Analyzing Source Preferences in Student Writing When Integrating Diverse Texts

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Analyzing Source Preferences in Student Writing When Integrating Diverse Texts

Literacy is a cornerstone skill which is built upon in each grade. When students enter sixth grade they are expected to have command of literacy strategies in examining a text. An additional skill taught in sixth grade is citing sources. Students are exposed to different sources and then asked to give credit to those sources as they synthesize both literature and informational text. Students need to both accurately utilize the information and then correctly cite it. This article’s content focused on literacy in the social sciences pedagogy and stems from the expectations set by state and national initiatives.

The purpose is to examine how students conceptualize a historical event and to which sources students give credit for their understanding by using a graphic organizer. Two primary research questions drove the study: Can students accurately categorize historical information? What types of sources do students perceive as providing them with an understanding of history? With qualitative research methods and elements of coding student work emerging patterns in their source choices and the content of their responses were present when using a unit developed around best practices.

For educators and researchers, there is value in knowing which types of sources students favor. As students enter the middle grades this process of citing becomes increasingly important to curriculum and literacy needs set by the Common Core State Standards (hereafter CCSS). Through this article, educators will be made aware of source preference patterns of sixth grade students and can use these findings to inform their choices in types of sources they present to their own students.

Content Relevance

Three pedagogical issues in discussion of literacy are discipline-specific literacy, complexity, and critical analysis skills. Discipline-specific literacy refers to the idea that there is not only a responsibility of content-area teachers to incorporate literacy skills, but also that they should be accountable for solidifying those literacy skills through rich lessons in their classrooms. From history to physical education, each discipline has its own texts and vocabulary. Special attention needs to be paid to historical text in social studies classrooms and reading classrooms because “we have the obligation to research and maintain the academic authenticity of social studies content, and to assist students in developing strong inquiry skills...” (Ackerman, Howson, & Mulery, 2013, p. 22). The goal is to facilitate student understanding of history by looking at historical texts like historians would. Educators need to strive to “free history instruction from the mire of memorization and propel it with the kinds of inquiry that drive historians themselves” (Gewertz, 2012, p. 11). Educators need to embrace what distinguishes history as a discipline and tailor instruction accordingly.

Complexity of text and student understanding of that complexity also play a role in the significance of the content. Close reading is a strategy many teachers utilize when expecting students to read complex texts, including historical texts. Some recommendations for close reading of a complex text include, students doing multiple readings of the text, and teacher facilitation of a deep, meaningful discussion (Fang & Page, 2013). For this study, close reading involves students initially reading a text, rereading the text, then having classroom or partner discussion, and finally looking back at the text to find specific evidence or facts to support class discussion and text based
question. Providing students the strategies to read complex texts allows them to better understand what they read, and ultimately, use what they read for a specific task. The goal of providing students with complex texts is to not only promote reading comprehension and build content knowledge on a subject, but to give them an opportunity to think like historians (Gewertz, 2012). In other words, when teachers engage students in historical thinking they are strengthening comprehension and constructing content-specific knowledge.

Lastly, critical thinking is vital to this specific content and this action research. In order to fully emerge students in both literature and informational texts, students need to be given the opportunity to experience problem-based history, where students seek answers to questions through their own interpretations (Gewertz, 2012). By giving students multiple texts and allowing them to piece together history for themselves, the teacher is giving the students ownership of their learning and encouraging them to think as a historian. One way of accomplishing the task of activating students’ critical thinking skills is in reference to Bloom’s Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). The higher-level thinking not only requires student to comprehend information through various strategies, but also asks them to analyze, evaluate, or create. The goal is to have students use knowledge to perform more advanced cognitive processes (Krathwohl, 2002). Students are performing these more abstract tasks when they interpret texts in order to answer historical questions. It is true that social studies teachers, and content-area teachers alike, need to encourage those higher level thinking skills by providing lessons that assess student knowledge through challenging and stimulating activities and assessment (Stobaugh, Tassekk, Day, & Blakenship, 2011). This also applies to English Language Arts (hereafter ELA) teachers and their classroom use of literature or informational texts. Critical thinking skills should not be limited to one classroom or one subject. Just as literacy is expected to be taught in all classrooms, the same expectation should apply to critical thinking skills so students can apply them across all subjects—a major focus for state and national initiatives.

**State and National Education Initiatives**

State and national initiatives are a new driving force for teacher preparation and student education. Teachers have to be aware of what is expected of their students and be willing to adapt instruction to accomplish a given standard. The initiatives this research will focus on are CCSS, and Civic Life framework.

**Common Core State Standards.** The CCSS have altered expectations for students and for teachers. According to the standards, students are expected to analyze a multitude of complex texts across the fiction and nonfiction spectrum. The standards also require teachers be well-versed in their subject area. CCSS, as monitored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) emphasizes a shared responsibility for literacy (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010). This means that some form of literature should be used within all subject areas. Social studies is no exception. In social studies, and specifically history, “Part of the motivation behind the interdisciplinary approach promulgated by the standards is extensive research establishing the college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text in a variety of content areas” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010,
It is key for ELA and history educators to present students with texts that meet the expectation of the standards. The sixth-grade specific ELA standards are separated into Literature and Informational texts. The student standards are laid out by genre-specific expectations. For this study, the expectations of CCSS are met by integrating fiction and nonfiction texts to allow students to get a full picture of historical events and figures (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

To ensure focused learning, three standards were chosen from both Literature and Informational Text. For example, the first standard for both Literature and Informational Text reads, “Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 36). The goal is for students to specifically pick out evidence and cite that evidence in writing or speaking (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). There is a need for students to cite information they acquire or extract because it not only exposes the students to sourcing, but it helps students distinguish facts from opinion.

In addition to its emphasis on citing information and evidence, this study focuses on the integration of multiple sources. This research targets Standards 6.7 and 6.9, which state the need for students to compare and contrast multiple texts. Standard 7 specifically addresses the comparison of different media sources such as speech recordings or televised interviews. The wording of the Literature and Informational standards do vary slightly with Standard 7, but both Standards address the need for students’ comparison of different media. Standard 9 addresses the comparison and contrast of print sources. The Literature standards states, “Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 37). Similarly, the Reading Informational Text standard advises, “Compare and Contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 39). Both of these standards present the need for students to be able to compare and contrast richly diverse texts.

Social Studies ELA standards mirror the ELA standards and all three—Standard 1, Standard 7, and Standard 9—are applicable in nature to this study. For instance, Standard 1 the social studies ELA standards discusses citing sources but specifically “to support the analysis of primary and secondary sources” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 61). The idea of primary and secondary sources is more often relevant to social studies content but can be easily related to any nonfiction or information text presented in an ELA classroom.

In addition to the expectations of the individual standards in both ELA and History, NGA and CCSSO (2010) have broader hopes for students. With the students being expected to analyze primary and secondary sources, cite textual evidence, be aware of an author’s perspective and how it affects a text, verify multiple sources, and create spoken and written arguments, specific standards. Standard 9, for example, asks teachers to give students opportunities to get the most out of the text (Wineburg, Smith, & Breakstone, 2012). Additionally, there are special considerations because this content involves the use of historical texts. These particular considerations are found in the C3 framework.

The College, Career, and Civic Life Framework. The College, Career, and Civic Life framework (2013), known as the C3 framework, is also applicable to this action research because of the informational text component. History standards from ELA apply
as well as the strict history expectation of the C3 framework (2013). The C3 framework (2013) has four focused dimensions: inquiry, disciplinary concepts, source evaluation, and communicating found conclusions (National Council for Social Studies, 2013). Like CCSS (2010), the C3 framework (2013) supplies educators with guides but allows teacher to use professional judgment on how to teach a particular topic (National Council for Social Studies, 2013). This initiative believes that providing students a strong base of methods and tools will allow for productivity in college, in career, and in civic life (National Council for Social Studies, 2013). There has been a needed shift of the disciplinary focus to move social studies beyond simple facts to application in different stages of students’ academic careers. One way to ensure that these initiatives are applied is to teach using a wide range of texts, both literary and informational.

**Literature and Informational Text Focus**

The literature focus for this research will be modeled on a Twin Text format. In this model, Twin Texts draw from both fiction and nonfiction texts in order to show students a theme (Camp, 2000). In order to capture student interest and to introduce factual evidence, both fiction and informational texts will be utilized. This idea of Twin Text caters to the “enjoyment of reading while capitalizing on students’ fascination with facts” (Camp, 2000, p. 400). The idea of using texts from different reading genres sets up the concept of compare and contrast. Allowing the student to view multiple genre sources is allowing them multiple opportunities to truly comprehend the material.

Within the Twin Text model, the fiction or literature material plays a specific role in comprehension. Many students find nonfiction more difficult to read because of the density of the material, so the plot structure of fictional stories not only seems more entertaining, but more digestible for the majority of students (Camp, 2000). Literature, specifically historical fiction, presents historical events in a way that students can make text-to-self connections and relate to the character during a specific time period or historical event. Historical fiction allows students to see history in an emotionally relevant way by imagining themselves in different historical circumstances. This allows students to make connections and get a familiar perspective of an event (Hughes, 2013). The benefit of Twin Text historical fiction books is that it “provides contextual setting for a topic that might not be found in more sterile factual text” (Camp, 2000, p. 400). But to ensure context validity, nonfiction texts are vital to the success of historical fiction in the Twin Text model.

The need for nonfiction or informational text lies in the importance of basic knowledge of historical circumstances. The nonfiction genre allows for a more in depth look at the subject. The element of nonfiction helps bestow context to the fictional stories students read. This study focuses on students reading a story about Rosa Parks and her involvement in the Civil Rights movement. Many portrayals of her story do not show the events in real time. Often, students will take away that she started the Montgomery Bus Boycott because of her refusal to move from her seat. Here is an instance that without the addition of nonfiction texts students could misunderstand the whole historical incident in its full content. These nonfiction texts help “Children realize that change usually does not happen overnight, without support, or without specific skills and knowledge” (Meyers, Holbrook, & May, 2009, p. 11). Teachers need to ensure that after the literature content is
taught that the validity of the historical event is intact or reinforced by nonfiction texts to avoid students developing historical misconceptions.

**Curricular Resource Considerations**

Because this action research relies so heavily on text, there are several variables to consider when evaluating text choices and options. The two main forms of text are trade books and textbooks. Each type of text helps enrich student learning, but there are several concerns with both trade books and textbooks that could alter student understanding.

**Trade Book Content.** This action research, being a texts-based study, invited the use of trade books. This type of supplemental tool is described as any instructional book that is not categorized as a textbook. So biographies, history texts, fictional stories, any poetry, drama, or any informational book used to enhance student knowledge on a given topic all fall under the trade book category (McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991). As described by their publishers and reviewers, many trade books on the Civil Rights Movement are primarily categorized as nonfiction (Bickford & Schuette, 2016). These types of books supply vivid illustrations of historical content in a reader-friendly format. Trade books help students understand how historical stories develop and they promote a “‘history from the bottom up’” approach (Barton & Levstik, 2003, p. 359). This concept encourages teachers to choose texts about people’s daily experiences during historical events, whether that be through fiction or nonfiction. It is the job of the teacher to focus on pertinent social studies content, scaffold the production of student knowledge, and decide the role of a book or text within the curriculum of a chapter or unit (McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991). The consideration of genre affects the way students approach text and understand its distinct textual structures and features.

Text complexity can also influence student understanding. Allowing students to read text at their reading level has benefits. This provides the teacher with opportunities to facilitate learning instead of providing only direct instruction. This gives students the opportunity to interpret text and draw conclusions on their own (McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991). Then, instead of the teacher lecturing, there can be more time spent on expansion of knowledge and application reading strategies. Text complexity can also negatively impact student understanding. If a student is presented with a text that is beyond his or her reading level, not only will there be a level of frustration, but a lack of comprehension as well. This is not the goal of text complexity. The goal of text complexity is to present students with challenging text, but texts they are still capable of understanding.

An additional consideration with trade books is the validity of the content. Many trade books with content about the Civil Rights Movement present information in a reader friendly manner but fail to mention critical elements of the movement. So students with limited prior knowledge within this content could come to historical conclusions that are not accurate with actual historical events (Bickford & Schuette, 2016). When students are presented with selective information they can draw incorrect conclusions about an event or person. These books may rid the text of facts in order to connect or reach readers but this does not equate to a historically accurate text (Bickford & Schuette, 2016). For these reasons, during this study, students will be introduced to trade books along with other types of text to help them recognize any incorrect representations of events or people.
Authentic Assessment

In terms of assessment, the expectations for teachers have changed with the addition of the CCSS (2010). No longer is it acceptable to evaluate student thinking by asking students to bubble in an answer on a Scantron sheet. Teachers need to make certain any assessment they present to students truly makes the students access a higher-level of thinking (Strobaugh et al., 2011). To guarantee that students are using higher-level thinking skills, “Social studies teachers should strive to create assessments that require students to make inferences and exhibit critical thinking skills” (Strobaugh et al., 2011, p. 4). By creating an assessment that requires students to apply critical thinking skills, there are more chances that these skills will be applied to real world or other content specific questions. Multiple-choice and many other types of summative assessment are further problematic because they promote memorization of facts when students need to be learning to interpret and analyze those facts (Wineburg et al., 2012). These tests provide data on one form of student comprehension in the form of comprehension checking questions (Fiene & McMahon, 2007).

One way to facilitate higher level thinking is using graphic organizers. Graphic organizers are well-adopted to gather data on what students extract from text. Venn diagrams are graphic organizers that are often utilized to help students organize information in a visual manner. These visual tools help students organize information by highlighting connections and relationships between story elements or historical events (Dirksen, 2011). Essentially, Venn diagrams allow students to create a visual for compared and contrasted information. These graphic organizers are categorized as an interactive strategy that can be used as a type of assessment (Camp, 2000). These graphic organizers can be completed whole class, in small groups, or individually. They provide opportunities for students to interact with the text, each other, and the teacher. In addition, the literature supports using technology in the form of SmartBoards and digital Venn diagrams when responding to and categorizing events (Rycik & Rosler, 2009).

In using Venn diagrams for an assessment, they can be used to understand student thinking in how items are categorized, what is categorized, and how much the student includes in their compare contrast analysis. This assessment is not multiple choice; rather, it is more student-created as opposed to teacher-created. To tie this into the CCSS (2010), citations by could be required by each piece of information the student categorizes thus, meeting the criteria for Standard 1.

Formative Assessment

In addition to being an interactive tool, Venn diagrams could be used for formative assessment. This type of assessment involves the educator noticing student literacy behavior in daily classroom activities (Johnston & Costello, 2005). For example, this could be used with a unit on Civil Rights. Students were asked to compare and contrast two events in the Civil Rights Movement, specifically ones based on the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Within the unit, students will compare and contrast people and events and then use what they have learned later in the unit as well. Because this type of assessment requires student writing, it gives the teacher insight into student thinking. Recording what the student recalls from a text allows the teacher to see “conceptions and misconceptions” they may develop from the texts (Deuel, Nelson, Slavit, & Kennedy, 2009, p. 70). By analyzing these graphic organizers, data can be collected through this daily student
activity. These organizers help educators identify what students are understanding from the text and what they are not fully grasping (Dirksen, 2011).

The act of using graphic organizers for assessment also sets up data for differentiation. This will guide lessons and allow me to correct any thinking that may be historically inaccurate. When looking at students’ writing samples, the literature states, “Several times, students’ written explanations revealed errors in their thinking even though they had selected the correct answer” (Deuel et al., 2009, p. 71). The literature also states that the objective of formative assessment is not to give students a grade or rate their work, but to decipher where they are having difficulties and tailor instruction around student need (Wineburg et al., 2012). This assessment is often used to identify student strengths and potential within literacy (Fiene & McMahon, 2007). It is an opportunity for an educator to notice patterns within student performance in classroom activities. As mentioned, using the Venn diagram as a formative assessment allows the teacher to see student comprehension and student thinking when comparing and contrasting. Pedagogy is intended to enhance content understanding, or at least make denser content more manageable for young learners. The text based pedagogy is based on the best available historical content.

**Historiography**

Although the Civil Rights Movement is commonly taught in many elementary and middle school classrooms, the validity of the content is not always intact. Many students have a limited view of the true struggle of African Americans. The movement is often reduced to a few key events such as Martin Luther King Jr.’s *I Have a Dream Speech* or the enforcement of Jim Crow laws in the south. In reality, the Civil Rights Movement is a series of events spanning hundreds of years and should bring light to more than just common social struggles and injustices (Bickford & Bickford, 2015). Students often get a limited view of the span of the movement. Many well-known histories skim the events prior to the 1950s focusing on the more enthralling sit-ins, social unrest, and major legislative decisions (Theoharis, 2013). Within the span of events which are often taught, the story of Rosa Parks and the events of the Montgomery Bus Boycott are typically present in student schema.

In actuality, the need for justice in the Montgomery Bus System did not begin during the 1950s. Bus segregation began in mid-twentieth century when a first boycott was staged to change the city ordinance to specifically state that no African American rider had to give up their seat when there were open seats for white riders (Theoharis, 2013). It was a victory, but that ordinance was not enforced, and before Parks made her famous social stand, many African Americans paid the heavy price for showing resistance.

Rosa Parks, like many key individuals in the Civil Rights Movement, began working for resistance many years before she refused to move from her seat on the bus. She had been involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, known as the NAACP, since 1943 (Theoharis, 2013). After years of witnessing and fighting against racial inequality, Parks took action. After her arrest, her willingness to act and her ordinary persona gained the trust and admiration of the people of Montgomery (Theoharis, 2013). She had sparked the people of Montgomery to want to fight for a change.
But if her incident was the spark, the boycott was the flames. The Montgomery Bus Boycott set the tone for the protest style and introduced the nonviolent mantras we know today (Zinn, 2003). The movement did get a boost from Parks’s arrest, but it did not stop there. The involvement of Martin Luther King Jr. and his organized nonviolent protest style was put to use on a large scale. For days, weeks, and months, the people of Montgomery showed their tenacity and desire for just social conditions before the Supreme Court deemed bus segregation illegal (Zinn, 2003). These efforts were not met without threats of violence. King was attacked in his home and push back from the white community came as the boycott gained momentum (Theoharis, 2013). The boycott was a 381 day struggle by a determined community of people.

The curricular choice of incorporating the information from the Civil Rights Movement is both beneficial from a historical and ELA standpoint. Presenting the events of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and highlighting Parks’s involvement will clear up misconceptions and encourage critical thinking and inquiry. While students can learn of Parks’s contributions through her arrest record and mug shot, they can also discover the depth of others’ involvement, like Claudette Colvin, JoAnn Robinson, and E.D. Nixon, as well as the resistance the movement faced. By utilizing such resources such as Parks’s arrest records, copies of Montgomery city bus codes, photographs of boycotters, and trade books, the students will be exposed to many types of text and visuals. Presenting information on the Civil Rights Movement can reinforce the CCSS (2010) requirement of a balanced literacy by exposing students to both literature and informational texts with the same content. By using this topic, students are exposed to a crucial span of events in American history and exposed to a plethora of texts both fiction and informational. The text, visuals, and literature will be detailed in the methods section of this research.

Lesson Methods

In order to integrate the expectations of the C3 Framework and the Common Core State standards, unit of study was created to examine student source preferences. This was all done in hopes to gather data that give insight into which sources students place the more importance and merit when conceptualizing a historical event. This study took place in two sixth grade Reading classrooms. The two respective Reading classes are taught at different times during the day. One is taught in the morning and the other is taught in the afternoon. The student population of the morning class includes both regular education students, students who receive Title I services, and gifted students. The afternoon class includes both regular education students Title I students, and special education students with Individualized Education Plans. The total students participating in the study was 46.

Preliminary Content and Instructional Procedures

The initial lessons leading up to this study focused on a timeline continuum of events. Students were introduced to the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement by understanding the events that led up to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. I began this unit by teaching students about slavery. Before broaching the Montgomery Bus Boycott, students discussed major topics like slavery, reconstruction, the great migration, and examples of social injustices. Students were introduced to key vocabulary words and content specific terms like segregation, discrimination, lynching, and The National Association for Advancement of Colored People. I used both text-based and visual primary sources to present students with historical information these preliminary lessons.
A vital lesson taught with the initial lessons are sourcing and citation (Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). When the students read or examined a document that is categorized as a historical document, they go through a process called “sourcing”. In this process the students look for four elements: Who made or wrote it? When did they make or write it? Why was it recorded? Is the information believable? They learned this procedural sourcing prior to this set of lessons and are familiar with how to locate the information. The purpose of sourcing is to not only gather basic information about a source for citation purposes, but to also question its validity. After sourcing, students will cite the document. We will use Modern Language Association, hereafter MLA, as per my district guidelines, to create an in text citation for each text. Then it was recorded on the student copy of the document.

Another preliminary lesson is focused on close reading. This is taught in the first few weeks of school. So by the time students use close reading with the material in this study, they have completed this type of reading process for several months. As noted previously, close readings, or careful scrutiny of a text using discipline-specific strategies involving annotation, discussion, and multiple readings of the text, is a strategy used to dissect all types of texts. The annotating includes marking the text with question, inferences, text connections, and underlining for importance. In history, students are tasked with considering the source’s bias or perspective, the context in which it was written, and other considerations like its credibility or if the source is congruent with other sources (Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). With these additional considerations on top of understanding the main idea and details of the text, the close reading process adequately equips students with the reading tools to complete this task.

Content and Instructional Procedures

To begin the lessons focused on Rosa Park and the Montgomery bus boycott, I first shared a historical fiction trade book. I began by building student knowledge of the Rosa Parks bus incident. Historical fiction taps into prior knowledge and provides an accessible introduction before they move on to primary documents and information texts. The books used for the first lesson is titled If A Bus Could Talk by Faith Ringgold (1999). This text introduces a reader-friendly version of Parks’s story with a simple plot structure and easy readability. I began the lesson by having the students take notes on a small piece of paper. They took one minute to record anything they knew about Rosa Parks and her life story. Then they were shared these early observations. I wanted to see what students knew and take note of any misconceptions. Before the initial reading, there was a whole group discussion about the intended audience of this book, and fictional elements were pointed out and discussed. For example, the narrator of the story was a talking bus. Then, I read the book aloud to them in its entirety. Then, I presented students with excerpts of the text which we used for close reading examination. There was a second read done by the students, discussion, and additional annotations made to the text. To complete this lesson, the MLA parenthetical citation was written on the excerpts for further reference.

After introducing the historical fiction element, I presented several primary documents on Parks. I first shared a copy of the Montgomery City Bus Code, court evidence, and an excerpt from Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Russell Freedman (2006). Students received their own copy of each document and photograph. They were first asked to closely read and annotate the Montgomery City Bus Code. This document explains the law and where passengers were expected to sit based on their race. Then students looked at court
evidence of where Parks was sitting. It was established she was not sitting in the whites only section, but in a middle section where blacks could sit until their seat was needed by a white person (Theoharis, 2013).

To add to this information, there were given an excerpt from Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Russell Freedman (2006). They were asked to read the excerpt and record findings in an organizer known as a double entry journal. The organizer has three columns: one for page number, one for text, and one for the student’s thoughts or reactions. After observing an initial model of how to complete the organizer, the students worked independently on completing the reading and the organizer. It was used for discussion for lesson three before continuing with another source.

This lesson began with sharing and discussing the text from yesterday’s reading. Students had the opportunity to highlight important pieces of text and voice their thoughts on that text. I pointed out a few key quotes and used those as a basis for discussion. After focusing on Parks, I began teaching about the boycott as a whole. I first presented students with an excerpt from the book If You Lived at the Time of Martin Luther King by Ellen Levine (1990). The excerpt focuses on what happened prior to Parks’s incident and during the boycott. For the lesson, I read aloud a section of text called “What is the Montgomery Bus Boycott?” Students picked out meaningful quotes or paraphrased information. Each student had an individual copy of the book to reread and reference. Then they commented on each piece of text. Similar to the previous day, students replicated the process of sharing.

Again, to begin the lesson, students shared their important findings from If You Lived at the Time of Martin Luther King by Ellen Levine (1990). This book mentions a woman named JoAnn Robinson but gives only a limited explanation of her involvement in the boycott (Theoharis, 2013). For this lesson the students looked at a primary source document of the leaflet Robinson distributed to inform the people of Montgomery about the boycott. The students read the document to themselves and annotated. Then I read it aloud and we discussed key phrases and information as I read. The process of sourcing was completed on this primary source. The students unanimously determined that it was a reliable document and source.

It was discovered that a common misconception is that Rosa Parks was not the first person to refuse to give up her seat. For lesson number six, the students sought to understand the story of Claudette Colvin and her role in the boycott (Theoharis, 2013). It has been established that a common misconception is that Rosa Parks was the first person to refuse to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus (Theoharis, 2013). Students explored the idea that there was girl who enacted the exact same protest as Parks but is not well known. We began by looking at her arrest records. I took this information from a book called Claudette Colvin: Twice Towards Justice written by Phillip Hoose (2009). We did close reading on this document. Then we read an excerpt from Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Russell Freedman (2006). This excerpt affords students insight into why Colvin is not recognized as Parks is today. Students also engaged in close reading and class discussion with this excerpt as well.

To add a visual element after several texts, I used the text If You Lived at the Time of Martin Luther King by Ellen Levine (1990) in conjunction with Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Russell Freedman (2006). For this lesson, I used visuals from Freedman’s book to answer questions suggested in Levine’s text (1990). The students had a worksheet with two questions and boxes labeled “before reading” and “after reading.” They answered the questions based on what they knew and what they could infer before looking at text.
or visuals. The questions were “How did people get to work and to school?” and “What did City Officials and segregationists do about the boycott?” to anchor our close reading of the photographs. Then I presented them with excerpts from Levine’s book (1990) and visuals from Freedman’s (2006). This lesson utilized both texts for a visual understanding of the challenges overcome to continue the boycott for over a year (Theoharis, 2013).

The last text I presented was Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2008). I used this as a read aloud and asked students to take notes using the double entry notes organizer. Because this was used as a read aloud only, I guided students through the note taking process and pointed out passages for them to add to their organizer since they did not have a copy of the text. This book focuses on the Jim Crow laws and their part in the boycott (Theoharis, 2013). There are several instances of figurative language in this book, and I utilized them in conversation, discussion, and students notetaking.

After all texts were presented, the students completed a Venn diagrams to organize information. In order to give the students optimal room for their responses, they were given a modified Venn diagram, shown in Appendix D. Previous experience has shown that a traditional Venn diagram limits responses because of space restrictions. This modified graphic organizer gives the students more space to write and more room to write their additional responses. Within the Venn diagram, students were required to make comparisons and contrasts between the Rosa Parks story and the actual Montgomery Bus Boycott. The organizer was pre-labeled for which section is for Parks response and which is for the boycott (See Appendix D). While the students completed the graphic organizer, they simultaneously cited each piece of information using MLA citations. The citation requirement was part of the initial directions. Students had a whole class period to complete the Venn diagram, which is around fifty minutes. Time was also used in the writing class period because several students were not done or expressed that they had more they wanted to include. Hard copies of the sources were on display for students use.

Assessment Methods

To assess the Venn diagram, I used a self-created rubric to assess the students. There are four categories on the rubric. The first category is Number of quality comparing statements. The purpose of this category is the measure the number of compare contrast statements the students submit. I wanted to ensure they are getting a full picture of this historical event, so I have made the number of responses for maximum points 12 or more. This confirmed that they are extracting several pieces of information for the sources. Both compare and contrast responses count towards this category’s total of 12 responses for maximum points.
After looking at the number of responses, I assessed their validity using the *Placement of statement within the Venn diagram* category. I wanted to take into account the students’ understanding of Parks’s role and the whole Montgomery Bus Boycott. Just because a student has several compare contrast statements written does not confirm that they have understanding of the information. The next category, *Integration of sources*, measures how many sources students use to cite their information they categorize on their Venn diagrams. This showed me if they relied on one source, a few sources, or if they were able to synthesize sources to show understanding. Lastly, I assessed the students’ ability to correctly cite the sources using the Modern Language Association requirements. This not only shows which sources the students choose to use, but meets the requirements set forth by the NGA & CCSSO (2010) on citing information from text and other sources.

All lessons taught in the short unit were in alignment with both the State/National initiatives and the current curriculum written for sixth grade. There are elements of multiple sources and citing of sources fulfills the requirements set by NGA & CCSSO (2010). The topic itself falls under the unit theme called “Standing Up” set by the district curriculum committee which consists of teachers and administrators. In keeping with NGA & CCSSO (2010) standards and current curriculum, it was effortless to incorporate this study into the classroom. Students were not under the impression that the lessons were different from common daily activities.
Equally important as the acknowledgement of the NGA & CCSSO (2010) and current curriculum, the findings in the study were done will help drive instruction.

Findings

Figure 1. Student response sample

When examining the Venn diagrams, I began with an initial reading. During this initial evaluation, I also counted the number of total responses each student recorded and recorded those findings. Then I read the responses a second time. During this reading, I used the self-made rubric to score the students on number of responses, accuracy of information placement, and then attended to the students’ use of citations and how accurately they cited (see Table 1). On a second evaluation, I looked at my notes on the student Venn diagram to record the number of accurate responses. This included vague or unclear information, irrelevant facts, or incorrect information. Using Microsoft Excel, I recorded findings on four elements of the student responses. Those elements were accuracy, complexity, corroboration, and multifaceted corroboration.

Accuracy

Accuracy was determined by noting how many correct responses students recorded on their modified Venn diagram. When looking at students’ accuracy, I first recorded the total number of responses for each student and calculated the median. With some students writing nine responses and some students writing as many as 34 responses the median number was 14. Coincidentally, the maximum number of response boxes on a page was also fourteen. It was common for students to complete the response portion of the Venn diagram by writing a statement in each of the provided boxes. They were given additional response boxes on request, but it can be noted that many students completed the fourteen boxes to fulfill the assignments requirements. So, many students felt they had completed the assignments when they filled in all 14 response boxes.
It was then necessary to reread the students’ data to note any responses that were vague, irrelevant, or incorrect. This step ensured accuracy of student assessment. An example of a vague student response “They were mad.” An irrelevant fact would be “The KKK rode horses.” Incorrect information includes a response that claims “The bus boycott lasted for 200 hundred years.” An example of an accurate response can be seen in Figure 1 response box 1. The student accurately conveyed the information about Parks and noted the date of her bus incident. The total number of accurate student responses ranged from six to 34. The median number of accurate student responses was 14. By comparing the two the medians, the total number of responses and the responses that were deemed accurate, it can be determined that students frequently responded with accurate information based on the sources presented to them.

**Complexity**

When examining complexity, I scrutinized the student responses and attended to how the responses were placed on the Venn diagram. As an educator-researcher, an additional area of concern was how students scored on the rubric I created. Students were scored on number of quality comparing statements, placement of statements within the Venn diagram, integration of sources, and citation. Students were scored using a scale of four to one. Four represented above grade level and one represented below grade level. An example of a quality response can be seen in Figure 1 response box 9. This student included a correct response, it was correctly placed on the Venn diagram, and the citation was included and accurate. With four categories, the rubric will be scored from a total of sixteen points. Using the rubric to total students’ scores, I calculated the median score out of 16 total points. The average score out of the 46 students was 14. The average percentage was an 86 percent. This demonstrated that students wrote with appropriate levels of complexity.

**Corroboration**

Corroboration is providing evidence to confirm or support a claim. Since a large portion of my research was based on the idea of citing sources, the element of corroboration focuses on whether or not students supported responses by citing a source. I evaluated students’ effective use of corroboration. Stated differently, I examined the frequency with which students substantiated their claims by citing supporting evidence. When looking at the students’ work, there were only six students who did not label their responses with citations. Meaning, these students did not include any citations with their responses. Throughout the lessons, students were presented with seven different sources all relating to Rosa Parks or the Montgomery Bus Boycott. An example of a corroborated response is shown in Figure 1 response box 8. The student not only provided an author, but provided a page number for the information as well. Overall, the median number of sources students cited was four. According to my rubric, this was considered on grade level. This is significant because it shows that the rubric I created allowed for the majority of students to show on grade level performance, while allowing opportunity for students to also show above grade level capabilities.

Looking at which sources students used most often, students relied heavily on an informational text that was used multiple times. During the unit the book *Freedom Rider’s the Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott* (2006) by Russell Freedman was used to help students understand several aspects of the boycott. In fact, students who used fewer than three sources, meaning they scored at a “progressing to grade level” or “below grade level”, cited this source most often. This may stem from the fact that it was a repeated source and they felt most familiar
with the text or the fact that they had a higher quantity of notes and annotations done on this source. The sources that were used the least were the primary source documents. In contrast to the informational text, these were used just once, but were given extensive attention with close reading and discussion.

**Multifaceted Corroboration**

Students, at times, cited multiple sources when categorizing information. This indicates students’ awareness of a multitude of corroborative evidence. So, an additional finding was that students cited multiple sources for one response. Confirming the validity of a source through multiple sources was not a mandatory requirement of this assignment. This was not a common pattern among students, but a noteworthy one. This occurred seven times within the student data, but it shows higher order thinking and complex understanding. These students were able to find similar understanding within multiple texts, paraphrase those facts into a concise statement, and correctly note the sources. The significance of this finding shows that both male and female students were able to apply multifaceted corroboration to their responses. It can be noted that out of the eight students who used multifaceted sources, the majority of them were gifted or high-achieving students. Conversely, one of the students received Title I services. This variety suggests that the capability of students to use multifaceted corroboration is not limited to gifted and high achieving students, but a skill that the average sixth grader is proficient enough to complete.

Students who cited multiple sources for a single response tended to cite both informational text and a trade book. Only three times were primary source documents used in a multifaceted response. An example of an informational text and a primary source cited in conjunction is shown in Figure 1 response box 3. Also only two students cited using two trade books. However, the informational texts were used most frequently in lessons throughout the unit.

**Discussion**

When examining the Venn diagrams from a qualitative standpoint I attended to four features: observations with primary documents, observations with trade books, interconnections of understanding, and educational appreciations. These findings were recorded throughout the research process as observational notes. Notes were taken both during in class discussion and after as part of a reflective journal.

**Primary Documents**

Since this unit relied heavily on historical content, primary documents are a major point of note. When looking at how students responded to sources, I found that through the close reading process, with multiple readings, students were able to comprehend the historical content effectively. Based on classroom discussion and my own observations, the documents that provided students with the most insight and complex understanding were text based. Text-based documents generated lengthy, rich discussions even though the texts themselves were excerpts or short in length. As shown in Figure 2, text as brief as a quarter of a page allowed for quick reading time and ample contribution to their understanding. Through close reading students were able to create their own working knowledge and unique understanding of the text. Instead of lecture based class structure, students were given the text and asked to make meaning out of
the text before it was discussed with partners or before I guided them through the text. This allowed them to authentically come to their own conclusions and form meaningful understandings.

Chapter 6 Section 11 of the Montgomery City Code

"Any employee in charge of a bus operated in the city shall have the powers of a police officer of the city while in actual charge of any bus, for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the preceding section, and it shall be unlawful for any passenger to refuse or fail to take a seat among those assigned to the race to which he belongs, at the request of any such employee in charge, if there is such a seat vacant. The first ten seats are reserved for whites. The last ten were for blacks. The seats in between are open seating until space is needed for whites."

Figure 2. Historical Document Example


The photographs presented did not elicit as much discussion as I presumed they would. In two different lessons I presented them with visuals. It seemed as if students dismissed the photographs as not having as much weight or information as the texts. These sources, it seemed, were merely used for visual confirmation of what text had stated, and students did not feel the need to engage in lengthy discussion about the photographs. The only exception to this was the visual I provided them featuring evidence from Rosa Parks’s arrest (see Appendix B). The students examined Parks’s location on the bus. This document brought students to think about Parks’s location compared to the regulations set by the city code. Students actively wrote on the document, made inferences, and connected information to previous information.

When looking at the documents, the students were very attentive to small details that the documents provided. As we examined the documents, I took notes on a blank copy noting information the students gravitated towards in discussion. It was evident when looking at the documents that students paid tremendous attention to detail. For example, when investigating the arrest of Claudette Colvin a student noted that the time of her arrest was after the school day (see Appendix C). The class then inferred that she was arrested on her way home from school. Also, the students read a leaflet made by Jo Ann Robinson notifying the people of Montgomery about the plan to boycott the buses. After close reading, a student noted the date of the leaflet compared to other dates we had encountered in other readings. Without putting importance on dates during my teaching, the students were attending to their importance, in terms of putting events in chronological order.
When citing information on their Venn diagrams, students did not frequently cite primary source documents. One reason for this could be the number of them that I provided to the students. Compared to the other types of texts, primary sources were utilized less frequently in my lessons. However, this was unforeseen. Based to the quality of discussion and student interest, it was unanticipated that students would not corroborate their responses using primary documents. They were used more as a source of validation or to authenticate information they had previously read.

**Trade Books**

As mentioned previously, trade books are any instructional books used that aren’t categorized as textbooks. In this study, I used four trade books. Two trade books are categorized as information text and two are considered historical fiction. Informational texts were the most heavily relied on source by the students. These were also the sources I used most frequently to present information. This text was very reader friendly and easily accessible to even struggling readers. Using these texts, particularly those from Levine (1990) and Freedman (2006), the students got multiple exposures to text on multiple days. It is my conclusion that these texts provided students with solid understanding which served as a catalyst to promote further understanding. This text allowed low-level or struggling readers to make meaning and simultaneously enabled higher-level readers to get a basic understanding and add their additional thinking.

The trade books with more of a fictional element but historical content were cited less but provoked dynamic and complex discussion. Adding a more fictional component to the content brought a mix of facts and literacy elements. The element of narrative played a major role in classroom discussion with this type of text. In the book *If A Bus Could Talk* by Faith Ringgold (1999) the narrator was a talking public transportation bus and in *Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation* by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2008) the narrator was a Blues-singing dog. The idea of a narrator brought up discussion about voice and narration techniques used. I called attention to authorial choice of narrator and students engaged in discussion about the author’s choice to create a fictional, and almost fantastic, narrator. It was generally decided that the narrator was chosen to appeal to a younger audience. Even though it may seem elementary, establishing that the narrator was inspired by an element of fantasy helped students discuss author motive and reject different fantastic details in the text. For example, according to the students, using a talking bus might draw in reader because young readers would connect the narrator with another popular book series with an animated bus. This means that students were reading for meaning, while also being aware of considerations presented by the genre of historical fiction.

Along with the narration, historical fiction presented students with illustrations. In particular, the text *Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation* by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2008) used literary elements and illustrations. With this trade book, symbolism plays a major role. The book is based on the presence of Jim Crow law in the South. Pinkney uses encoded symbolism and dramatic illustrations to help readers understand the controversial social laws. This was a text I did strictly as a read aloud book, so I could lead discussion at the same time as the text was presented. In doing this, I guided students understanding with scaffolding and allow them to interpret the text. Notably, the text provided engaging prose and evocative images for students to examine and make meaning. Throughout the book the students picked up on the
repetition of the narrator and the presence of Jim Crow, both in text and in the illustrations. In terms of citation preference, this source was cited most often to convey that students learned that the bus boycott ended and the Supreme Court outlawed bus segregation on November 13th, 1956. Until this text, that fact had not been established. This was meaningful because with all of the additional features of literature, illustrations and symbolism, students were able to recognize the importance of those elements while determining key information from the text.

**Interconnections of Understanding**

Presenting multiple texts and multiple types of text positioned students to make interconnections between information. A major component of looking at information in this unit was the idea of sourcing. As mentioned previously, sourcing is when students question the text’s integrity by answering a series of four questions. This helps students decide if the information from a historical document, a fact in a book, or claim a character makes is valid. So when students were answering the sourcing question of whether or not the information they read was believable, they were connecting to what they read in other texts to validate information. For instance, reading in a trade book that Jo Ann Robinson distributed leaflets was deemed authentic and believable because the students could corroborate that information with a primary source. Students were able to make the connection between the two sources by questioning validity and confirming facts through the other source. In fact, that notion that information was mentioned in another source was a common student response when sourcing. So when introducing sources, as we read more about Parks and the bus boycott it only further established the historical information from previous lessons. This shows the presence of reconsideration in student thinking throughout this unit. Reconsideration is the idea that historical learning is done by building on understanding. Much like bricks are laid and cemented together, ideas and concepts are learned and connected and built upon as new information is learned. So this suggests that the students were using corroboration to verify facts. Then they were able to construct knowledge as they gained new information.

When students were examining sources for information, they not only made connections; they also noted the lack of interconnections between texts. This was most evident when learning about Claudette Colvin. Students were first exposed to information about Colvin when close reading a trade book excerpt. An overwhelming number of students commented on the fact that this person was never mentioned in any source prior to this lesson. They questioned her role and importance because, unlike historical figures such as Parks and King, they had no prior knowledge of Colvin. They recognized the omission of this historical figure and interrogated the reasons behind it. This idea that information was excluded prompted students to question why and led to engagement as Colvin’s story was examined through other texts.

**Educational Appreciations**

One of my main concerns as an educator was ensuring the lessons associated with this study were relevant to curriculum and the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). After teaching and assessing student work, I can conclude that the lessons attended to the needs of the student and the grade level requirements set by CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Having a focus on citing and looking at student citation completed the requirement by CCSS that students will cite information and their inferences from the text (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). It was reassuring that students were able to take the citation skills I have been continually reinforcing and use them when synthesizing this historical content.
Another set of standards I focused on involved reading, comparing, and contrasting texts from different genres. This idea was the basis for my study. I had some concerns about the length of this unit. I wanted to present students with an adequate amount of texts and a well-rounded selection of information. My main concern was the length of the unit itself. I did not want to overwhelm students with source after source. I was concerned that sources that were examined early in the unit would be forgotten or disregarded. In reflecting on the unit, this was not a variable in student learning. With adequate notes and repeated readings of text, students were able to acknowledge a variety of sources. I attribute this to close reading and the students making concrete meaning of text and attaching that meaning to a source.

Another aspect relating to CCSS was the students’ ability to make purposeful connections to the text. As mentioned previously, students were quick to connect new information to previously studied material. They were able to do this without prompting, and it often came about in the sourcing process. Comparing one author’s statements to another author’s to check for validity is a skill that is addressed in CCSS Standard 9 (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). But students were not only connecting between information learned in reading, but other subjects as well. For example, when reading Jo Ann Robinson’s leaflet promoting the boycott, the fact that she used repetition was pointed out by a student. This student commented on how Robinson was using repetition as a persuasive tactic to get people to remember the important information about the boycott. During the time of this unit, the students were simultaneously learning about persuasive and argument writing. This shows that students were closely reading the text and transferring knowledge that was learned in one subject area and applying it to another. This reinforces the CCSS recommendation of integrating reading and writing and making cross curricular connections (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Lastly, CCSS encourages the educator to facilitate learning. True facilitation is not a hands off approach to teaching, but guiding students through information while letting each student construct their own meaning. Using close reading I could see this was accomplished. No two students annotated a text exactly the same. Higher-achieving students were able to note their deep understanding and struggling readers noted main ideas and key aspects to help with comprehension. Even though I guided them to notice certain aspects of a text or visual, it was up to them to make meaning of what I presented. In this unit I felt facilitation was accomplished most notably in the students spent working on their Venn diagrams. I presented students with a task, modeled the task, and they worked on completing their own Venn diagrams. During the work period, the students were focused and engrossed in the task before them. Students were reading notes, organizing their annotation and documents, and diligently writing and citing their information. Students who normally do not participate willingly were working carefully on completing the Venn diagram. Struggling students were confident in the task and needed little scaffolding to complete the Venn diagram. I was able to circulate the room helping students when they required assistance. I observed engaged students eager to show what they had learned about Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. As mentioned in the methods section, I purposefully extended the work period on this assignment because students were requesting more time to work. In my professional opinion, this was a beneficial use of class time because students were reading, writing, and using higher order thinking skills.

In summation, emphasizing sourcing and the importance of different sources when teaching about a historical topic is worthwhile. Examining which sources students are favoring provides insight into their thinking and insight into the teacher materials and practices used to
present the information. Allowing the C3 Framework and the CCSS to guide the teaching of a historical unit not only meets state and national initiatives, but provides purpose for both student and teacher. Requiring students to read, write, and cite while using higher order thinking skills is undoubtedly best practice, and it is a great means to gather qualitative data on students work and your practices.
References


National Council for the Social Studies (2013). *College, career, and civic life (C3) framework for social studies state standards: Guidelines for enhancing the rigor of k-12 civics, economics, geography, and history*. Silver Spring, MD: NCSS.


Appendix A- Trade Book List


Appendix B

Evidence of Rosa Parks’s Position on City Bus

Illustration of bus where Rosa Parks sat, December 1, 1955

Appendix C

Claudette Colvin Arrest Report

Appendix D

Modified Venn Diagram

Response Boxes

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