

# How do I balance District Requirements with my own teaching personality when teaching United States History I?

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May 1, 2014

## **Introduction**

In order to fully explain the educational setting in which I currently practice and my teaching situation, I have to go into a history of my employment in the only school district I have ever taught in. This is my 5th year teaching at Morris Knolls High School in Rockaway, NJ. I work in the town that I grew up in, however, I attended the sister school one mile down the road --the counterpart of the Morris Hills Regional District. I have a long standing history with this district and with a number of people who work there. That being said, I did not go to college with the intention of becoming a teacher, let alone returning to work in my hometown. It wasn't until college that I even contemplated teaching, but only after discovering that Biology, Clinical Psychology, Psychology research, Finance, and Consulting weren't for me. I went to a college that didn't really encourage teaching. In fact, many of my fellow classmates believed a good education was wasted on someone who was "just" a teacher. Though I am grateful for the experience of my teacher prep program, I realize in hindsight that I did not learn many of the essential skills required to be an effective teacher while earning my undergraduate degree. Nonetheless, I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, a minor in Education, and a North Carolina teacher certification in Social Studies. It wasn't until I came home to New Jersey to apply for jobs that I discovered that my Social Studies license did not translate. New Jersey is one of the few states that require a dual major to teach Social Studies and Psychology, whereas most other states regard them as the same subject. Fortunately, Morris Knolls was willing to hire me fresh out of college as a Psychology only teacher -- provided I earned the New Jersey Social Studies teaching certification within my first year.

As with any brand new teacher, my first year teaching was tough. I was teaching Advanced Placement Psychology as a first year teacher as I was traveling back and forth between two different high schools. At the same time, I was taking graduate classes to earn my Social Studies licensure. My mentor was very nice and certainly helped me adjust to the nuances of the school, however, he did little to provide guidance in terms of actual teaching. Fortunately, I was able to call

upon my experience as an AP Psychology student (in addition to the resources provided by my AP Psychology teacher) to make it through my first year of teaching.

For my second year of teaching, I took on the challenge that my employment was contingent upon -- teaching history. I began teaching early American History, from colonization to the industrial United States (1600's - 1900), and it was a time period I was not particularly familiar with, having focused most of my college studies on the 20th century. I was able to work closely with a colleague who was also a 2nd year teacher, but had taught US I the year before. We shared lesson ideas and worked together to learn the material, create effective lessons, and abide by the district guidelines of a 5 page research paper and a final exam that was 50% district portion, 50% teacher portion. By the end of the year, I felt confident in continuing to get better at teaching US History I. I had a number of books I wanted to read over the summer to increase my content knowledge, and I was excited to improve my abilities in this subject area.

That all changed the last week of my 2nd year teaching when my boss asked me if I would like to be trained to teach the International Baccalaureate (IB) Psychology class. As a non-tenured teacher, not to mention a Psychology major, I was excited at the opportunity to increase my skill set and embark on yet another teaching endeavor. I did not realize at that time what this new challenge would do to the progress I had made in teaching US History. In addition, district changes of a new Benchmark exam in addition to the Final Exam began to put pressure on my creativity in teaching US History I.

In my 3rd year of teaching, I was in a full-blown balancing act. With 2 AP Psychology classes, a new IB Psychology class, and 2 US History classes, I was borderline overwhelmed. With the pressure of tenure and extenuating life circumstances, looking back I am amazed I even made it through that year. Though I still loved teaching all of my classes, I noticed that the increased number of Preps did have a negative effect on the overall quality of my teaching. This realization could not have come at a worse time -- because at the end of my 3rd year, the teacher who was

teaching the other IB Psychology section was removed from the program. I would have to teach IB Psychology Year 1, IB Psychology Year 2, AP Psychology, and, if I still wanted, US History I. That or I had to give up teaching AP Psychology - which I had truly grown to love over those last 3 years. It had become part of my teaching identity. I chose to teach the 4 Preps, despite knowing what it would do to my teaching overall.

In my 4th year of teaching, I taught AP Psychology, IB Psychology Year 1, IB Psychology Year 2, and 2 sections of US History I. I was absolutely miserable. It wasn't just the overloaded schedule with too many Preps and not enough planning -- during my 4th year the district instituted mandatory Quarterly Exams and did away with Benchmarks and Final Exams. There was no flexibility in teaching the content for US I. I had to cover Colonization & the Revolution by November, the Constitution and Early American Presidents by February, Jackson and Reform by April, and the remainder of the syllabus by June. I could no longer spend time on things the students found interesting, and I could no longer focus my energy on the ideas and life lessons I felt passionate about. I felt trapped by the district requirements. I was trapped by my schedule. I literally dreaded coming to work every B-Day because I had to teach my 2 sections of US History. I began to question why I even went into teaching. I felt depressed. I intentionally used my personal days on B-Days to avoid teaching my own classes. I contemplated not teaching US History I in my 5th year. I didn't want to deal with the district requirements anymore, and I was tired of not having enough time to improve myself as a history teacher. I still took the same amount of time planning as I did as a 2nd year teacher who was planning for this class for the first time. I needed to make a change.

The event that led me to my current topic occurred at the end of my 4th year teaching. I met with my boss and sat down in his office. With tears in my eyes, I asked my boss if I could possibly stop teaching history and just teach psychology for the following school year. We had discussed it multiple times throughout the year, but at that point I was so frustrated I was ready to give up. He

and I both knew this was the ultimate defeat for me. I had worked so hard to get my Social Studies licensure and teach a subject I was not familiar with. My lack of content knowledge, time, and professional development had led me to feel that I was hopeless and worthless when it came to teaching history. I explained that I felt like I was letting my students down more than I was letting myself down. I felt my students deserved a teacher who was passionate and dedicated to the subject, and I was unable to give them that. My boss encouraged me to stick it out and teach history for another year. He really needed me to teach history, but he only needed me to teach one section of US I for my 5th year. I was hesitant, but also did not want to give up on getting better. With enough time, eventually my passion for the subject and my dedication would return.

Then I discovered the graduate program at TCNJ and RTC. I know it sounds completely corny -- but the RTC program provided me the one opportunity that had been missing the last 4 years of my career. I was so badly in need of the resources and guidance to become a better teacher. Though my district certainly challenged my abilities, professional development was dismal and feedback from my boss was few and far between. I wanted to be a better teacher. I wanted to be a better *history* teacher. I knew RTC would provide the material and structure to achieve that goal. I took two classes over the summer and immediately began implementing the lessons I learned. After taking 510 this fall, I was determined to focus my research efforts on how to find myself as a history teacher. I wanted to avoid getting brought down by district requirements, quarterly exams, teaching 4 preps, and never ever having enough time. I needed to find the balance of who I am as a history teacher and what I have to do for my district -- and that is why I chose that as my research topic. I couldn't go another day let alone another school year miserable. I couldn't keep dreading teaching history after working so hard to get my licensure. I couldn't keep failing my students by drudging through each day instead of giving them the dedicated, passionate, energetic teacher that I know I can and should be.

My research topic is teaching history. I want to find the balance between teaching this

subject and meeting the requirements set forth by my district. I am focusing on this topic to regain the passion of teaching for a subject I am not as comfortable with as I am in teaching psychology. The event that drove me to this topic was at the end of my 4th year teaching when I almost decided to give up teaching history because of how miserable I was teaching it with the implementation of quarterly exams. This topic is important to me because teaching history is part of who I am as a teacher, and I want to enhance my teaching abilities and provide the best learning opportunities for my students while meeting the requirements set forth by my district.

### **Literature Review**

My research topic is related to teaching history, and finding the balance between teaching this subject and meeting the requirements set forth by my district. I am focusing on this topic to regain the passion of teaching for a subject I am not as comfortable with as I am in teaching psychology. The event that drove me to this topic was at the end of my 4th year teaching when I almost decided to give up teaching history because of how miserable I was teaching it with the implementation of quarterly exams. This topic is important to me because teaching history is part of who I am as a teacher, and I want to enhance my teaching abilities and provide the best learning opportunities for my students while meeting the requirements set forth by my district. This topic needs to be explored further and is important to the field of education in general because it is a struggle that most teachers experience, and it can occur at any point in their career. District requirements, state requirements, and national requirements are constantly changing. Additionally, there are always new trends in teaching as research on what works in the classroom continues to evolve. Finally, our students are an ever-changing population, as the only constant seems to be the evolving nature of technology, society, and the world we live in.

#### **Article #1: High-Stakes Testing and Curricular Control: A Qualitative Metasynthesis”**

This research article was a qualitative metasynthesis in which 49 qualitative studies were analyzed to determine how high-stakes testing affects curriculum. Curriculum is initially defined

according to its Latin roots, "*currere*, which means a course to be run" (Au 258). Ultimately, the common definition of a curriculum has come to represent a body of content knowledge that must be learned by students in a class. According to Au, the concept of a curriculum also implies a curricular form, essentially, how the required content is organized and subsequently presented. For his analysis, Au utilizes the more complex definition of a curriculum, which includes "subject matter content knowledge...structure or form of curricular content, and...pedagogy" (258). Thus, the focus of a curriculum is the content of what is taught, how the content is organized, and the method of teaching the information. High-stakes testing was defined as a test that is part of a policy design in which the "results are used to make important decisions that affect students, teachers, administrators, communities, schools, and districts" (Au 258). Utilizing ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) a search was done on any reports or research documenting the effect of high-stakes testing on curriculum. Results showed that in a number of ways, there is a significant relationship between high stakes testing and curriculum, including content control, formal control, and pedagogic control.

In regards to content control, an overwhelming number of studies showed a narrowing of curriculum and the phenomenon of "teaching to the test" (Au 258). Additionally, this effect was found to be most prominent in secondary social studies and language arts. Ironically, a minority of those who expanded content due to high stakes testing was also found in secondary social studies classrooms. Nonetheless, high stakes testing did impact the amount of content control that teachers exerted over their required curriculum. The dual effect that testing had on the content control of the social studies classroom certainly is one that stands out in my mind. It seems that social studies teachers go in very opposite directions -- either narrowing their content and teaching to the test, or broadening their content in spite of the test. A strength of this article is identifying this trend, which resonates with me as it is one that I have noticed amongst teachers in my own department in light of our recent high-stakes testing.

Results of the analysis of formal control, in other words, how content is organized, overwhelmingly led to a fragmentation of knowledge. Teachers broke down content into “small, individualized, and isolated test-sized pieces” and disregarded the greater ideas and concepts of their subject areas in order to meet the demands of the test. A minority of teachers did manage to increase the integration of knowledge in order to meet the demands of the test. Unfortunately, one weakness of this article is that it did not provide specific reference to how these teachers increased their integration of knowledge, which would provide helpful insight as to how to avoid the fragmentation of content.

Lastly, the results in regards to pedagogic control were the most disappointing to read. The majority of changes as a result of high-stakes testing were an increase of teacher-centered instruction, with a focus on lecturing and transmission of test-related facts. Teacher-centered instruction was found to be highly related to both fragmentation of knowledge and the narrowing of curriculum. This phenomenon occurred in approximately 75% of the studies reviewed, as opposed to 21.4% of the studies which showed a pairing of curricular content expansion, increased integration of knowledge, and increasing student-centered instruction.

This article did an excellent job of articulating the effects that high-stakes testing has on curriculum. I find it interesting that high-stakes testing is completely unrelated to externally assessed tests, such as the Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exam. Despite the pressure for students to perform well on these tests, since they are unrelated to teacher performance, they do not fall into the high-stakes testing criteria. Additionally, I do not feel the narrowing of content and fragmentation in my AP and IB classes that I feel in US History, which has become a high-stakes test due to the implementation of quarterly exams as SGO (Student Growth Objectives).

**Article #2:** “State Testing and Mathematics Teaching in New Jersey: The Effects of a Test Without Other Supports.”



I chose this article because despite the fact that it is related to teaching mathematics, a study was conducted in the state of New Jersey in 2003 to determine the impact of implementing a test without providing other supports. With the recent changes in the teacher observation system in New Jersey, in which student performance is now linked to teacher evaluation, this article certainly has relevance to my topic of teaching history within the district requirements. Though quarterly exams are not a state-mandated test, they are linked to the mandatory Student Growth Objectives as an evaluation of teacher performance. This study conducted both interviews and observations of 63 teachers to determine the effects on teaching practices, both in the classroom and the self-reported attitude of the teachers. Teachers who used both teacher-directed and inquiry-oriented methods were included in the study, and the study was conducted at schools with varying amounts of funding - whether it was received from the district, state, or local colleges or universities.

Results showed that teachers did report changing their classroom practices in response to the test. This varied from implementing more inquiry-based instruction (as was required by the state-exam) and teaching to the test to teaching test-taking skills. "Very few teacher mentioned issues such as stress management, advising students about good 'test week' habits including early bedtimes and eating breakfast, time-saving procedures, process of elimination, and going over how to read directions" (Schorr et al 385). This in particular is an important concept that is not highlighted in the article but is certainly a strength. In a high-stakes testing environment, these types of good test-taking behaviors should be explicitly explained to our students.

Results also indicated that professional development related to the high-stakes test was often a short-term learning opportunity -- as it was related to mathematics education but not at the level that teachers would require to truly change their practice. According to Schorr et al, "our results indicate that although tests can trigger reflection on practice, they provide insufficient guidance to support deeper change" (397). This is certainly an effect I have seen with the

implementation of UBD (Understanding By Design) without enough formal training. Teachers in my district have changed their lesson plans to match the template of UBD, but have not had the proper time and support to truly and effectively change their practice.

**Article #3:** “‘Why do we learn this stuff?’ Students’ views on the purpose of social studies.”

This article caught my attention because it was one of the few articles that focused on how the subject social studies and a change in curriculum is perceived by students. I appreciate the student perspective and make a concerted effort to keep my students in mind when planning lessons and implementing the curriculum required by my district and state. The premise of the research was whether student views of social studies were related to the enduring understanding that social studies is a subject devoted to understanding what it means to be a good citizen. Misconceptions that students have are that social studies is boring, involves too much reading, and doesn’t apply to their lives. Conversely, students who enjoy social studies often have a teacher who has articulated clear goals, a sense of purpose, and a personal enthusiasm for the subject (Gibson 43).

Though this research focused on elementary school, the implications of considering the student perspective are highly relevant to my research on teaching history. Additionally, research was done on the teacher’s views of the new curriculum that was being implemented. One finding indicated that teachers often felt overloaded by the new curriculum, and subsequently became self-conscious of their lack of knowledge on some of the required topics. This is a particular concern I have in regards to social studies education -- if a teacher has been given a license by the state to teach the subject, why must a curriculum monitor and exert such control over the topics covered? Social studies should be about the essential themes and enduring understandings of the students, and teachers should be able to use content they are familiar with in order to foster such critical thinking. Social studies is not a subject that can be broken down into content and the amount of time it takes to cover it. The passion, experience, and knowledge of the teacher must all be taken

into consideration.

Children's views on social studies were also studied, and one overarching theme was that students are often aware of the content they are learning but are not aware of the purpose or reason why they are learning it. There was also often a great disconnect between the student view of the subject and the focus of the curriculum. Themes of time and people were also common, as students understood social studies to be an examination of the past, present, and future, as well as people in different societies. When asked why they have to take social studies in school -- students responses mostly focused on preparing for the future, either academically in higher levels of school or in traveling to other parts of the world. The ever-so-common theme of learning from the past was also mentioned, but students clearly did not understand the importance of citizenship or being an active citizen.

The author identifies a continuing challenge of our school systems that I find to be one of the greatest strengths of this article -- "big picture thinking about goals and purposes for what we do as teachers appears to be continuing to take a back seat to specific grade level outcomes" (Gibson 56). This article shows that without considering the big picture, teaching social studies is not only frustrating for our teachers, who are forced into covering content that may be broad or unrelated to their passions, but we are also diminishing our ability to connect to our students, their lives, and helping them to understand the impact that classroom learning can ultimately have on their lives.

**Article #4:** Pink, Daniel H. *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*.

Daniel H. Pink's book *Drive* is a study of motivation that uses psychological research to argue that the traditional approach to motivation is no longer relevant in the modern world. Motivation is defined as a need or drive that energizes and directs behavior. Originally, human beings were motivated by our need to survive, what Pink refers to as "Motivation 1.0." The institution of civilization pushed humans forward into "Motivation 2.0" -- in which reinforcements

and punishments were used to modify behavior. Pink conducts an analysis of a variety of research that shows that there are a variety of scenarios in which traditional rewards and punishments do not successfully motivate human beings. For example, when you give someone an extrinsic goal, that is, one that is short-term and measurable with the outcome as a reward or punishment, the result is often a decreased desire to perform the behavior and even an abundance of undesired behaviors. Pink argues, "Goals may cause systematic problems for organizations due to narrowed focus, unethical behavior, increased risk taking, decreased cooperation, and decreased intrinsic motivation. Use care when applying goals in your organization" (Pink 50). To avoid this, he says, when an extrinsic motivation (in the case of teaching -- a test or quarterly exam) is applied to a task, 3 important practices should be applied to the explanation of the task: "offer a rationale for why the task is necessary, ...acknowledge the task is boring,...allow people to complete the task in their own way" (Pink 62). This provides insight as to how teachers can approach district-mandated tasks with their students in such a way that will not provoke the unethical behaviors that often accompany extrinsically rewarded tasks.

Additionally, Pink outlines a flowchart based on his research of when and when not to use rewards. I think this has particular implications in the classrooms, where teachers often promise rewards to increase student motivation. Pink argues that rewards that are dependent on outcomes (like exams) should only be used when the task has been explained as necessary, boring and the approach is differentiated. For tasks that are intrinsically rewarding, such as learning history or becoming an informed citizen, rewards should only be given in the form of praise and feedback, rather than physical rewards students can eat, touch, or spend (such as extra credit or free homework).

Finally, an important implication for the classroom, which is also connected to Article 3 on student views, Pink says that it is equally important to explain why someone must complete a task as it is to explain how to complete it. Though he connects this concept to business practices, I find

that too often teachers only explain the “how” rather than ensuring that students understand the “why.” He also offers various advice specifically for teachers in the final part of his book:

- Homework: teachers should ensure that they offer students autonomy in how homework can be completed, assign work that promotes mastery, and make sure students understand the purpose of the assignment
- FedEx Days: based on the practices of FedEx corporate offices, Pink recommends that teachers occasionally provide students time to complete a project of their choosing, and the reward is when the student is able to share their findings with their classmates
- DIY Report Card: offer students a chance to identify their learning goals and provide feedback and a report card on these goals and skills. This will take some of the focus off school being solely about the grade.
- Offer Praise the Right Way: “Praise effort and strategy, not intelligence...make praise specific...praise in private...offer praise only when there is a good reason for it” (189-190)
- Help Kids See the Big Picture: as previously mentioned, explain both how and why to students
- Pay Teachers More Intelligently: raise the base-pay, avoid reward-based merit pay, and get rid of bad teachers (had to include this! if only it were that easy...)
- Turn Students into Teachers: Pink argues that we should not only encourage students to learn information and explain it to their classmates, include other classes, teachers, parents, school administrators or the community as part of the activity. “A classroom of teachers is a classroom of learners” (Pink 196).

Overall I thoroughly enjoyed Pink’s analysis of motivation and the modern perspective of what drives human beings. I think his analysis of psychological research has important implications for the education system and parents, teachers, and administrators could all benefit from considering what research shows about what really promotes and hinders human motivation.

**Article # 5: “The Importance of Educational Research in the Teaching of History”**

This article is one teacher’s self-analysis of integrating new educational research into their classroom instruction. Utilizing relevant research (much of which is employed by my school district), including Marzano’s *Classroom Instruction that Works*, Wiggins and McTighe’s *Understanding by Design* model, and Richard W. Strong’s *Teaching What Matters Most: Standards and Strategies for Raising Student Achievement*, Stafford reflects upon a project he has been using for years and conducts a deep analysis of his methods and modifies the assignment given the recommendations of current research. Stafford focuses his efforts on converting a historical re-enactment activity (A 1920’s nightclub -- a popular lesson plan in my district) into an effective performance task. Interestingly, Stafford reflects upon the fact that he is revising a lesson that students enjoy - however, the lesson made no effort to connect to student learning, did not employ authentic assessment, and was not related to the enduring understandings of the course. He utilizes Wiggins and McTighe’s four “filters” for determining what content is worth conducting research on and ultimately understanding:

- “Represent a big idea having enduring value beyond the classroom
- Reside at the heart of the discipline (involve “doing” the subject)
- Require uncoverage (of abstract or often misunderstood ideas)
- Offer potential for engaging students” (Stafford 2)

In addition to meeting these 4 criteria, important content should be exposed to the students on multiple occasions for optimal long-term memory. Stafford concludes that important content should be “revisited, re-examined, and placed in a meaningful context,” and goes on to connect this idea of brain research. He calls upon research that emphasizes the role of emotion in memory formation. Though role-playing and celebrations are both lesson types that provide an emotional commitment to content, Stafford opts to revise his lesson as a celebration of the nation’s accomplishments in a given time period in order to encourage a deeper emotional connections

amongst his students to the content, and ultimately the enduring understandings. Stafford goes on to call upon the work of Lewis and Shoemaker, who outline the 5 key characteristics of a performance task:

- “Students have some choice in selecting or shaping the task
- The task requires both the elaboration of core knowledge content and the use of key processes
- The task has an explicit scoring system
- The task is designed for an audience larger than the teacher, that is, others outside the classroom who would find value in the work
- The task is carefully crafted to measure what it purports to measure” (Stafford 4-5)

These guidelines help him to carefully craft his previous assignment into a successful performance task. In addition, Stafford calls upon the recommendations of Marzano to encourage students to form groups of 3-4, which are optimal for effective cooperation, in addition to playing an active role in assisting groups to understand their content as the project progresses. Furthermore, Stafford utilizes primary sources in his teaching of the unit related to the performance task in order to maintain the rigour that is necessary to “prevent the students from simplifying complex content” (Stafford 6). His task is also differentiated by both learning style and intelligence type, as the students are given a choice of topic and activity to perform. The use of a portfolio system for students to document their progress and record their feelings throughout the task is also utilized for student success. Finally, Stafford concludes with arguably the two most important aspects of converting an ordinary project into an effective performance task - teacher knowledge and enthusiasm. The idea for the project came from a non-pedagogical book that Stafford read as part of his own enrichment, and his passion was furthered by the challenge to use new strategies to engage his students.

This article seems to cover every single aspect of an effective teacher. Stafford revises an old

project into an effective performance task utilizing enduring understandings, student emotional involvement in content, differentiated topic and tasks, an explicit rubric, an audience greater than the teacher alone, cooperative groups, the teacher as an active role in understanding, a portfolio system for self-reflection, and his own knowledge and enthusiasm. It is almost too good to be true, and it is truly an impressive performance task that utilizes all of the modern research on effective teaching. It did make me feel slightly better when I read that Stafford has been teaching for 20 years, because clearly he has the knowledge, confidence, connections within the school, and time to dedicate to creating such an incredible performance task for his students. I need to realize that it would be unreasonable to restructure every lesson or project to the level that Stafford was able to achieve. Ultimately, the greatest weakness of the article is that the “Before” and “After” lesson plan, assignment sheet, and rubrics are not shared. Rather, Stafford explains them in depth but does not provide the files. My greatest criticism was that I cannot learn more from such an incredible description of effectively restructuring a good lesson into a great one.

This article has given me great insight into how I can begin to find myself as a history teacher. The way he broke down the order of how he restructured his project into a performance task is a good guideline to follow. Start with a lesson that I am unhappy with - ask myself what the Enduring Understandings are, then figure out a way to get the students emotionally involved in the content, and then utilize all of the skills I have to create an effective lesson with student choice, rubrics, cooperative groups, and self-reflection.

### **Research Question**

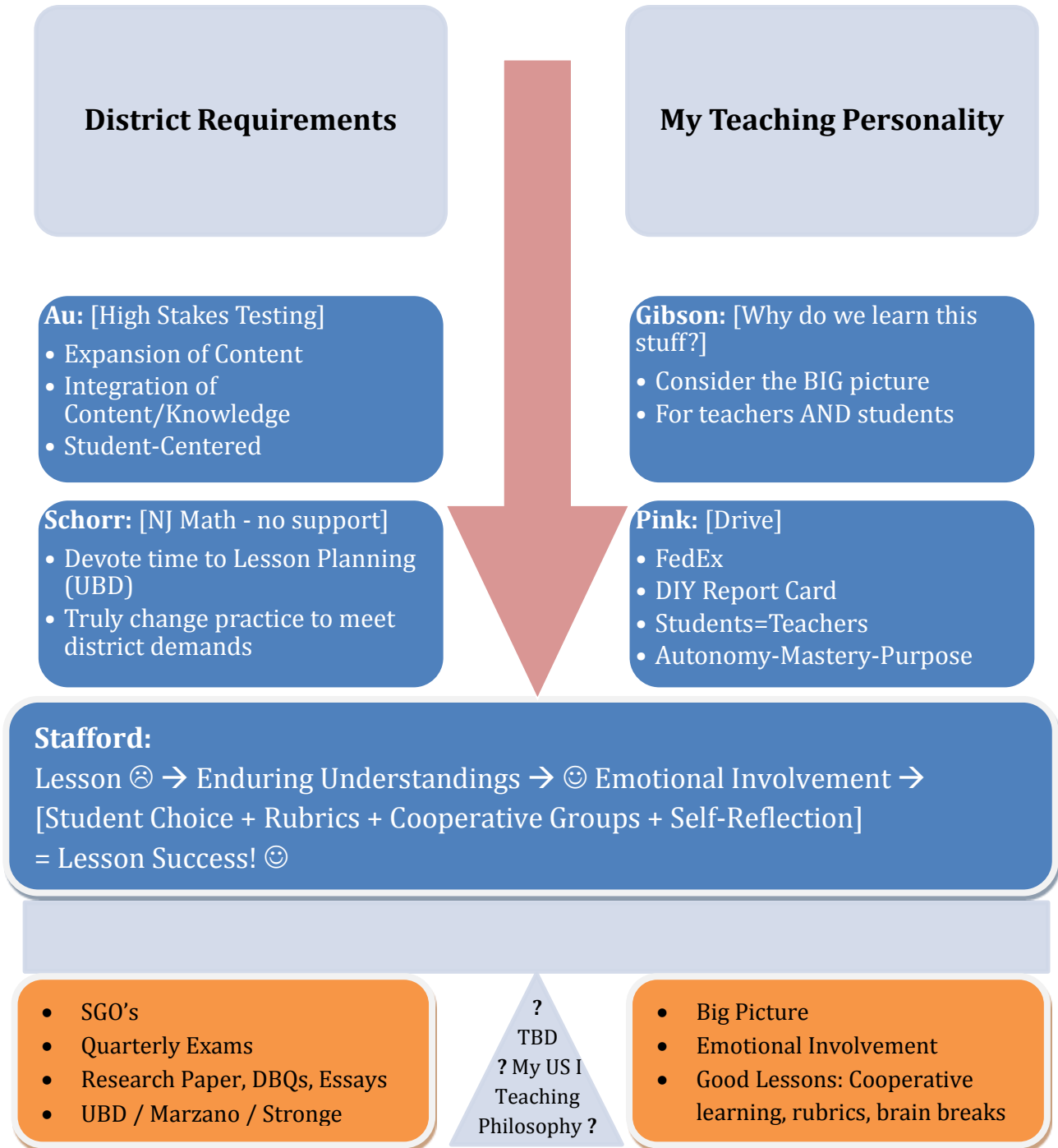
The areas of further explanation for my research study are strongly connected to the research that has laid the foundation for my work. The narrowing of content and fragmentation that I feel in US History, which was documented by Au in high-stakes testing environment, should be evaluated in my own the implementation of quarterly exams as SGO (Student Growth Objectives). Additionally, the work of Schorr et al demonstrates the importance of dedicating time to change their lesson



plans and effectively change their practice to the demands of district requirements. Gibson emphasizes the need to consider the big picture when teaching social studies, for both the sake of the teacher and student. While Pink shows that analysis of psychological research has important implications for teachers, and recommends practices to help promote student motivation. Finally, from the work done by Stafford, I have an example of how to start with a lesson that I am unhappy with, determine the Enduring Understandings, develop a lesson that will get the students emotionally involved in the content, and utilize the skills necessary to create an effective lesson with student choice, rubrics, cooperative groups, and self-reflection. Applying the works of these researchers, authors, and teachers will ultimately help me find myself as a history teacher and enable me to balance the requirements of my district with my own teaching personality.

## Literature Review Graphic Organizer

**Research Question:** How do I create a *United States History I CPA* curriculum that balances district requirements and my teaching personality?



## **Methodology/My Research Plan**

### *Participants*

For this study, I utilized my Block 4 United States History I CPA (College-Prep A) class for a variety of reasons. First of all, this class contains 26 students, which is a large population and enabled me to get a lot of feedback from a variety of students while I was conducting my research. These 26 students also consist of a good mix of males and females. There are a number of students with Specialized Education Plans as well as students who are in Honors English and math classes, thus, academically diversifying the population of students. My US I CPA class is also subjected to District Quarterly Exams, which are final exams given once every 9 weeks. Since these Quarterly Exams largely shape classroom instruction, I am choosing a class that I teach that must take these exams. This class meets at the end of the day, which will also enable me to make comments and write down observations directly after class is over, since I have no further duties or responsibilities once the bell rings.

### *Types of Data and Collection Procedures*

I collected a few types of data and utilized different methods to obtain them for my research. First of all, in order to ultimately determine my teaching philosophy of US I, I utilized daily journaling. I wrote 5-minute quick writes whenever an idea, improvement, change, or other concept came to my mind. This often happened when I got home, was working out, or just talking to friends/family about my day, etc. It was an effortful process to keep track of my thoughts and made sure they got to my computer. Sometimes I wouldn't even get to do a quick write -- I just had to write down the essential idea that I couldn't get out of my head. By the end of my research, my desk was covered in post-it notes filled with ideas of insight that related to teaching US I, or sometimes teaching in general. For example, I wrote down reminders like "Expand Content," "Use Kinesthetics!" "Mini-Assessments," and "Brain Breaks." While they don't provide much detail to someone on the outside, they assisted me in organizing what my priorities were with my students

and what I wanted to stay focused on.

I also used brief student surveys and field notes to obtain information about what was going on in my US I classroom. I used positive and negative feedback about individual activities ( the “Twitter” activity), lessons (Causes-Events-Effects War of 1812), and test preparation (Kinesthetic Review) in order to monitor and adjust how I taught the class. I also used the Student Survey that was mandated as part of the new evaluation procedure to gain insight into my students feelings about how my classroom is run, their preparedness, and my teaching style. I believe it is very important to use student feedback as well as to document how I monitor and adjust the class for my overall conclusions about what works in my US I classroom.

Last but not least, I revised lesson plans as well as the US I Curriculum that I am still working on. Lesson plans are submitted on (or around) the 15th and 30th, so I tracked the changes to my lesson plans in light of my new teaching methods. My goal was to effectively change one complete lesson or project in light of what I have read. I had originally intended on implementing some of the new ideas of my readings, including Enduring Understandings, FedEx days, DIY report card, and others, however, change in all of these areas was much slower than I originally intended. For the most part, the changes I instituted reflected the principles of what I had read rather than the actual concrete activities I wanted to try. Finally, I also reflected upon the process of working on the US I Curriculum guide, which I am doing for the District with a colleague of the Social Studies Department. I tried to focus on my contributions as well as what I have been able to learn from Kevin about curriculum development. This has ultimately helped me determine how I want to cover the curriculum in the future.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Using my journal entries and the changes made to the Curriculum Guide and my lesson plans, I have been looking to determine the essential themes of my teaching style in history while adhering to district requirements. I started by going back and reading my journals and noting any

aspects related to district requirements on the left side of the page, while annotating aspects that seemed to represent my teaching style on the right side of the page. I also noted any quotes or ideas that seemed to support these concepts.

Next, I created a graphic organizer chart with 3 columns to help sort my thoughts into a more formal manner. First, I identified the 3 most important things to my school district: The Stronge Evaluation Model, Marzano's Classroom Instruction that Works, and Understanding By Design (UBD). These categories were placed in the Leftmost column and broken down into their respective parts. From the Stronge Evaluation Model, I broke it down into Standard 2: Instructional Planning, Standard 3: Instructional Delivery, Standard 4: Assessment of and For Student Learning, Standard 5: Learning Environment, and Standard 7: Student Academic Progress (Measured in my district by the use of Quarterly Exams). From Marzano's Classroom Instruction that Works, I included all 9 of the strategies (1. Identifying similarities and differences, 2. Summarizing and note taking, 3. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition, 4. Homework and practice, 5. Nonlinguistic representations, 6. Cooperative learning, 7. Setting objectives and providing feedback, 8. Generating and testing hypotheses, 9. Cues, questions, and advance organizers). Finally, I used only two of the planning ideas of Understanding By Design (UBD), since they are the two I am least familiar with and need to work the most on -- Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings.

On the right column of the graphic organizer, I included things in each of these categories that were important to me and my personal philosophy of teaching US I. For example, under Strong 2: Instructional Planning, I documented how I believe in using the teaching strategies that maximize retention of learning. For Strong 3: Instructional Delivery, I documented how I believe the use of PowerPoint provides clear objectives for student and a daily and unit agenda allow me to give students a clear idea of where they day and unit are going. I also wrote about the use of effective closure - both academic and nonacademic to instill the lesson of the day's class.

In the middle column of the chart, I looked for items in my notes, lessons, and curriculum

guide that were aimed at achieving the balance between the District Requirements (left columns) and My Philosophy (Right Column). As I went through my reflections, field notes, student data, lesson plan revisions, and Curriculum units, I noted what specifically I did to achieve balance between these two areas, and where possible, how it made me feel. This center column, in addition to the column on the right, ultimately led me to determine how I achieve the Balance in my classroom, in addition to my Philosophy of Teaching History.

### **Findings & Implications**

For this project I set out to determine how I could balance the District Requirements set forth by the school that I work in with my own teaching style while teaching United States History I. I have struggled greatly to teach this course, especially given the implementation of Quarterly Final Exams, which are given every 9 weeks. Last year I found myself teaching to the quarterly and minimizing learning activities that I had planned, which I felt would ultimately benefit my students in both academic and non-academic ways. When I did the research for my Literature Review, I set out to find teachers who had accomplished this balance in their classroom to try to see if their methods could work for me. I found five major methods and attempted to implement all of them this year. Four of those methods are now the findings of this research assignment:

#### *Finding #1: Teach Beyond the Test, Integrate Knowledge, and Keep Student-Centered Lessons*

My first finding which I implemented over the last 3 months was to teach beyond the test, integrate knowledge (instead of Fragment), and keep student- centered lessons. This has such important implications for me because teaching to the test and becoming teacher-centered was the source of most of my misery teaching United States history last school year. What I decided to do to avoid teaching to the test was change the way I plan my units. For me, planning takes places with a pen in my hand and a blank piece of paper in front of me. For example, this year in my Unit 3: Constitution Unit, I wrote on the left side all of the dates that I had to teach the unit - including any half-days or other shortened blocks. Then, I wrote next to the date the topic that should be taught

that day. On the right side, I then wrote the corresponding activity to illustrate the day's lesson.

After reading Au and their recommendation to teach beyond the test and integrate knowledge and keep students-centered lessons, I realized that I was not being thoughtful enough of what was on the Quarterly Exam. I would plan my units, and then two days before the quarterly, panic that I had not taught everything needed because the obscure questions or topics did not fit into the lessons I had in mind. Thus, I decided to change my method of planning in order to teach the material on the test without teaching to the test. When I sat down to plan Unit 4: The Early Republic and Unit 5: Jackson and the Era of Reform, I made a simple change that has lifted the burden so much of the quarterly exam. I divided my blank paper into 3 columns instead of 2. In the leftmost column, I once again listed my dates and anything that might hinder the time I spent teaching. In that left column I also listed the topics I wanted to cover that day. In the rightmost column was where I made a huge change, I sat down with the Quarterly exam and determined what questions, themes, and content corresponded with the various days of my unit. I wrote down the corresponding test information with the day that it needed to be covered. Then, in the middle column, I wrote down the activities that would enable me to accomplish both teaching the topic or Enduring Understanding of the day, as well as covering the quarterly material. This simple change had an incredible impact on my teaching the last few months. Instead of feeling pressured and rushed at Quarterly 3 time to review every single topic with my students, I only needed to refer back to a lesson that we did to ensure they had learned the material needed for success on the exam. I even had my students staple together the 10 most important worksheets/activities from the unit as an alternative Quarterly 3 Study Guide to the one produced by the district. This made many of them feel that they already knew and had learned the information rather than that they needed to learn the topics for the quarterly all over again (MK Notes 4/8/2014). Just as Au said, when I began teaching beyond the test, I was much better able to integrate information into my unit instead of fragment it, and I was able to maintain the student-centered lessons that I find to be most important. In terms of the new

Evaluation Model - this has helped me to achieve a greater standing under Stronge Model #2 - Instructional Planning, as I have more effectively planned for both district assessments as well as what I deem to be most important for my students.

Ultimately, the implication of this finding is that it does not matter what course I am teaching -- if I choose to start with the basic test material when I am in my planning phase, I can use that as the foundation for which I can build my unit and my daily lessons from. Instead of scrambling to teach to the test, I can utilize the test to guide my course -- but not dictate the way that I teach or the pressure I feel to cover the material.

*Finding #2: Dedicate Time to Change Lessons & Practice*

My second finding comes from the Schorr reading, which stated that most teachers truly do not dedicate the time to change their practice when new testing requirements or regulations are put in place. I decided to actively dedicate my time to change my practice to meet the district requirements and recommendations. Utilizing lesson planning techniques like WHERETO (from Wiggins and McTighe - Appendix 1), Marzano's Classroom Instruction that Works (CITW), the Pyramid of Retention Rates (Kinesthetic Learning), and Understanding By Design, I spent more time on prepping for my United States History I course over the last 3 months than any of my other classes.

I began utilizing a PowerPoint every day as a simplified version of my WHERETO plan, as I posted the Objective, Activities of the Day, and Homework for my students. This helped to establish order and routine in my classroom and also helped me to meet Standard 3 of the Stronge Model - Instructional Planning. With clear objectives and activities planned, both students and administrators can feel comfortable with the day's agenda. My boss did comment on the change in my practice in my 2nd Evaluation of the year, as he appreciated knowing where the class was going after he left, since he only stayed for a 30 minute observation. I also saw how lessons that I did not utilize WHERETO, such as ones conducted prior to this project like my Articles of Confederation



Lesson on Wednesday 11/20, did not go as smoothly and I truly felt the students did not gain as much from the lesson itself. I even said in my reflection, "I spent too much time planning for this lesson without thinking about what I wanted the students to learn." In the future, utilizing WHERETO allows me to plan where I want the lesson to go, and ultimately where I want my students to be at the end.

Additionally, in accordance with Marzano's CITW Strategies, I changed lessons to be more mindful of these 9 strategies that have proven to work for student progress in the classroom. Though I was unable to document my purposeful use of all 9 strategies, many of Marzano's ideas I use on a daily basis without even recognizing that I am doing so. During this project, however, there were two times in which I really made an effort to incorporate Marzano strategies to achieve balance between district requirements and my teaching style. For a lesson on the War of 1812, I decided not to make students take notes on the Causes-Events-Effects of the War as a might have in the past. Instead, I utilized a different method of Note Taking (Marzano strategy #3) to help students summarize and ultimately understand the information. I created a Causes-Events-Effects chart as I normally would, however I gave it to students in the beginning of the block blank. Then, each student was given either a Cause, Event, or Effect and had to draw their item and explain it to the class. Then, the class had to decide if it was in fact a Cause, Event, or Effect. The students posted their items on the board and even made corrections as a class when they saw that what they thought was an Event was really an Effect -- such as the significance of the Star Spangled Banner being written. By the end, the students had filled in the Graphic Organizer (Marzano Strategy #1) and had also summarized and taken notes (Marzano Strategy #2) without even realizing that they had done so. It was a completely student-centered activity (which also supports Finding #1 for this project), and it allowed students to think about the material in a new and different way. This, to me, is one of the most important parts of a lesson such as this one.

Another lesson in which I purposefully utilized Marzano's Classroom Instruction that Works

was for my review for Quarterly 2, which consisted of an essay on broad themes across the course, including Social, Political, Economic, and Ideological. These topics can be very difficult for students because they do not inherently organize material into thematic segments; rather, history is often organized in a linear timeline in their minds. Thus, I utilized a graphic organizer that enabled students to see the themes over time. This Advanced Organizer is a Marzano strategy that I was able to utilize to help my students better understand the themes of the course in a manner that works best with the way that they inherently organize information. Ultimately, I achieved the balance of reviewing material on the District Quarterly while maintaining my personal teaching style of viewing the material through the student perspective utilizing Marzano's Strategy of Advanced Organizers (#9) for my Marking Period 2 Review lesson (described further under Finding #4).

Also, in terms of Finding #2: Dedicate Time to Change Lessons & Practice, I made use of the Learning Pyramid of Retention Rates that I learned in the Kinesthetic Classroom course from RTC (Appendix 2). Though I already try to utilize methods towards the bottom of the pyramid like Teaching Others and Practice Doing, I saw in my reflection that there were times when I did not utilize my knowledge of the Learning Pyramid to the fullest extent in my classroom. One particular lesson was the Bill of Rights on Monday, January 8, 2014. I used an Audiovisual method by having students view an image and then determine what Amendment of the Bill of Rights was being violated, however, only a few students who really were confident with the material seemed to be engaged. In the future I will keep the Learning Pyramid in mind and have already made notes to myself that in the future this lesson should be taught with either Teaching Others or Practice By Doing. For example, in the future I will have students make up skits to demonstrate what rights are listed in the Bill of Rights and how they may be violated in a given scenario. The rest of the class could then work together to read the corresponding Amendment and determine if rights in fact have been violated. The implication of this finding is an essential component of who I am as a

History teacher and will ultimately translate to my success in other teaching settings - I must be mindful of my practice and the effect that my methods have on the engagement and ultimate retention of my students learning.

Finally, the outcome of the Schorr reading which indicated that I must devote time to improve my practice was evident in elements of my implementation of Understanding By Design. Two of these elements are Transfer of Knowledge and the Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings of the course. I worked on my ability to foster Transfer of Knowledge by changing my Hook and Closure methods for class. On a daily basis, I began changing the beginning and end of my class -- using questions that would more effectively engage students' prior knowledge and also provoke them to think about the relevance of the topic to their overall lives. This concept of Transfer of Knowledge helps students to place themselves in the context of the course and ultimately impacts their memory of their daily experiences. I utilized questions such as those about the immigrant experience, and asked students who in their family immigrated to the United States. This was an effective introduction for the topic of Irish and German Immigration and the Nativist response in the 1800's. I asked students about their travel experience, what it feels like to travel, and if they think it is important to travel within the United States as an introduction to the Lewis and Clarke expedition. This allowed students to first sympathize with the lives of such explorers before learning about their experiences and contributions to United States history. In terms of the UBD concepts of Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings, I was forced to reflect upon my practice of these as I made changes I made to the United States History I Course of Study for the District from January to April. I often found that the Essential Questions I used were closely linked to the Hook and Closure questions I had developed for my own course. For example, the question, "What is the change that is the American Revolution?" is a great closure question but also an Essential Question of the course. Also, I found that the Enduring Understandings I was writing, such as, "Immigrant groups face discrimination and prejudice from Nativist populations (those who

already live in the land),” in fact became essential components of discussion with my students at both the beginning and end of class. Working on the Course of Study also forced me to think about what daily Learning Activities were most important, and essentially provided me with the insight needed to truly understand the United States History I course “by design.” For the first time ever, I really started at the end of the course and understood it from the beginning. The implication of this finding is that in the future when I teach a course, I should consult the Course of Study, as well as consider the Essential Questions, Enduring Understandings, and Transfer of Knowledge as guidelines of how to structure the entire course and teaching on a daily basis.

The implications of this finding are many, and at the core of each aspect that I worked on over the last four months, is the overall takeaway that I was able (and will be able in the future) to balance district requirements such as quarterly prep, purposefully implementing WHERETO lesson planning, Marzano strategies, the Learning Pyramid, and UBD, while still utilizing critical thinking skills and teamwork, and the student perspective, which I find to be incredibly important. I can balance district requirements by remaining mindful of the content and course goals, but also of my practice, keeping in mind the effect that my methods have on the engagement and ultimate retention of my students learning on both a daily basis and over the course of the school year.

### *Finding #3: Remember the Big Picture in Social Studies*

In the article I read by Gibson, the work largely reminds the teacher that in Social Studies, especially, we must remember the big picture of why we are teaching and the long-term impact of our work. In a conversation with my Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology students, all of whom were seniors in this particular class, we discussed the reliability and validity of memory. I asked my seniors a bunch of questions from my United States History I course. It was content that my sophomores would probably claim as “easy,” but just a mere two years later, many students could not remember basic facts and ideas that they had just learned. This sparked a conversation about the importance of school, given that most students will not recall the facts that they learn in a given

course. This conversation, in addition to the Gibson reading, really made me stop and think about what the big picture is in my United States History I class. Through analysis of my journals, it is clear that to me, the big picture is about life skills such as listening, awareness of both academic and non-academic abilities, interpersonal relationships, and self-improvement. There were various activities that I did this year that were more about listening and relaying someone else's view than just spouting one's opinion. I asked students to Think-Pair-Share, in both the seated setting (Legislative Branch 12/9), and in a rotating circle (Judicial Branch 12/13). I emphasized to students that this was a test of listening, not just of content knowledge. As a closure to class on Tues 12/17 with a few minutes remaining, I asked my students to tell me the 3 most important academic and non-academic things that they learned that day. I wanted to assess what the greater takeaway of their experience in my class was beyond the content they had learned. Students said, "I learned that sending an email is sometimes about how you look to the other person," and, "I should practice acting professional when communicating with my teachers." Both of these comments were in response to a discussion where students sent me emails with no appropriate subject, greeting, or name in the body of their email! Looking back at the journal, I can see that to me, part of the big picture of social studies is life skills such as proper communication with others, both in the form of listening and in a formal setting. In terms of interpersonal relationships, I found from rereading my journals that I felt it important for students to recognize each other's strengths. After doing research in the library on Friday March 21, 2014, when students returned to the classroom, I asked them to think about another student in the class who showed hard work and proper behavior in the library. I allowed students to speak about their classmates and ultimately gave a lollipop to the three students that the class agreed upon had done the best in class that day. This activity continued for the next 2 classes and had an incredibly positive impact on the students' relationships with each other and the class environment as a whole (Stronge #5!). I have never seen a class of mine so productive in the library!! Reflecting upon this activity jumped out to me as evidence of

what I believe to be the bigger picture in social studies -- acknowledging and supporting the hard work of others while striving to better oneself.

The implication of this finding is arguably one of the most important, when I am aiming to meet the requirements of the District and state, I must never forget the big picture in social studies, and my personal view of the importance of listening, awareness of both academic and non-academic abilities, interpersonal relationships, and self-improvement.

*Finding #4: Convert Good Lessons to Great Ones using UBD, Marzano, etc. (Stafford)*

The reading by Stafford was arguably the most relevant to my research question because it was a teacher's documentation of how he used concepts like Understanding By Design (UBD) and Marzano's Classroom Instruction that Works to improve one lesson from a good one to a great one. His lesson was the 1920's Speakeasy which he turned into an event regarding all changing aspects of Canadian Society in the 1920's. I set a personal goal to follow in Stafford's lead and convert one of my good lessons into a great one. Though in the end I did not have the time to utilize all of the techniques, as Stafford did, I did make significant changes to two lessons that really needed to be altered, and created a new lesson that was both relevant and exciting for my students.

The first lesson that I altered was the introduction of my Constitution Unit. In the past, I had asked my students questions like "What is the Purpose of Government?" "How should the Government protect its citizens?" and often found that these questions did not connect with my students. Thus, I tried to get on their level and think about the Enduring Understanding of the functions of the United States government. I decided that since many of my students do have prior knowledge, this would be a good opportunity to use a Word Associations Activity. I asked my students to number their paper 1-10 and write down the first thing that came to mind when they heard each word. Then, using the words of the Preamble of the United States Constitution, I read the words aloud to the students. Words like "Perfect" "Defense" "Justice" "Welfare" and "Tranquility" were all familiar to the students - but none in the context of our government. A truly enlightening

discussion followed as students tried to connect these well known words and the associations they made with them to our government and how it was established. I was successfully able to use what I learned from Gibson to ask myself what the Enduring Understandings were, then figured out a way to get the students emotionally involved in the content, and a great connection of the content to their lives was made.

Another lesson that I converted from a good one to a great one by considering the outcome and utilizing Marzano strategies was the Bingo Review conducted for the Marking Period 2 Quarterly. As previously mentioned, I used the Marzano Strategy of an Advanced Organizer to improve my review for Quarterly 2, which consisted of an essay on broad themes across the course, including Social, Political, Economic, and Ideological. The implementation of this organizer was what converted this lesson from a good one to a great one. I decided to make completing the organizer a Bingo game, in which students would have to fill the entire grid. All of the answers to the grid were provided on note cards that were placed on a table in the center of the room. Students were grouped into teams of 4 with each group composed of both stronger and weaker academic students. Students had to get up from their seats (one per group at a time) and get a notecard and determine where it went on the grid. Thus, they were given the correct answer but had to determine the time period and the category to which it belonged. The game also doubled as a Kinesthetic Activity, as students were purposefully up and out of their seats for a large portion of class. At the end, all students had a completed review sheet for the Quarterly Essay. Students really enjoyed this activity, and I asked them to jot down their feelings about it as they exited the room:

- “I liked this activity because it did help me think about what the information should be linked with what time period and section. i also liked that it was fun to play, i enjoyed this activity”
- “I really like that you got our mind off school though” (quarterly week)
- “It made you think in a different way than you standing in front of the room and asking us questions”
- “It was a change of pace from the normal classroom activities and served to prove what I did and didn’t know”

Overall, this Bingo Review Activity was a complete success. The students were engaged, critically

thinking, working together, with a common end goal in mind. Despite the fact that this was not in itself a graded assignment, as in Stafford's work, it still was a good lesson that was transferred to a great one when I really put in the time, effort, and energy to utilize the tools I have been given as a teacher.

Last but not least, instead of improving a good lesson and making it a great one, I created an entirely new lesson that was student-centered, involved cooperative learning, kinesthetic activity, critical thinking, and a modern-day element to hook the students and engaged a skill and a method of communication and a skill they are all so familiar with -- Twitter. The Twitter lesson plan was one in which I really sat down and thought to myself, what is the big picture here? I wanted my students to learn about the expansion of the Federal Government in the 1830's but I wanted to avoid the traditional reading/lecture/discussion on the Court Cases of that time. Students have a hard time relating to this material and find it very dry so I wanted to put it in terms they could understand. Since the end goal was really for students to summarize what they had read, I decided to use Twitter as the medium since it requires a post of 140 characters or less. I began the lesson with a Kinesthetic Activity to get the students up and moving. I passed out slips of paper with different pairs on them, for example, "Barbie" and "Ken," or "Burt" and "Ernie," or "Jay-Z" and "Beyonce." Once the students found their pair they needed to sit with their partner and think of a Twitter handle or name (for example: @CourageousCondiments for Salt & Pepper). Next, I gave each group a reading, and there were 5 different readings spread out amongst 12 different groups. Posted on the Projector was the question, "How did the Federal Government increase its power in the 1800's?" After students read their reading, they would have to answer the question as a Tweet - with 140 characters or less utilizing hashtags as appropriate. I had students email me their Tweets so that they could easily be posted on the projector.

Example tweets:

- @CourageousCondiments: Due to the Judicial Review, The Supreme Court, a Federal power, gained more power in the 1800's (Set forth by Marbury v. Madison)  
#Salt&PepperShakers #WhatHappenedDuringThatTime



#DidAnyoneBotherListeningToGeorgeWashingtonsFarewellAddress?

- @beyonjey: Federal land pays taxes to the federal govt not state. Fed>state #mccullochvMD #dontmesswiththefeds
- @Stars&Stripes4Ever: In the 1800's federal power increased because federal government gained control of interstate commerce #gold\_diggers
- @letsgetgarfunkywithit: The Monroe Doctrine put a policy on european colonization #stayonyourownland

After the tweets were posted, we discussed each and discussed the Essential Question

which had been posted on the projector. Students really seemed to grasp the understanding of what increased Federal Power so much better than in years past. Tweets like “#dontmesswiththefeds” and “#gold\_diggers” were great examples of students identifying how people might have felt in the 1800’s, but expressing it in their own words and language. I was truly impressed with their effort and enthusiasm. Their exit card notes were also really reinforcing of the power of this lesson:

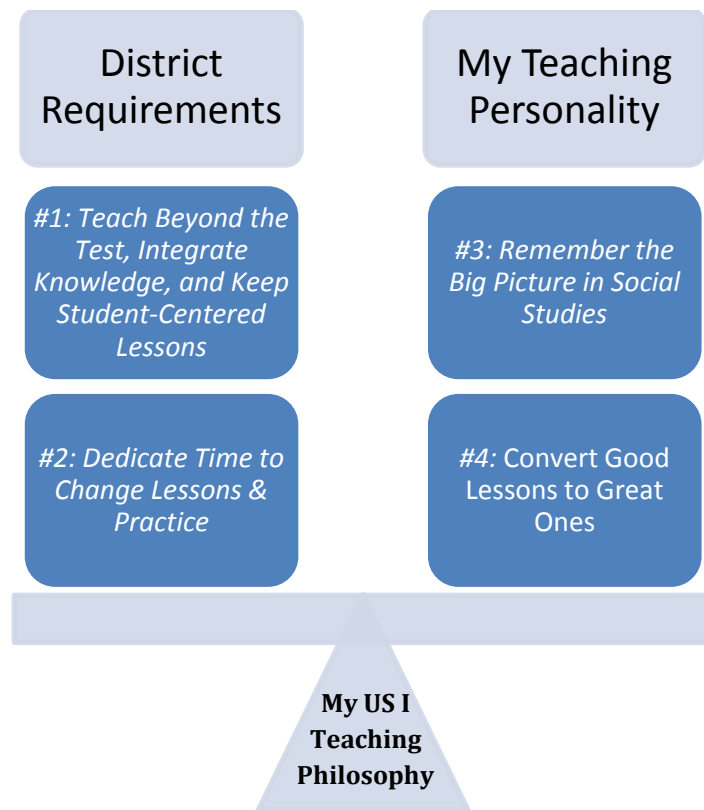
- “It was really cool and we also learned while doing it. It also helps because a lot of people have twitter and relate. I love doing things like that.”
- “The twitter activity was fun and I hope we can do more things like that. It helped us build a relationship with someone we haven’t worked with and gave the class a good laugh.”
- “the twitter activity was a great way to incorporate modern concepts into the classroom. The only note maybe creating an actual twitter account”
- “I really enjoyed the activity. I like the way we found partners and the handle names. I also liked how the summary was only 140 characters like a tweet would be. The activity was overall really fun.”
- “I liked this activity because most teenagers have a twitter so we knew what to do and it related to our generation.”

It is clear from their comments that the students appreciated being asked to do a task that was easy for them despite the fact that the content they had to read was difficult. They enjoyed the new method of finding partners, creating a handle together, and the common experience of sharing the tweets at the end of the activity. To me this lesson was a complete and total success, because I managed to get on the level of the students and into their mindset in order to create a challenge that they felt they could handle. I utilized Understanding By Design, Kinesthetic Learning, Cooperative Learning, and higher-level thinking, all rolled into a lesson that students felt comfortable with and challenged by in a fun, yet academic classroom setting.

This finding truly has significant implications for my work as a history teacher in settings

other than United States History 1. Utilizing Stafford as a model, I sought to change good lessons into great ones. What I now realize is that I have created lessons that can be used in different subjects and disciplines. For example, the Bingo Review Activity can be utilized any time I need students to learn or review themes over time. The Word Associations Activity can be useful when introducing a topic in order to dispel misconceptions and activate prior knowledge. The Twitter activity is great for when students are being asked to summarize a work that might otherwise be very difficult for them to understand and put into their own words. These are all great lesson plans that can be put into effect in a number of different subjects, levels, and settings. I have essentially created a base of great lessons to use and grow from.

### Findings Graphic Organizer



### Limitations & Subjectivity

#### *Limitations*

In terms of logistical limitations, it wasn't necessarily the individual class disruptions such

as snow days or fire drills that limited my study; rather, it was the overall lack of time for the project that served as a limitation. I would have loved to mimic Stafford's work, in which he truly and completely revised one entire unit project to contain all of the elements of a fantastic lesson. Instead, I revised a number of lessons in significant ways, but did not get to create a project that would have contained all of those elements across an entire unit. Additionally, I did not have time to incorporate the lessons of Pink that I would have liked to utilize in the classroom. Mastery Homework, FedEx Days, and DIY Report Cards are fantastic ideas that would certainly contribute a great deal to my classroom, however I just did not have time to plan and implement them with all of the other ideas and suggestions I was working with over the course of the project. Additionally, another limitation was that I failed to document each time I utilized one of the 9 Marzano Strategies in my classroom. I was able to document a few of them as I went through my reflections and field notes, however, it would have been very labor intensive to go back through each lesson and determine what strategies I utilized since I did not document the first time. This limitation, however, did not have a great impact overall on my research due to the fact that I analyzed so many different elements of the Stronge Evaluation Model and my use of Understanding by Design, in addition to how I achieved the goal set forth by each of the researchers I read about.

One major limitation that I will need to focus on in the future was the creation of Unit-long Enduring Understandings, not just daily ones. This was something my research partner and I discussed at length at multiple meetings, yet I did not manage to really create any of these Enduring Understandings and carry them across my Unit. This is something I will need to work on for teaching History next year.

### *Subjectivity*

My project really had only one major flaw in terms of subjectivity which affected both my notes as well as the feedback from my students -- my enthusiasm. It became clear to me that when I was enthusiastic about a lesson or topic, the students really seemed to feed on my enthusiasm. If I

was having a bad day, not only did the students pick up on that, but more often my reflections and field notes tended to be briefer or I just didn't do them at all. My data analysis and interpretations weren't too clouded by my enthusiasm or lack thereof, mostly because I utilized a coding method that was pretty straightforward and wasn't influenced by my present emotions. In terms of my perspective, I learned a lot about myself throughout this project, both in terms of what I find to be important and what type of teacher I want to be. My reflections say a lot about the things that bother me when I get home from work -- probably more than the successes I achieved. It is good to be aware of my own perspective and to keep it in check so I am not so hard on myself all the time.

### **Emerging Questions**

My questions for further study largely come from the things in this project that I was unable to do. First of all, I want to know, how can I incorporate the business concepts that Daniel Pink applies to the classroom such as Mastery Homework, FedEx Days, and DIY Report Cards into my classroom? Will these be successful or is his application too much of a stretch? Another emerging question is will I ever be able to revise an entire unit the way Stafford did to incorporate ALL of the elements of a great lesson? I hope that by my tenth year of teaching I will have the time and expertise to accomplish this goal. Additionally, an emerging question is will I be able to create Enduring Understandings that span entire units to help my students make better connections of each day's content and lesson to the overall purpose of that unit? This will take serious thought, effort and planning to be utilized effectively. Last but not least, how will my enthusiasm and dedication to United States History this year translate to teaching World History next year? Now that I have found myself has a teacher of United States History I, will my Philosophy of Teaching History carry over successfully to teaching World History?

### **Conclusion**

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed this research project and feel that my teaching and my mental well-being have greatly benefitted from it. Reading about how other teachers have dealt with

changes in district and state requirements, including testing, gave me incredible insight as to how to adapt to these changes with enthusiasm and grace, rather than the rejection and negativity that most teachers tend to react with. Throughout the last four months, when District Quarterly Exams, meetings about the PARCC, the new Evaluation model, and the Documentation Log were being discussed, I was confident in improving my classroom ability to meet the challenges and changes of whatever the state or district throws at me. By dedicating my time to changing and improving my practice, I was focused on truly meeting the changing demands rather than wasting my time complaining about them. This benefit in my classroom also translated into a mentally positive outcome because I watched so many teachers stress themselves out over the changes this year. Often, I became a source of comfort to others as I encouraged them to do the things I had read about - teach beyond the test (Au), dedicate time to improving their practice (Schorr), and remember the big picture (Gibson). Rather than deal with the changes as a source of stress, I saw them as a challenge that I had the capacity to overcome.

My study may be useful to others who are either stressed out by district and/or state changes or who are teaching a new class preparation that they may feel uncomfortable with or unsure of. For those who are stressed out, my study shows that focusing on what you can control in order to compensate for that which you cannot is much more satisfying in the classroom and emotionally than concerning oneself with changes beyond their control. By immersing myself in my classroom I was able to avoid the negativity and stress that often accompanies changes in testing, documentation, and teaching. This would be helpful especially to new teachers who feel pressured to “do it all,” or perhaps to those who have been teaching a few years and feel themselves hitting the so-called “burnout” and need to refocus and re-energize their practice. Additionally, my study is helpful to anyone who is teaching a new course or teaching a course in a new way for the first time and feels overwhelmed by all of the demands. Buzzwords like UBD, Marzano, Pyramid of Learning, WHERETO, Bloom’s, Costa’s, Differentiated Instruction, Cooperative Learning, Kinesthetic Learning,

and all of the others that are floating around the educational stratosphere can feel overwhelming and suffocating all at the same time. That does not mean, however, that they are not educationally valid ideas. That being said, a teacher does not need to revamp their entire classroom to utilize every single buzzword in the educational book, but it is certainly helpful to make minor changes and sometimes new lessons that take these principles, ideas, and philosophies into account.

This study seemed to have an incredibly positive impact on my student's learning -- if not in a measurable way than in the learning experience itself. In a time and school district where students are being tested more than ever, it is important to remember the big picture -- that these are children and we are a small step on a very long journey of their lives. Overwhelmingly my students appreciate the enthusiasm and effort I have put into the course. They seem to respond with a level of enthusiasm and effort that is unparalleled by any section of United States History I that I have ever taught in the last 5 years. Even though the effect may not be directly measurable in their test grades, SAT scores, or how much money they make in ten years, the fond memories of the lessons, discussions, and experiences we shared this year are an impact that I am happy with more than any increment of improvement on any quantitative measure of learning.

### **Implementation Plan**

When I began this project I was trying to determine how I could find the balance between the requirements set forth by my District and my own personality and style in the classroom. Effectively, I needed a Philosophy of Teaching for United States History I. After analyzing my journals, student data, and working on the Course of Study, it is evident to me that I have, in fact, created a Philosophy of Teaching History. I will use this study and this Philosophy of Teaching History when I begin teaching World History next schoolyear. Though I will be leaving the content of United States History behind, I will work to utilize my Philosophy of teaching all History classes to make teaching freshman World History next year a success.

### *My Philosophy of Teaching History*

As a History Teacher, I understand that my enthusiasm and dedication are the underlying elements to a successful year with my students. I am dedicated to take the time to plan out the school year and think about where I want my students to be - in academic skills, content, and life skills - by the end of our time together. I will then make a plan for each unit from beginning to end to gradually build the various skills my students will need to move onto the next year. I will not teach to the test that my students are being given, but rather will utilize the test as a basis for what the students need to know. I will work to continually improve good lessons and make them into great ones, recognizing that student feedback and my own reflection are essential components of which lessons are in need of revision for the following year and which are successful enough to use again. From the beginning, I will build rapport and trust with my students, always reminding them that the goal in my classroom is to learn the big picture, the big themes, and the big lessons, not the little details or facts. I will also work to remind myself each day that the goal in my classroom is the big picture -- not the little things.

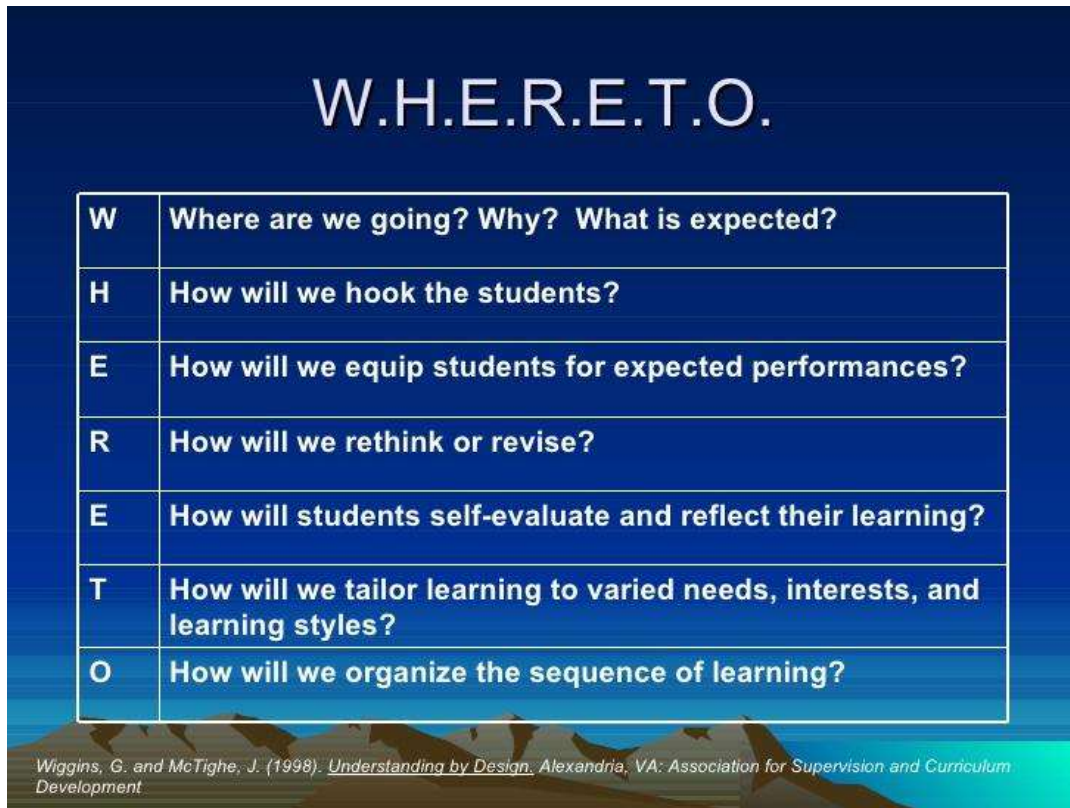
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: WHERETO Lesson Planning Format



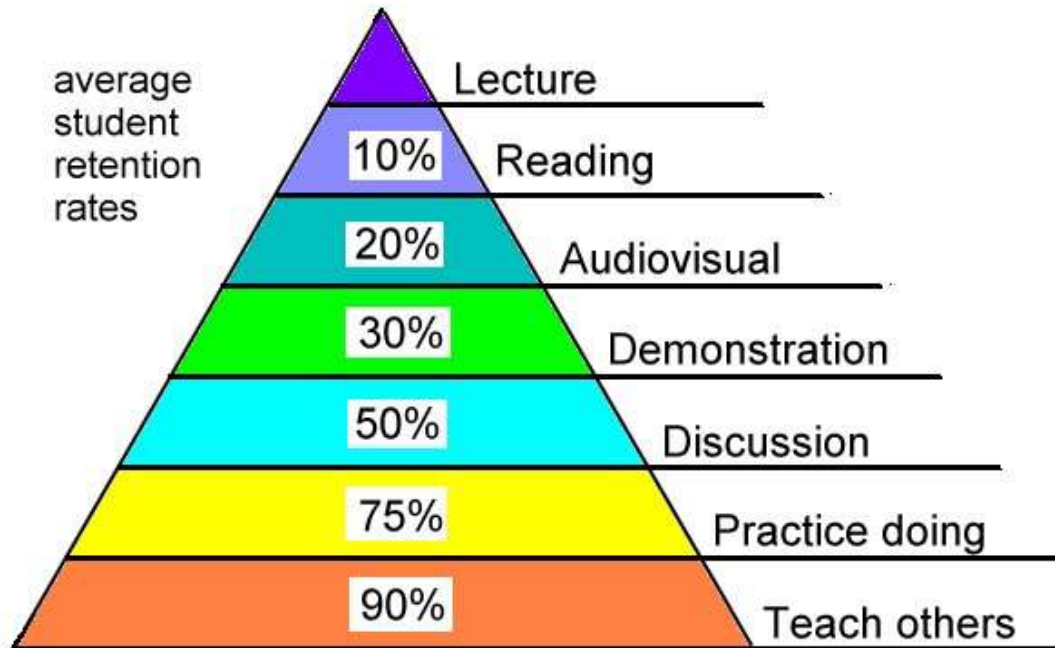
# W.H.E.R.E.T.O.

<b>W</b>	<b>Where are we going? Why? What is expected?</b>
<b>H</b>	<b>How will we hook the students?</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>How will we equip students for expected performances?</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>How will we rethink or revise?</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>How will students self-evaluate and reflect their learning?</b>
<b>T</b>	<b>How will we tailor learning to varied needs, interests, and learning styles?</b>
<b>O</b>	<b>How will we organize the sequence of learning?</b>

Wiggins, G. and McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Appendix 2: Pyramid of Retention Rates

## Learning Pyramid



Source: National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine