined as states and individual school districts return to their role as leaders in educational policy.

Teaching in the age of accountability

In the mid-1980s researchers began to study educators in hopes of revealing what types of decisions they made each day in the classroom and how teachers arrived at those decisions. Thornton (1989) argued that teachers should be called curricular gatekeepers because in constructing the daily lessons which were presented to the students throughout the school year, they determined the content, sequencing, and instructional methods which would be utilized. Numerous studies on teacher thinking and meta cognition illustrated the complexities involved as teachers maneuvered through each lesson (Cornett, 1990). Studying these reflective practitioners also ushered in the discovery that teacher led lecture predominated most classrooms and that they primarily relied on the textbook to guide curricular choices (Shaver et al., 1980). However, it was also revealed that teachers rarely used only one textbook and even within a single school district uniform textbook use was not guaranteed (Stodolsky, 1988). This lack of consistency fueled the fire for those interested in creating a national standards-based curriculum. For some, that meant a focus on improving the quality of instructional content for every student across the board (Thompson, 2001) and for others it signaled a need for the creation of high-stakes,

standardized, test-based reform (Ravitch, 2016). Ultimately, the latter prevailed as NCLB became the law of the land.

Once standards and high stakes testing became de rigueur in the United States, those in the teaching profession were required to adapt. Under NCLB teachers at all levels reported that both their creativity and autonomy were undermined as accountability became central to their jobs (Yeager & von Hover, 2006; Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Many shared that their ability to build relationships with students was supplanted by the drive to teach material required for the tests (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). Several researchers studied elementary classrooms and revealed a loss of instructional time for social studies, as schools chose to focus more time on the areas tested by NCLB, math and reading (Au, 2013; Pace, 2011; Haefner, 2018). For high school teachers, different challenges arose. World history educators practicing in states which did not test their subject matter, reported experiencing an identity crisis as they were now expected to teach literacy skills rather than their subject area (Yeager & von Hover, 2006; Au, 2013). For those working in states with high stakes subject matter tests, teachers shared their frustration because they simply did not have enough time to cover the voluminous material set forth in the standards (Yeager & van Hover, 2006; Crocco & Costigan, 2007). As NCLB was replaced by the Common Core, new challenges emerged.

Although most of the studies on the role of teachers during the Common Core era have focused on elementary and middle school classrooms, the trends which emerged apply to high school educators as well. Teachers realized the need

for additional professional development, whether it be understanding new standards, judging the complexity of texts, or teaching effectively the numerous non-fiction texts required under the Common Core (Glaus, 2014). Additionally, educators continued to express discontent that they were hampered in building relationships with students due to the increased pressure to continually raise test scores (Cherry-McDaniel, 2014; Atchinstein & Ogawa, 2011). Many teachers shared concerns about the lack of learning; that students knew how to take tests, but the focus on lower-level learning limited the ability of students to apply knowledge or to truly understand the power of the material to which they were being exposed (Cherry-McDaniel, 2014; Glaus, 2014). Almost universally teachers believed they suffered a lack of autonomy within the classroom as they were forced to choose between culturally relevant content and that which was required within the curriculum (Cherry-McDaniel, 2014; Glaus, 2014; Atchinstein & Ogawa, 2011). Since it appears that standards and testing will remain a part of education for the next several years, further work must be done to study how high school teachers' decision making is affected by these efforts. Interviewing experienced world history teachers in Minnesota will provide an opportunity to discover how they integrate subject matter, standards-based test constraints, and the need for an educated, active American citizenry.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This research study used mixed methods to understand the processes which experienced high school world history teachers utilize to determine what content specific knowledge, historical thinking skills, as well as both literacy and writing skills are presented in their classroom. This research followed an exploratory sequential design, where the qualitative method helped to produce the quantitative method (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Specifically, this study utilized the analysis of qualitative interviews to develop a theory regarding the processes used by experienced world history teachers in making curricular decisions for their classroom. The second, quantitative phase, tested the validity of the theory through a survey instrument delivered to a large sample of experienced world history teachers in Minnesota. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to both validate results and bring greater insight into the research question than would be obtained by either type separately (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Greene et al., 1989; Ivankova et al., 2006; Almalki, 2016; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Both the qualitative and quantitative data were considered equally (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006).

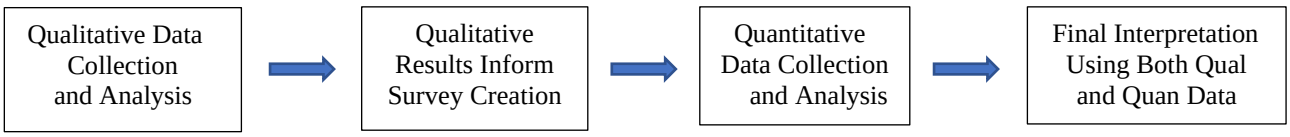
While an increased number of researchers have turned to mixed methods design, others have questioned the validity of this type of design due to perceived conflicts in worldviews (Greene et al., 1989; Creswell & Clark, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Historically quantitative research has favored postpositivism and a singular view of reality, whereas qualitative research has often embraced

ontological worldviews possessing multiple realities and varied perspectives, such as constructivism (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Therefore, how can both the qualitative and quantitative meld together? Some practitioners indicate that they simply cannot (Greene et al., 1989). However, others stress that because the research question should drive the methodological choice, the singularity of that question allows the researcher to utilize the worldview which fits best for that unique question (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Highlighting the research question allows for a pragmatist world view, with a focus on the problem, in this case determining how experienced world history teachers choose what content and skills are presented in their classroom. This pragmatic world view also allows for multiple methods of data collection including semi-structured interviews as well as an electronically delivered survey with both closed- and open-ended questions (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Cozby & Bates, 2018). Taken together, a rich understanding of the processes utilized by the participants were attained.

In this exploratory sequential design both the qualitative and quantitative data had equal weight in the final interpretation (Subedi, 2016). Figure 1, below, describes how the initial qualitative data collection and analysis informed the creation of the survey designed to test the soundness of the information discovered through the qualitative data collection. This survey was distributed to a far larger sample of experienced World History teachers. The final step in this

Figure 1

Exploratory Sequential Design



process included determining to what extent the quantitative results either support or challenge the initial qualitative results (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Subjects

All the subjects for the qualitative portion of the study were world history teachers in Minnesota with at least five years teaching experience in the social studies subject area of world history. In order to recruit experienced world history teachers, a request to participate in a research-based interview was distributed by the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals to each of its 1085 members on March 22nd, 2021 (See Appendix A). Those who filled out the survey indicating their interest in participating in the research signed a consent form (See Appendix B) assuring them of their anonymity as well outlining the purpose of the research. Assigning pseudonyms to all the interviewees provided yet another layer of anonymousness. From the larger group a small purposive sample of five teachers meeting the initial qualifications, but also representative of the gender of social studies teachers across the state of Minnesota were contacted to schedule an interview. More specifically, the teachers participating in the interview portion consisted of one teacher from a large urban school district, two teachers coming from suburban districts, one teacher from a smaller unit district, and the last from a rural school district. Three of those interviewed identified as male, with the other two identifying as female. All the teachers had significantly more than the minimum requirement of five years of experience teaching world history.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative Data

In a qualitative study, the researcher is both the primary data collector as well as the data analyst (Creswell & Clark, 2018). After the final determination of the purposive sample, these five teachers participated in an interview utilizing the Zoom online video conferencing platform. Each of the five interviews took place between March 31st, 2021 and April 8th, 2021. Those being interviewed entered a password protected Zoom room. The video portion of the Zoom sessions were not recorded. The researcher took field notes on the respondent's answers to nine semi-structured questions (See Appendix C) and additionally taped their responses using an iPad. The researcher transcribed each of the five interviews. The iPad audio files were destroyed once the transcription process was complete. The questions in the survey sought to discover the thought process which these experienced world history teachers use in both formal planning and more informally in the classroom setting as they balance the requirements of both national and statewide testing against the need for students to learn how to become active, democratic citizens.

Quantitative Data

The quantitative portion of the study utilized a survey instrument, developed using the results of the qualitative study, designed for world history teachers throughout the state of Minnesota (See Appendix D). The survey included limited participant demographic data that allowed for the comparison of district size and number of years of experience teaching world history as well as several questions

related to the central research question. This Likert-type, ordinal scale survey, created using Qualtrics, was distributed via an electronic link through a variety of teacher organizations including the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals in order to reach as many world history teachers as possible (See Appendix E). The scale scored from one for strongly disagree up to five for strongly agree. The researcher used this data to test the validity of the factors discovered in the qualitative portion of the study. With nearly 1,000 high schools in Minnesota, comprised of teachers with an average of 14 years teaching experience (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019), a solid sample size should have been achievable (Coxby & Bates, 2018).

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data

After reading the five interview transcripts, the researcher began the analysis by identifying initial descriptive codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Birks & Mills, 2017). This open coding led to axial coding and eventually to the development of major themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Birks & Mills, 2017). Once the themes were constructed, in vivo coding was collected to both support the themes as well as demonstrate surprising discoveries (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These themes identified nine different factors experienced world history teachers in Minnesota use both in planning and executing lessons as they balance national and state standards for content and literacy against the need to develop active democratic citizens. Of the nine components, three were mentioned by only one interviewee.

Quantitative Data

Upon the collection of the surveys, the researcher collated the data utilizing descriptive statistics to describe and summarize the data, searching for patterns (Cozby & Bates, 2018). Measures of central tendency: mean, mode and median, provided a picture of how the entire group of experienced world history teachers responded to survey questions, allowing for a comparison to those teachers who participated in the qualitative study. Additionally, measures of spread were applied to further elucidate the survey results by determining the variability which existed within each set of scores (Cazby & Bates, 2018).

Researcher Positionality

As a former world history teacher, with over ten years of experience in the classroom, I have done this work of considering how to best incorporate state and national standards as well as allowing for the development of critical reasoning requisite for living in a democratic society. My years in the classroom allowed me to develop an affinity for active, constructivist, problem-based learning. I believe the purpose of education, and especially the area of social studies, should be to "train students to gather evidence, generalize upon data, estimate character, apply lessons of history to current events and lucidly state conclusions", as proposed by the Committee of Ten (National Education Association, 1893, as cited by Nash et al., 2000). I do not believe the memorization of dates are important, since students can readily access them, rather I feel that is imperative for students to be able to use history to interpret the world in which they live.

Entering the education profession in 1989, I walked into the initial beginnings of the voluntary standards-based reforms, including optional standardized testing. In fact, I served on the World History Committee for Illinois and helped create and vet questions for the multiple-choice test which was to be offered to all high school students. I contributed to both district and statewide committees to develop the curriculum, scope and sequence, and standards for social studies students. My colleagues and I designed them to be flexible so they could reflect what is now referred to as culturally relevant teaching (Hursh, 2007). Sadly, leaders in Washington D.C., such as Diane Ravitch, declared them to be "vapid" and "nothing more than vacuous verbiage" (Ravitch, 2016, p. 22). After reading her condemnation of our efforts, I can understand that as a non-educator, as someone not working in the classroom, she believed our standards and objectives were constructed to simply be noncontroversial (Ravitch, 2016). However, they had a purpose which she and others simply did not understand. My anger and frustration that our work was so easily dismissed has certainly influenced my feelings toward standards-based education.

As reforms progressed, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) became the law of the land and brought the issue of accountability to the forefront for educational leaders. First, schools would narrow the curriculum and more directly teach to the test. This often meant that teachers were no longer able to connect the work in the classroom to the lives and culture of their students thereby increasing educational relevance (Hursh, 2007). In fact, schools were spending so much time on reading and mathematics; social studies, music, art, and physical education were often

significantly decreased or even eliminated (Kozol, 2005). Without a doubt, that riled me as well. How could my passion be so easily eliminated? The next iteration of national standards, the Common Core State Standards fit my ideas far better because they focus on skills. However, they fail to fully address history, focusing only on math and literacy.

State standards in both Illinois and Minnesota are an interesting mesh of NCLB and the Common Core. They attempt to create somewhat broad standards, however the most recent events included in the standards deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is nothing about China's resurgence, September 11th, or even the break-up of the former Soviet Union. All these topics, I would argue, are critical to understanding today's political events. My fear is that the accountability scare of NCLB has created a generation of teachers unwilling to move beyond the standards to teach issues that are not specifically included in the standards.

As a student of history and education, I have contemplated these topics often over the years. I believe that my experience in the classroom will help more than hinder in conducting this research. I am passionate about the teaching of history and well-versed in the various battles that have been fought within the field. I can be sympathetic to the plight of the teachers as they manage students, parents, administrators, tests, conferences, athletics, and all the little bits and pieces that affect each day. However, I do recognize that I will need to monitor my feelings if I encounter teachers unwilling to stray from the standards to teach what I deem to be important. Even though I am hoping to find that experienced

teachers will discuss topics above and beyond the published standards, I need to be accepting of those that may choose to follow their scope and sequence to fidelity.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

As stated in Chapter 1, this study examined the processes experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota utilize to determine which content specific knowledge, historical thinking skills, as well as both literacy and writing skills are presented in their classrooms.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected sequentially for this study. The organization of the data presented in this chapter follows the same sequence: qualitative date presented first, followed by the quantitative data.

Qualitative Data Presentation

Themes

The interviews were first analyzed using open coding. Open coding allows for direct words or phrases from participants to represent key ideas brought up during the interview (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Each interview was coded separately to allow for every participant's unique voice and ideas to come forward throughout the coding process. The axial coding stage brought together the open coding from all the interviews into common themes. Codes were combined and adjusted to represent the themes present across the multiple interviews.

Minnesota State World History Standards

Four of the five participants indicated that the Minnesota State World History Standards strongly influenced their planning and classroom content. No one interviewed expressed that their students were exposed to all the required standards throughout the course of the school year. In fact, three of the educators

remarked that it would simply impossible due to the breadth of the standards. Nor did the teachers intimate any remorse or regret that their students were not introduced to all of the standards and benchmarks set out by the state of Minnesota. However, they universally denoted that the information which they chose to cover in their classroom largely fell within the Minnesota State World History Standards.

- "It's more of a here's what we think valid, valuable historical scholarship looks like – do the standards fit?" Kirk
- "I would say that maybe 10-15% of them [the standards] simply don't get incorporated." Kirk
- "There were times that it really guided a lot of our planning. There were still some things that had to be skipped, but we really tried to cover more." Janice

In summary, the Minnesota State World History Standards played a significant role in determining instructional content for those high school teachers who were interviewed.

Common Core State Standards Initiative

None of the world history teachers that were interviewed indicated that the Common Core influenced their world history course content and most questioned if it even really applied to subjects other than math and English.

- "I don't think we've ever had a conversation in terms of how that fits into our instructional strategies." Kirk
- "I'm not guided by the Common Core." Janice

- "I'm not even sure what Common Core is for world history because we just don't use it." Christine

For these teachers, the Common Core existed as a concept which they acknowledged, but it played little to no role in determining the instructional content of their classrooms. Therefore, it would appear that the literacy and writing skills required by the Common Core standards were not being addressed in these world history classrooms.

Comprehensive World History Class?

For four of the five teachers interviewed, they indicated that earlier in their career world history classes were far more Eurocentric than the current iteration. Those same four teachers also expressed that they and their colleagues remain committed to ensuring that the course truly reflects a history of the entire world, not just Europe and her effect on the rest of humanity. Only one of the teachers conveyed that he basically taught a Western civilization class. He additionally pointed out that he did not believe that his students were missing out on any content, but rather he was focused on teaching them the material they needed to know. All the teachers acknowledged that when studying imperialism, they largely focused on how Europe colonized and forced themselves on countries throughout the world, while barely touching upon similar Japanese and American imperialistic efforts. Yet the teachers were united in their goal to present imperialism not simply through a European lens, but also from the perspective of those enslaved and conquered. For instance, when teaching how Asian and African nations, in particular, rose up against Europe and other imperialistic

nations, that provided an opportunity to shift the focus away from Europe and instead to those newly freed nations and their people.

- "So, we try to balance things out as best we can, trying to deemphasize the Eurospecific, kinda treating history as the history for the people as opposed to western history imposed upon the people." Kirk
- "…try to cement in their mind that places had independent cultures and realities long before White, Christian, European folks got there." Christine
- "Most of my course is Western Civ, which would honestly be a better title for the course…Again, it's not that other history is not important, but we do have to pick and choose." Leonard
- "And, in fact, to get away from that [Eurocentrism] is why we started doing one continent per quarter. That's why we started doing Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America." Janice

All the teachers recognized and discussed differences between the comprehensive world history class which is expected to be taught today and the world history class of old which simply presented Europe and how it interacts with the rest of the world. For the overwhelming majority of the teachers, creating an inclusive world history curriculum fundamentally shaped the instructional content of their classroom.

Current Events in the Classroom

Despite current events not being explicitly included in either the Minnesota State World History Standards, nor the Common Core standards, all of the teachers expressed their commitment to discussing current events in their classroom. Some of the teachers utilized a more formalized process, for instance, starting each new unit by connecting it to a current world event. Others examined relevant events as they arose. Further, all the teachers indicated that they enjoyed using current events as a way to draw parallels between the past and today. Three of the five teachers signaled a desire to spend more time examining current events with their students.

- "But I do try to draw, frequently try to draw, parallels from world history to the present day." Janice
- "Oh my gosh, sometimes that's all we do. Sometimes I joke with my students that I wish the real world would stop being something we need to teach about so that we can just get back to the content." Christine
- "So, I really used to spend lots of time with that, but it's now gone by the wayside. I do what I can, but it's not as much as it used to be." Scotty
- "It's not a new idea or if it is a new idea, here's it's roots in some other event. So, we can always find those connections and I'm really big on connections. Looking at current events gives us the connections." Kirk

Again, although each teacher described a different way of infusing current events into their world history courses, the propensity to do so was universal.

Content not Covered in the Minnesota State World History Standards

In order to ascertain how willing experienced world history teachers were to teach well-known topics that were not included within the Minnesota State World History Standards or the Common Core, the researcher inquired how they would handle a student requesting additional information about 9/11 or ISIS during a lesson on the spread of Islam. All the teachers attested that they would address the student question and examine the topic but would also make clear that Islam is only tangentially related to those concepts.

- "I would try to let the students speak and really my first question should be where are you coming from? What is it that you really want to know? I would tie it back to what we have already learned and how government and religion, you know, this very interesting relationship moves forward." Christine
- "I would certainly talk about the issues underlying it, why Islam and 9/11 are two separate events in the sense that religion in this respect, in any respect, I would bring them to the point that you can't blame the religion for what happened." Kirk

Teachers cannot plan for student questions, but without exception these instructors were willing to discuss topics relating to their classroom content even when it represented an idea that was outside the bounds of state and national standards.

Additional Factors Teachers Consider

The teachers who were interviewed were also given an opportunity to share other factors which help them determine their curricular course content. Kirk shared that his district demonstrated a strong commitment to collaboration across the schools in the district and even set aside time each school year for the faculty across high schools to create comprehensive plans as well as look for new ways to approach the topics that need to be taught. He revealed that the school district had "set up the framework that let's us create a really strong foundation for a constant reevaluation of our department and curriculum". Other teachers also indicated that working with colleagues helped to shape their own courses.

Two of the teachers described the usefulness of online resources such as Stanford History Education Group or even utilizing open education resources such as the New Visions Social Studies Curriculum. By bringing additional materials to the classroom, it allowed the teachers to add important course content. In some cases that information included primary sources designed to enrich commonly taught topics such as the Columbian Exchange. Other times the texts provided multiple perspectives and voices which are often missing from textbooks on critical topics such as the previously mentioned topic of imperialism.

Three of the teachers expressed that their own personal interests and specific academic knowledge influenced what topics they chose to focus upon in the classroom. For instance, Christine shared, "Asia, that's my jam, so whenever I get a chance to say you might know about feudal Europe, but let's look at Asia and the Tokugawa Dynasty, too." Additionally, Leonard reflected that "certainly

it's things that interest me that will be focused on in class". Three teachers spoke about adapting some of their course content to address the cultural background of the students sitting in their classroom. In fact, as one school district's demographic began to trend to more students of African descent, the staff wanted to ensure that they covered the history of that vast continent more extensively, so they decided to organize their class by content rather than chronologically.

Only one teacher expressed that she and her colleagues really concentrated on providing their students plenty of time to learn the essential historical skills, such as change and continuity over time, in addition to being able to analyze various primary and secondary sources. Although state and national standards certainly influenced these teachers and the content chosen for their world history classrooms, many other pieces played a significant role as well.

How the Qualitative Study Shaped the Quantitative Survey

Once the qualitative coding was complete, the various factors that experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota use in determining content for their courses became clear. It was, however, unclear the relative importance of most of these pieces. For instance, several of those interviewed indicated colleagues influenced the planning process, but there was no opportunity to assess how that ranked against other elements such as classroom composition. When asked what other items shaped course content, only one teacher suggested that historical skill building strongly influenced the work she and colleagues created for their students, but perhaps had other teachers been asked about that specific factor, they, too, would have indicated its importance.

Additionally, from the interviews it also appeared that a solo teacher, in a smaller school district, might have a very different experience from those individuals instructing in a larger district. Therefore, the survey questions were designed to try to quantify and clarify some of these items.

Quantitative Data Presentation

Subjects

Sixteen experienced teachers in Minnesota participated in the qualitative survey. Five of the participants self-identified as working in a rural school district, two indicated they were employed by a school district in a small to medium-sized city, eight reported teaching in a suburban district, while the last respondent works in an urban school district.

Themes

Minnesota State World History Standards

First, the subjects were presented a series of questions related to the Minnesota State World History Standards. When asked if those standards informed their educational planning, the mean score was a 4.06, illustrating that the teachers agreed with that statement. The next question extended that idea by having the respondents reflect upon the statement, “What I teach in my classroom is included within the standards, but I don’t include all of the standards as a part of my course”. Here the teachers responded more strongly with a mean score of 4.25, once again demonstrating they concurred with the statement. When queried if teachers with less than five years of teaching experience were more committed to teaching these world history standards, the respondents felt more neutral

garnering a mean score of 3.13. The last question regarding the Minnesota State World History Standards examined the feasibility of presenting all the standards to the students within one academic school year. Here the teachers disagreed with the statement, reflected in the mean score of 1.75.

Common Core State Initiatives Standards

Next the subjects were invited to reflect similarly upon the Common Core Standards. With a mean score of 3.13, the teachers demonstrated a far more neutral response regarding how much the standards informed their instructional planning. The educators felt slightly more confident when invited to ponder the extent to which classroom content stems from the standards, despite not teaching all of the standards, accumulating a mean score of 3.56. Next, with a mean score of 2.56, the respondents indicated slight disagreement with the suggestion that teachers with less than five years of experience were more committed to the Common Core. Lastly, the teachers' mean score of 2.38 demonstrated a mild disagreement with the belief that all the Common Core standards could be covered within one academic year.

Comprehensive World History Class?

The survey also attempted to understand whether the teachers truly presented a balanced curriculum which not only covered all geographic areas of the world but also divided the time spent each on each area relative to its importance throughout world history. In short, did the instructors strive for an

Table 1

Time Spent Teaching Content Related to Specific Geographic Regions

Geographic Region	Percentage of Time
Africa	14.88%
Asia	18.56%
Europe	29.94%
Middle East	14.44%
North America	8.13%
South America	7.81%

all-inclusive history or focus instead upon Europe? For the purposes of the survey, six regions were designated: Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America and South America. The respondents were asked to assign a percentage to each area which reflected the amount of time spent teaching content related to each of the aforementioned areas. As shown in Table 1, the plurality of the classroom time focused on content relating to Europe, at just under 30% of academic year. The subjects directed the second highest concentration, 18.56%, of instructional time to historical events in Asia. Both Africa and the Middle East represented just over 14% of the academic year. While the historical developments of North America and South America finished with 8.13% and 7.81% respectively.

Additional Factors Teachers Consider

During the qualitative portion of the research, the interviewees identified several additional factors beyond state and national standards which informed instructional planning in their world history classrooms. As a part of the quantitative survey, the subjects reflected upon those factors as well. As shown in Table 2, the respondents recognized that their colleagues as well as current events influenced the content of their classrooms. Although less strongly, those

Table 2

Additional Factors Teacher Consider in Developing World History Instructional Content

Factor	Mean
Colleagues	4.31
Current Events	4.33
Students in the Classroom	3.8
Textbook	2.2

same educators indicated that they consider the students in their classroom as they choose world history subject matter. Lastly, the mean score of 2.2 revealed that the subjects did not rely heavily on the textbook in developing instructional content.

Historical Thinking Skills and Making Connections with Current Events

As a part of the qualitative piece of the study, one teacher indicated that historical skills represented an important part of what she hoped her students would learn in her classroom. To determine if that belief was more widely held, the quantitative survey asked the subjects to respond to the following question: “I

am more concerned about teaching historical skills than historical content". With a mean score of 4.25, the teachers agreed with that statement. Additionally, the five teachers who were interviewed suggested that current events provided a way to draw parallels from history to the modern world. In a closely related question, the subjects completing the survey expressed strong agreement, with a mean score of 4.8, that students should understand how current events are influenced by history.

A Special Look at Rural Minnesota Teachers

Within the qualitative portion of the study, the one rural teacher often differed significantly from the others in his answers. Because the quantitative segment included a healthy number of subjects from rural Minnesota, it provided an opportunity to compare those educators against the subjects from more populated parts of the state. For example, Table 3 demonstrates the contrast between how the rural educators allocated the amount of time spent teaching historical content throughout the six designated geographic zones. This breakdown highlights some interesting distinctions. First, the rural teachers spent almost 6% more time covering Europe than the other teachers, which translates into 10.8 days, just over two weeks of class time. Additionally, the rural teachers spend 10% of their time presenting information on North America, almost 3% more time than the teachers in more highly populous areas. This almost

Table 3

Time Spent Teaching Content Related to Specific Geographic Regions by City Size

Region	Mean Score All Others	Mean Score Rural
Africa	13.14%	12.5%
Asia	20.6%	17.5%
Europe	30.36%	36.25%
Middle East	15.54%	17.5%
North America	7.27%	10%
South America	8.8%	6.25%

directly mirrors the difference the groups spend teaching Asia with the rural teachers reporting in at 17.5% and the remaining teachers checking in at 20.6%. It is also important to note, however, that for both groups, although the percentage of time devoted to each area may have differed, the rank order remained the same with only one exception. The rural teachers spent the least amount of time on South America while those teaching in the larger school districts spent the least amount of time on North American content.

Several observations can be made in examining the distinction between the subjects in rural Minnesota and the other subjects in relation to the relative weight of the various factors influencing the instructional content of a world history classroom. Consider that in Table 4 the rural teachers' score indicates that

they somewhat agree that they rely heavily on the textbook to determine course content while the other teachers sit squarely between somewhat disagree and

Table 4

Comparison of Mean Scores of Factors Influencing Instructional Content

Factor	Mean Score All Others	Mean Score Rural
Minnesota State World History Standards	4.18	3.2
Taught Content Covered by MN Standards	4.45	3.8
Common Core Standards	2.28	3.6
Taught Content Covered by Common Core	2.64	4.0
Colleagues	4.5	3.8
Current Events	4.3	4.4
Students in the Classroom	3.8	3.0
World History Textbook	1.5	3.8

strongly disagree. Furthermore, the rural educators rely on their colleagues and consider the students in their classroom less in choosing course content than those working in larger school districts. When examining the scores related to the Minnesota State World History Standards, the rural respondents felt less strongly about their influence upon the instructional content presented in the classroom than the other respondents. Paradoxically, the subjects from the rural school districts indicated that the Common Core shaped classroom content beyond that expressed by the other subjects. Both groups demonstrated unanimity with regard to current events affecting their course content.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted to determine the process experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota use to determine course content. The final chapter of this dissertation restates the research problem and reviews the methods used in the study. The major sections of this chapter summarize the results, discuss their implications, and make recommendations for further research.

Statement of the Problem

As instructional gate-keepers (Thornton, 1991), high school world history teachers in Minnesota make innumerable decisions each and every day balancing both Minnesota's content laden academic standards for world history and the literacy skills present in the Common Core within the confines of their busy classrooms. Because school districts are held responsible for both national and statewide tests, there can be added pressure to ensure students score well. Yet, beyond those state and national standards, students must be prepared to participate in a United States where its citizens critically question the legitimacy of its government, media, and history. Understanding the present as it fits within the expanse of world history has arguably never been more important.

The following subquestions helped to guide the research:

- How do experienced high school world history teachers balance their own pedagogical beliefs against the ever-present high stakes testing and both state and national curriculum standards?

- How do these same teachers decide whether to present current events in the classroom?
- How do teachers balance the required, but untested, content against the required and tested literacy skills?
- How do world history teachers ensure the course does not simply become how the rest of the world interacts with Western civilization?

Review of the Methodology

As explained in Chapter 3, this research utilized mixed methods to understand the processes which experienced high school world history teachers use to determine what content specific knowledge, historical thinking skills, as well as both literacy and writing skills are presented in their classroom. This research followed an exploratory sequential design, where the qualitative method helped to produce the quantitative method (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Specifically, this study utilized the analysis of qualitative interviews, lasting about an hour, to allow for a more in-depth reflection on how teachers determine instructional content for their classroom. The second, quantitative phase, tested the validity of the initial results through a survey instrument delivered to a larger sample of experienced high school world history teachers throughout Minnesota.

Interpretation of the Findings

Not surprisingly, experienced high school world history in Minnesota synthesize several resources when they create lessons and plan content for their individual classrooms (Cornett, 1990). Based on the answers received from the teachers interviewed in the qualitative portion of the study, the primary elements

educators appear to utilize most consistently are colleagues, textbooks, current events, Common Core standards, Minnesota State World History Standards, and the ethnic and racial background of the students in their classrooms. When asked to reflect upon how both the Minnesota State World History Standards and the Common Core shaped the instructional content of their classrooms, teachers who were interviewed indicated that the Minnesota State World History Standards strongly influenced their teaching and were a significant part of their planning process. As a group, they did not strive to include all the standards, because as one teacher, Scotty, exclaimed "there's no way in hell you can do it all". Furthermore, the teachers completing the online survey documented similar results with a 4.06 mean score demonstrating that the Minnesota State World History Standards played a role in shaping instructional content for them as well. In fact, universally, the Minnesota State World History standards play a prominent role in the curricular planning process. Other than the broadly accepted ideal that the standards simply represent too much material to cover during one school year, the concept of standards were recognized and provided a useful device to inform curricular content. Over the past several decades, this educational tool has quietly become a standard in the teacher toolbox, representing an acceptance that was not present in the early days of standards-based reform.

The Common Core, on the other hand, revealed far less unanimity. As a group, none of the educators participating in the interviews reported including the Common Core as a part of their instructional action plan. In fact, they were quite

up front in their distaste for the Common Core sharing words like “useless”, “ineffective”, “unnecessary”, and “invalid”. But those completing the surveys, did not express the same negativity. Instead, that group accrued a relatively neutral mean score of 3.13. What caused this split? Perhaps the neutral score reflects the fact that the Common Core standards do not specifically address world history content, but instead simply use the social sciences as another way to teach literacy skills (Common Core, 2012). This lack of direct focus on their subject matter may allow the Common Core to largely be ignored by world history teachers. But that does not fully explain the more negative reaction by those teachers who were interviewed as opposed to those who completed the survey. Since all participants in both the qualitative and quantitative portion of the research were volunteers, the validity of the interview versus the online survey should be the same (Akbulut, 2015). However, due to the relatively small sample size of those surveyed, a large variance could have easily affected the mean. Regardless of the reason, the Common Core standards are not providing strong guidance to experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota as they develop course content.

Because the Common Core does not universally inform the instructional planning process for these skilled educators, it could potentially cause concern for district administrators and other educational leaders. Assuming that the larger educational community values the literacy skills imbedded in the Common Core such as critical-thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to analyze a wide variety of texts (Common Core Standards, 2012), it is puzzling why all teachers

who participated in this research are not incorporating these skills. It may simply be that teachers need more professional development as Glaus (2014) indicated. Or perhaps colleges and universities need to embrace and highlight this skill set for their teacher candidates. If, however, these literacy skills are not broadly valued, than these Minnesota high school world history teachers simply represent the mainstream and there is no real cause for concern. The results of this research provide no clear indication of which scenario may be more accurate.

This investigation also sought to understand whether the desire to build a truly inclusive, global world history course represented a piece of process employed by these experienced teachers. Recall, that beginning with McNeil's first comprehensive world history book in 1963 through the introduction of the AP World History test in 2001, historians and educators struggled to determine how to move away from a class which by its title appeared to encompass the entire world, but instead concentrated primarily on European affairs. Based on this research, the mandate from the College Board that Europe could not comprise more than 30% of an AP world history class (College Entrance Examination Board, 2001, p. 7, as cited by Burack, 2003), appears to have had far reaching effects. In fact, four of the five teachers interviewed, shared how they and their colleagues intentionally crafted a class that presented the history of the peoples from all the geographic regions of the world. And even for topics which necessarily center the role of Europe, those educators ensured that multiple perspectives were presented and the voices of the oppressed were highlighted. In

fact, one teacher, Kirk, shared that "Europe has been so overtaught. We are actively trying to work against that."

Knowing that most of the teachers indicated a shift away from a Eurocentric world history class, the survey tried to ascertain the extent of this realignment by having the survey participants summarize the percentage of time spent teaching content of specific geographic regions. Again, those results can be found in Table 1. Here, those surveyed indicated that they spent 29.94% of their class time directed toward Europe, almost exactly the number set forth in the AP World History curriculum. Although comprehensive textbooks might logically explain this shift, that did not appear to be the case because the influence of textbooks were reflected by a mean score of only 2.2. Instead, with a mean score of 4.31, the data would suggest that the influence of colleagues represents the more likely cause for the trend toward inclusivity. Additionally, as the students in schools throughout Minnesota become more racially and ethnically diverse (Minnesota State Demographic Center, n.d.) those teachers who consider the students in their classroom as they develop course content, may have broadened beyond Europe to create culturally-responsive content for their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). A mean score for students in the classroom of 3.8, far higher than the score for the textbooks, establishes that the students in the classroom inform the planning process more than a textbook. To further elucidate the importance of the students, consider this reflection from Janice:

> I have really liked that we have refocused on Africa which historically, I think, gets the least attention in US/world history classrooms and we have

> a population in this school which is about, well actually, it's not that 48% of our students are African-American or Black, but that is our non-White population. I think the Black population is about 30% and they're just hungry for it. It really gets them interested in world history. We do try to tailor our curriculum to the students we have in a given year.

Although the reasons behind the drive to teach a more comprehensive world history class may be varied, clearly, the seasoned high school teachers in Minnesota remain committed to the task.

From the inception of the United States through the present day, the primary role of education has evolved and shifted from a focus on creating an active citizenry to the more recent bond between education and the economy. Surprisingly, the participants in this study never referenced the economy nor the world of work, rather their focus steered toward preparing their students to be able to function and thrive in this increasingly complex world. For educators concerned with developing engaged, active citizens, one might argue that discussing current events and understanding their roots in the events of the past would be an important piece of functioning within a democratic society; yet current events are rarely covered in textbooks (Loewen, 2018). And the most recent iteration of the Minnesota State World History standards does not mention the events which occurred in New York on September 11th, 2001 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2013). This research specifically queried teachers about the role current events play in their classrooms to ascertain if these topics were being discussed despite the fact that those topics are not required to be taught nor

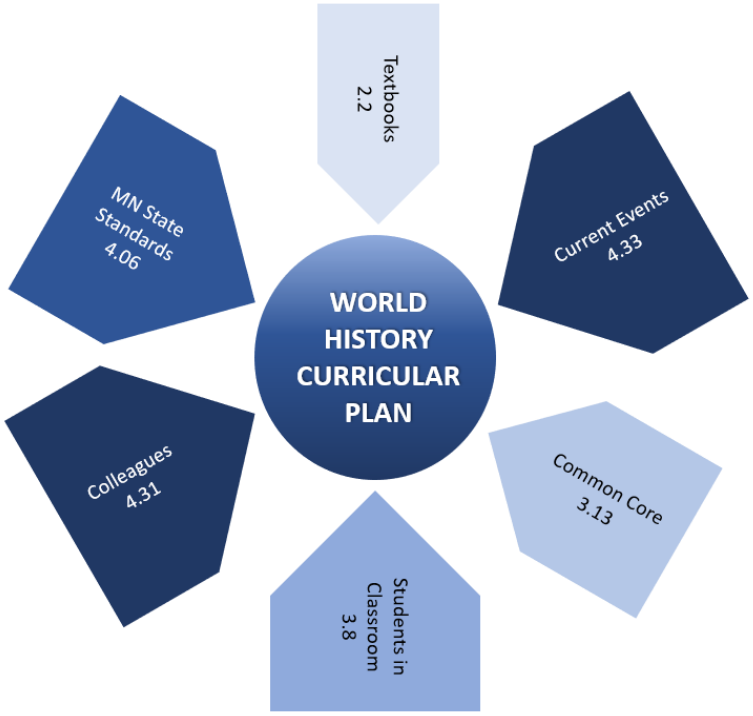
would they be tested by any state or national assessments. Each of the five teachers interviewed attested to the importance of current events. Christine indicated the following, “I am very mindful of looking at current events. I will unpack them backwards, if I get the chance. It is always on my mind and informs my decisions”. Those who completed the survey also shared the idea that events happening in the here and now guided their instructional content. In fact, rather notably, current events scored just above colleagues in terms of their significance in shaping classroom subject matter. Despite their omission from national and state standards, teachers clearly recognize the value of introducing current events. And by consistently creating those connections between the past and today, they prepare students to critically engage with historical perspective in national debates surrounding the future.

Although no one diagram can fully encapsulate the intricacies involved in planning instructional content, using data from this research, Figure 2 displays the factors influencing experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota as they develop a curricular plan. Despite the dominance of national and state standards in the educational debate of the past several decades, they do not represent the preeminent influence for educators in Minnesota. The Minnesota State World History Standards certainly inform the work in the classroom, yet they are edged out by both current events and colleagues as the prime drivers of instructional content. Additionally, the interests and needs of the students sitting in the classroom throughout the school year influenced the lesson planning more than the national Common Core literacy and writing based standards. Finally, the

teachers in this study did not rely heavily on the textbook as a part of their classroom preparation. Ultimately, despite the focus on standardization and the desire for national and state leaders to influence and improve education, the teachers chose a different path.

Figure 2

Process used by Experienced High School World History Teachers in Minnesota to Determine Course Content



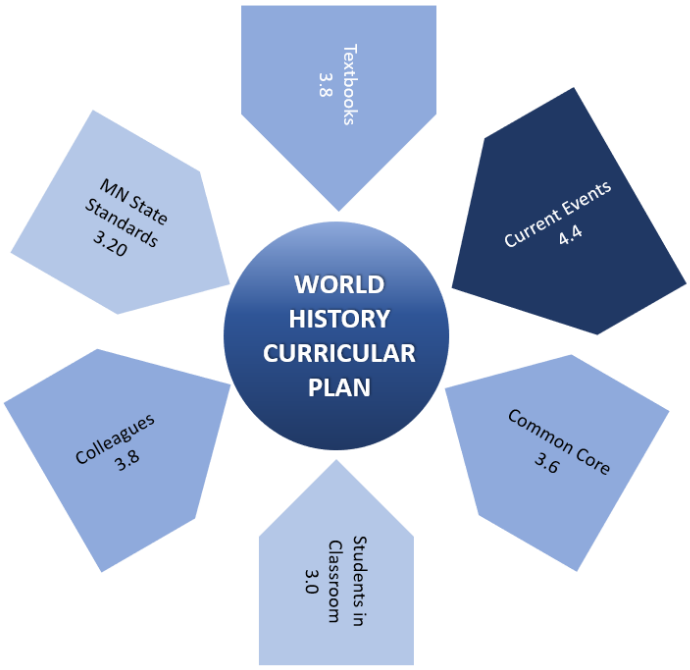
A Special Look at Rural Minnesota Teachers

Based on the data from this research, it would appear that experienced high school world history teachers in rural Minnesota employ a different planning process than their counterparts throughout the state. Figure 3 focuses on rural teachers and Figure 4 breaks out the data for all the teachers in urban, suburban,

and small to medium city categories. Figure 3 displays that rural teachers still highlight current events as the predominant factor in the instructional planning process, however, colleagues did not play quite as significant a role. When one considers that many of these small, rural high schools may only employ one social studies teacher responsible for teaching all the course offerings, that sole teacher may feel more isolated and unable to share both concerns and ideas with colleagues in other disciplines. Additionally, the rural group of educators placed a far higher significance on the use of textbooks than their non-rural counterparts. Since history textbooks tend to present an overly simplistic and often

Figure 3

Process used by Experienced High School World History Teachers in Rural Minnesota to Determine Course Content

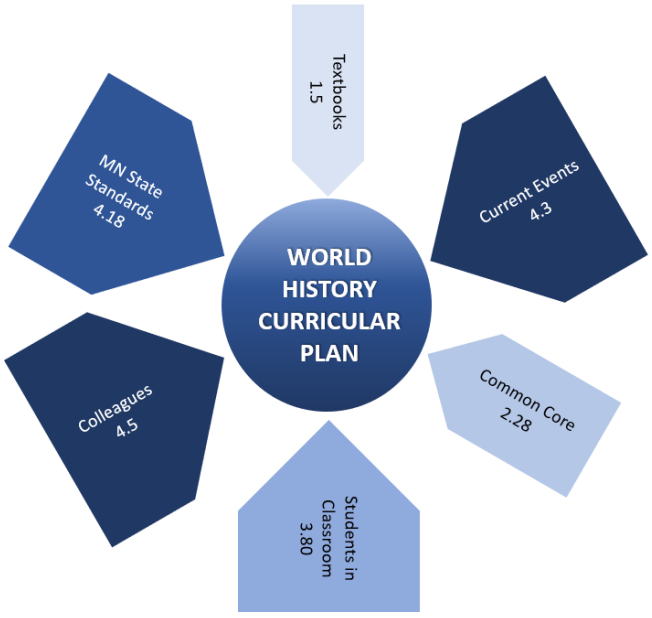


Eurocentric view of historical events (Loewen, 2018), that could prove problematic if teachers want to help students more fully appreciate and

understand how current events relate to the past. Another item of note, the rural teachers indicated the Common Core played a more influential role than the Minnesota State World History Standards. Perhaps the rural teachers understand the term differently or former President Trump's administration's change in focus away from standards toward charter schools and the privatization of schools (Green & Castro, 2017) did not cause them to adapt their methods while those in larger schools pivoted away from the Common Core and instead began fighting against those privatization efforts (Kaplan & Owings, 2018). Also, the rural teachers placed the least amount of significance on the racial and ethnic background of the students sitting in their classroom. That lack of focus on racial

Figure 4

Process used by Experienced High School World History Teachers in Non-Rural Minnesota to Determine Course Content



and ethnic background is not unanticipated because nearly all the school districts with more than 89% percent White, non-Hispanic students are located in rural Minnesota (Minnesota Rural Education Association, n.d.). Lastly, the non-rural teachers ranked both textbooks and the CommonCore significantly lower than their rural counterparts indicating a diminished role in the curricular planning process. There are several plausible explanations for the striking difference in the textbook scores. For instance, perhaps teachers in larger school districts have access to more ancillary materials than those in the rural districts, thereby diminishing their reliance on one standard textbook. When considered in totality, the data would appear to indicate that both teachers and students in rural Minnesota encounter world history classes differently than others throughout the state.

Relationship to Current Research

Current research, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, painted a pretty bleak picture of the teaching profession. With the adoption of NCLB and Common Core and the often-overwhelming amount of material being tested, many teachers complained about having their creativity thwarted as they pushed to cover all the required information as well as raise test scores (Yeager & von Hover, 2006; Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Additionally, teachers bemoaned the fact that they were unable to build relationships with students (Cherry-McDaniel, 2014; Atchinstein & Ogawa, 2011). That was simply not the case with these veteran high school world history teachers in Minnesota.

None of the educators interviewed shared that they felt unable to build relationships with their students. Now it may be important to note that the teachers were interviewed during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and their students were not attending school on a full-time basis. The teachers repeatedly acknowledged that this was a unique year and conceivably that overshadowed any other thoughts regarding relationship building with students. But despite the curricular pressures and the extra stress due to the pandemic, the data showed that these experienced world history teachers leaned into the specific needs of their students and even catered the curriculum to them. Scotty expressed the following:

> It's a really big thing to be working with people who are interested and committed to kids and have a passion and have a knowledge base. They also have to be realistic – understand the kids. You can create the most fantastic thing [lesson plan] in the world, but you gotta understand and involve your clientele.

While the previous research indicated frustration and a diminished ability to build relationships with students, these Minnesota teachers demonstrated a commitment to continuing to create meaning in the classroom through the content they chose to cover.

Not only did these experienced high school world history teachers fail to indicate that they felt national and state standards thwarted relationship building with students, they also clearly exhibited creativity within the parameters of the standards once again contradicting the earlier research. The teachers reworked lessons and in one case the entire curriculum more than once to meet the needs of

their students. Janice shared that she and her colleagues modified the entire world history curriculum each of the past three years, moving from a more traditional chronological path to a different continent each quarter, to its current iteration which spotlights a different theme each quarter. Janice and her co-workers were not alone. Many of the teachers shared stories of working with colleagues to plan units together while ensuring that the information provided was included within state standards. But as individuals, they also adapted those daily lessons to provide solid learning opportunities for the students in their own classroom. Consider this description of creativity shared by Kirk:

> One of the things that I am very pleased with in our district is that we periodically have whole school time to get together and comprehensively plan. So, all of our schools are doing something very similar. I think that's where we have the touchpoints and say that we know what is going on all over the place. We have a meeting of the minds even though there's tons of differences in how we do the things.

Consequently, in this suburban district the overarching topics were the same, but the teachers were able to put their own unique spin on how each lesson would be presented. Scotty shared something similar in his medium-sized school system, "It's a big thing working with other people. It's huge. We generally do the same topics, and we generally do really similar assessments, almost everybody works together and we feed off each other". Not one of the teachers interviewed described the type of dissatisfaction present in the current research regarding a lack of autonomy in the classroom.

Historically historians and educators have fluctuated between viewing history as a series of dates and events to be taught purely for knowledge's sake and content which can inform and influence the understanding of the present (Nasaw, 1981). While standards and testing have served as the educational focal point over the past several decades, teachers have often felt pressure to simply present multitudinous facts to cover the impossibly broad curriculum while not providing students with the opportunity to master more in-depth skills (Cherry-McDaniel, 2014; Atchinstein & Ogawa, 2011). Once again, the teachers in this study did not acknowledge any of the previously mentioned stresses and strains; thereby challenging the existing research. Additionally, the data in this research established that the primary element in their lesson planning was current events which demonstrates not only a pendulum swing toward using history to influence the present, but also indicates that these experienced high school teachers did not feel restricted to follow only the extensive list of Minnesota State World History Standards. They exhibited the ability to balance historical content against current events preparing students for a life after high school where they can critically examine the world in which they live.

Limitations to the Findings

While the quantitative survey had the potential to reach over 1,000 high school world history teachers, the return rate was disappointing. With only 16 completed surveys, this research lacks reliability as well as generalizability. Nonetheless, allowing for the small sample size, the results can still serve as an indicator of whether the themes identified through the coding of the qualitative

interviews are shared across a slightly broader group, which in large part they were.

Although initially designed to be a random survey, with only one of 16 completed surveys coming from an urban school district, the results do not accurately represent the demographic breakdown of high schools within the state of Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). However, the ratio of rural teachers to those that are not rural teachers among the group who completed the survey is roughly proportional to the ratio across Minnesota. 31.25% of the respondents to the survey self-identified as teaching in rural school districts, while statewide rural high school teachers represent approximately 25% of the whole (Minnesota Rural Education Association, n.d.). Therefore, the information specific to rural Minnesota teachers would appear to be compelling despite the small sample size.

Suggestions for Further Research

The research completed in support of this dissertation provides particular insight into what factors drive the curricular content of experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota. However, to ensure reliability and generalizability, the quantitative piece of the research, an online survey, could be distributed again to gain a larger a sample size which should provide further validation regarding the process used to determine instructional content. Additionally, although this research clearly identified the primary drivers behind course content, it did not delve deeply enough into the actual planning and thought process employed by these teachers as they develop course content. For

example, current events represent a principal piece of content within these classrooms, but how do the teachers determine which events to incorporate into the classroom? Recently the Israeli and Palestinian conflict dominated the news cycle. Because that event is rooted in imperialism, nation-state development, alliances, and has historical ties to the spread of Islam and the Crusades, it could easily be tied to a variety of content and therefore woven into the classroom. In fact, one of the Minnesota State World History Standards broadly addresses conflict in the Middle East (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007). Another timely topic with deep roots would be the Chinese oppression of the Uyghurs. The Japanese internment camps in the United States, Stalin's pogroms, as well as the concentration camps of the Holocaust present natural connections to world history material. But this topic is not clearly covered within the Minnesota state standards (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007). With a finite amount of classroom time, how do teachers choose between these two significant current events? If, as this research illustrates, current events significantly drive content in the high school world history classrooms across Minnesota, researchers should learn how teachers discriminate between the innumerable events occurring across the globe and elect which topics to include and ignore. Understanding that cognitive process could add to the field in a variety of ways.

Through the research done for this dissertation, rural teachers in Minnesota appear to utilize a different process in planning instructional content for their world history classrooms than their non-rural counterparts. First, further research should be pursued to understand if that trend exists broadly across the

state. As previously noted, the small sample size of this study could have skewed the mean scores and perhaps a statistically significant difference does not exist between the rural and non-rural teachers. If additional research validates the trend of this current research, then a deeper dive could be done to determine what content is being covered within the rural classroom. This doctoral research indicated that perhaps there was a tendency for the rural schools to be more centered on Europe and North America in the material delivered to students. In our increasingly interconnected world, that could be problematic. Additionally, it emerged that colleagues did not play as significant a role in the planning process for these rural high school world history teachers. If further research supported these initial claims, it could lead to discovering ways to help these rural educators feel more connected and supported in their classroom efforts.

As a part of the quantitative portion of the research, teachers related what percentage of time they spent teaching content surrounding Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and South America. Taken in aggregate, the results established the those surveyed did not spend an inordinate amount of time teaching about Europe. Instead, their self-reported percentages demonstrated a balanced presentation of world history content. However, further research is needed to discover the type of information being shared with the students. In the past, teachers may have developed lesson plans on South America, for instance, but the information provided described the civilizations as barbaric or less cultivated and advanced than the Europeans (Nash et al., 2000). So, although teachers indicated spending just under 8% of the school year examining the South

American continent, if the information provided simply continues to enforce the old stereotypes, then the numbers no longer point toward a comprehensive study of world history. Additional research could help discover whether students encounter an inclusive, non-Eurocentric history of the world.

The teachers within this research project shared that they were unable to teach all 43 of the Minnesota State World History standards. Further studies could elucidate which standards may be consistently ignored by teachers and discover why they are not being taught in the classroom. If, for instance, the standard related to "Hemispheric networks intensified as a result of innovations in agriculture, trade across longer distances, the consolidation of belief systems and the development of new multi-ethnic empires, while diseases and climate changed caused sharp, periodic fluctuations in global population" (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007) is not being introduced into the classroom simply because teachers are not familiar with the topic or its significance, strategies could be developed to ensure educators became more familiar with all the standards and benchmarks. In addition, perhaps underutilized standards could be highlighted throughout the year so that teachers could learn the content themselves and be introduced to a variety of ways the topic could be included into their curricular planning. For if teachers and educational leaders continue to pursue the idea of employing state and national standards, then educational leaders should understand how and if those standards are being utilized.

Lastly, within the context of educational reform over the last 40 years, developing standards and high stakes testing were supposed to create uniformity

and ensure that students across the United States would be taught the same information and teachers would share common expectations for their students (Hamilton et al., 2008). Another stated goal of these efforts was to close the achievement gap (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). This research indicated that colleagues influenced world history instructional content more than both the Common Core and the Minnesota State World History Standards. Additionally, according to those experienced high school teachers who were interviewed, they and their compatriots taught essentially the same classroom material although it the content may be presented in unique ways. Therefore, further research could study the lessons plans of teachers who plan together and observe what occurs in the classroom to determine if indeed they are covering the same material. More expansively, future studies could expand this research across state boundaries to learn whether experienced teachers in other states use the same factors to inform their instructional content as those in Minnesota.

Conclusion

With the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the educational world appeared to have changed forever. The reformers call for standards-based accountability and high-stakes testing caused the national government to significantly increase their role in education with the development of consequential tests, numerous committees, and voluminous reports all designed to fix the "broken" system. Despite those efforts, this research appears to demonstrate that the high school world history education experience has not altered substantially over time. Even without the presence of national testing, Minnesota teachers continue to work

together and loosely follow the same curriculum, similarly to the way it has been since communities began educating students in the United States. The U.S history average test scores of eighth grade students on the NAEP remain largely the same: 259 in 1994 and 263 on the most recent exam in 2018 (Nation's Report Card, n.d.). Correspondingly, the gap in NAEP U.S history scores between White and Black students was 28 in 1994 and 26 in 2018 (Nation's Report Card, n.d.). One positive, compelling change has occurred, within the realm of high school world history, more Minnesota teachers are now striving to teach a comprehensive, inclusive, culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995) world history class. Perhaps as Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr penned in 1849, "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" – the more things change, the more they stay the same.

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Appendix A

My name is Kathleen Ferrero and I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting research to understand how experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota determine course content. I am asking that you share the note and survey link below with your high school social studies teachers, in order to recruit qualified teachers for me to interview.

Thanks in advance for your help and cooperation!

Kathi

My name is Kathleen Ferrero and I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting research to understand how experienced high school world history teachers in Minnesota determine course content. Specifically, I am looking at how they balance both national and state curricular goals against content which may not be included in those standards, such as current events.

If you are a world history teacher with at least five years of experience, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you. Participants in the study will spend approximately an hour answering nine questions regarding how you choose world history course content. The interview will be conducted via a video

conferencing system, Zoom. The confidentiality of all participants will be strictly maintained. Additionally, all data will be kept secure and password protected. You can find additional information and the consent to participate at the link below:

https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_79uUPxeIA8OkLAi

If you would be interested in participating in this study or have any questions regarding the consent to participate form, I can be reached at kathleen.ferrero@mnsu.edu or 630-452-5234.

Thank you for your help and willingness to participate!

Respectfully,

Kathleen M. Ferrero

Minnesota State University IRBNetd Id: #1713786

Date of Minnesota State University Mankato, IRB approval: March 2nd, 2021

Appendix B

I _____, voluntarily consent to participate in the research project regarding the process world history teachers use to determine course content. This research is being conducted by Kathleen Ferrero, under the guidance of Dr. Candace Raskin in the Educational Leadership Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Procedures

I will participate in this interview via an online video conferencing platform**.** This project will require me to answer 9 interview questions and will take approximately an hour. If you have any questions about this research study, contact Dr. Candace Raskin at (952) 818-8881 or candace.raskin@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242.

Confidentiality

All information obtained in this project will be kept confidential. All interview information will be stored on a password protected iPad. It can only be viewed by authorized staff, Kathleen Ferrero or Dr. Candace Raskin. Pseudonyms will be used on all documents. No personal information will be released, and no names will be recorded other than what is on the consent form. Once the researcher has completed the verbatim transcripts, the audio recordings will be destroyed. Any data sharing will be completed using One Drive, again provided by the university.

Risks and Benefits

The risks of participating in this study are not more than normal participation in everyday life. Participating in this study may help the participant to reflect upon the process used to choose curricular content for the classroom.

Right to Refuse Participation

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Additionally, individuals may discontinue participation at any time by simply notifying the researcher.

Minnesota State University IRBNetd Id: #1713786

Date of Minnesota State University Mankato, IRB approval: March 2nd, 2021

Appendix C

1. Can you please share how you choose what content will be presented in your World History classroom?
2. When I say the words MCA World History standards, what are the first three words that come to mind?
3. Please describe in detail how the MCA World History standards affect your instructional planning.
4. When I say the words Common Core, what are the first three words that come to mind?
5. Please describe in detail how the Common Core affects your instructional planning.
6. World History classes have often been described as the history of Europe and how it interacts with other parts of the world. How does this statement relate to your classroom?
7. Would you please explain the role of current events in your World History classroom?
8. If you were teaching about the spread of Dar-al-Islam and a student wanted to discuss 9/11 or ISIS, how would you approach that situation?
9. Are there any other things regarding the process you use to choose World History curricular content that you would like to share?

Appendix D

Are you at least 18 years old?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Do you consent to participate in the survey?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Please choose from below which term best describes your school district.

- ○ Rural
- ○ Small to Medium City
- ○ Suburban
- ○ Urban - Large City

Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching World History.

- ○ 1-4 years
- ○ 5-9 years
- ○ 10-14 years
- ○ 15-20 years
- ○ 20+ years

These statements relate to the Minnesota Department of Education's World History Standards.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
They inform my instructional planning.	○	○	○	○	○
What I teach in my classroom is included within the standards, but I don't include all of the standards as a part of my course.	○	○	○	○	○
Teachers with less than 5 years experience are more committed to adhering to the standards.	○	○	○	○	○
Teachers can teach all of the standards in one school year.	○	○	○	○	○

These statements relate to the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
They inform my instructional planning.	○	○	○	○	○
What I teach in my classroom is included within the standards, but I don't include all of the standards as a part of my course.	○	○	○	○	○
Teachers with less than 5 years experience are more committed to adhering to the standards.	○	○	○	○	○
Teachers can teach all of the standards in one school year.	○	○	○	○	○

These questions relate to other items which may influence your instructional content.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
My work with colleagues largely influences my World History course content.	○	○	○	○	○
Current events influence my World History course content	○	○	○	○	○
I consider the students in my current classroom to determine World History course content	○	○	○	○	○
I rely heavily on the textbook to determine World History course content.	○	○	○	○	○

These are general questions relating to your World History classroom.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I am more concerned with teaching historical skills than historical content.	○	○	○	○	○
Students should understand how current events are influenced by past history.	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate approximately what percentage of the time in your classroom is spent teaching content related to the following areas of the world.

Africa	0
Asia	0
Europe	0
Middle East	0
North America	0
South America	0
Total	0

Appendix E

Participant Consent Form

You are requested to participate in a research study regarding the process experienced high school world history use to determine course content. This research will be trying to determine how high school world history teachers balance state and national curricular goals against historical thinking skills and current events. This research is being conducted by Kathleen Ferrero, under the guidance of Dr. Candace Raskin in the Educational Leadership Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Procedures

You are being asked to complete an anonymous survey. This survey consists of 7 questions and should not take longer than 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions about this research study, contact Dr. Candace Raskin at (952) 818-8881 or candace.raskin@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242.

Confidentiality

All information obtained in this project will be kept confidential. Any data sharing, regarding the survey results between researchers will be completed using a platform considered safe and secure by Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact Minnesota State University, Mankato IT

Solutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

Risks and Benefits

The risks of participating in this study are not more than normal participation in everyday life. Participating in this study may help you to reflect upon the process you use to choose curricular content for the classroom.

Right to Refuse Participation

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Additionally, YOU may discontinue participation at any time by simply not completing the survey. In the event that this occurs, any questions that may have been completed will be discarded from the final results.

Minnesota State University, Mankato IRBNet ID# 1761193

Date of Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB approval: May 14th, 2021