

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

6-29-2006

## The effect of a constructivist social studies unit on student attitudes toward social studies

Kristi L. Arruzzo  
*Rowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Arruzzo, Kristi L., "The effect of a constructivist social studies unit on student attitudes toward social studies" (2006). *Theses and Dissertations*. 879.  
<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/879>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [graduateresearch@rowan.edu](mailto:graduateresearch@rowan.edu).

THE EFFECT OF A CONSTRUCTIVIST SOCIAL STUDIES UNIT ON  
STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL STUDIES

by  
Kristi L. Arruzzo

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Science in Teaching Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
July 29, 2006

Approved by

Advisor

Date Approved

6/29/06

© Kristi L. Arruzzo

## ABSTRACT

Kristi L. Arruzzo

### THE EFFECT OF A CONSTRUCTIVIST SOCIAL STUDIES UNIT ON STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL STUDIES

2006

Dr. Randall Robinson  
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of a constructivist social studies unit on student attitudes towards social studies. It was hypothesized that students who experienced constructivist based social studies lessons would display a greater interest in social studies topics in the classroom than those who did not experience constructivist based social studies lessons. The subjects in this study were fifty, fourth grade students from a southern New Jersey school district. The study consisted of an experimental and a control group, both of which received a pre-test. While the control group received no difference in teaching style, the experimental group participated in lessons that were taught in a constructivist manner. At the completion of this unit, both groups of students took a post-test.

At the completion of this study, calculations were completed, demonstrating that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, therefore agreeing with the hypothesis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people played an important role in the completion of this thesis:

My family, who has supported me throughout my college career. They have not only guided me in the right direction through life, but pushed me to reach success. The help that you have provided me with through my research was priceless.

Dr. Randall Robinson, who spent a great deal of time and energy helping me to expand upon my ideas and create a thesis that I could be proud of.

Dr. Paul Fitch and Dr. Joan Finch, who each provided a great deal of support and guidance to me during the completion of my graduate program.

Mrs. Carol Gross, Miss Jennifer Howlett, and Mr. Neil Clancy, who welcomed me into their school and classrooms in order to conduct the research that was needed for this thesis.

My collaborative education cohort, who was always willing to give feedback and share ideas with me. Thank you for helping to create such an amazing support system.

Shannon Bishop, my co-teaching partner and friend, who made me laugh throughout the innumerable amount of hours we have worked together. I do not know how I would have completed so many projects without your collaboration.

Ryan Sherwood, who not only calculated my *t*-tests for me, but put up with me and my sometimes endless complaining. Without your confidence and encouragement, I may not have completed this thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER	
One	SCOPE OF THE STUDY..... 1
	Introduction..... 1
	Statement of the Problem..... 2
	Hypothesis..... 2
	Limitations of the Study..... 3
	Definition of Terms..... 3
Two	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE..... 5
	Introduction..... 5
	Educational Visionaries..... 5
	The Theory of Constructivism..... 8
	Constructivism in Practice in the Social Studies Classroom..... 12
	Summary..... 15
Three	PROCEDURE..... 16
	Introduction..... 16
	Description of the Subjects..... 16
	Procedure..... 18
	Description of Data Collection Instrument..... 19
Four	ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS..... 21
	Introduction..... 21
	Tabulation of Scores..... 21
	Analysis of Data..... 23
Five	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS... 25
	Introduction..... 25
	Summary of the Problem..... 25
	Summary of the Hypothesis..... 25
	Summary of the Procedures..... 26
	Summary of the Findings..... 26

Conclusions.....	26
Implications and Recommendations.....	27
REFERECNCES.....	29
APPENDICES	
A Parent Consent Form.....	31
B Student Pre-Test.....	33
C Social Studies Lessons.....	36
D Student Post-Test.....	55

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. School and State Ethnic Groups.....	17
2. Pre-Test Means and Standard Deviation.....	22
3. Post-Test Means and Standard Deviation.....	22
4. Summary of t-tests.....	23

## Chapter One Scope of the Study

### Introduction

Making learning meaningful to students is one of the most important aspects of teaching and it is a task that has not always proved to be easy, especially with the subject of social studies. Although it is obvious that “learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to the students’ lives, needs, and interests and when the students themselves are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge” it is not easy to implement (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

Can a constructivist social studies unit change, or even have an effect, on the attitudes or outlook of students in the classroom? Constructivism has been discussed in the educational realm for quite some time. It consists of “individuals actively creating experience and meaning which contribute to form a personal construction of the world” (Kelly, 1955). It is important that students are not just memorizing material presented to them, but that they are internalizing information. Learning should be made hands-on, exciting, and relative to their lives. It is not enough for teachers to give students an activity to complete, they must guide them and ask them inquiry-leading questions to help them explore and activate their own ideas and knowledge further (Brooks, 1990).

What does this type of classroom look like in practice? The theory of constructivism helps support and develops a classroom that promotes this type of deeper learning. Students in these classrooms have interactions with one another to help



construct new knowledge that they can reflect upon and transfer to other areas (Resnick, 1989; Richardson, 2003). When constructivist principles are implemented in a classroom; it can be assumed that a greater deal of meaningful learning will occur amongst the students within that classroom (Littledyke, 1998).

### Statement of the Problem

If learning is not made meaningful for students and they have no interest in a particular topic, it becomes much harder to put forth the necessary efforts to succeed. Social studies is a topic that is filled with dates and information to remember. Often times, students will find this to be boring and have a negative attitude towards the subject. It seems as though the topic of social studies has been slow to take on the constructivist philosophies (Scheurman & Yell, 1998). One must wonder if using more constructivist-based teachings will help to raise the level of interest for the students (1998). By using these teachings students will be able to help control their own learning, as well as participate in activities that can help relate the matter at hand to their own lives (Littledyke, 1998). This study will give insight as to whether or not the attitude that students have when it comes to social studies will change as the style of teaching changes.

### Hypothesis

The hypothesis that this study examined was that fourth grade students who experience constructivist based social studies lessons will display a greater interest in social studies topics in the classroom than fourth grade students who have not experienced constructivist based social studies lessons.

## Limitations of the Study

As with any type of research, there were limitations to this study. Without access to a variety of schools and classrooms, the study was only conducted in the fourth grade at an elementary school in New Jersey. More specifically, two fourth grade classrooms were involved, which totaled fifty students. This affected the external validity of the study.

A second limitation of this study was the period and setting with which it occurred. There was only an eight week time frame with which the researcher was able to come into an already established classroom and make a variety of changes the structure of it. Therefore, the results of the study may be different than they would be if the classroom was established as constructivist in nature from the onset of the school year.

A final limitation was the schedule that the school followed, which often led to difficult time restraints. The students only had social studies class three out of every six school days, for forty-five minutes. Therefore, lessons had to move quickly at times. It must be noted that due to positive support from the cooperating teacher, extra time was allotted when it was needed.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms used within this study are operationally defined as:

*Meaningful Learning-* Meaningful learning has been described as helping students achieve a deep understanding of complex ideas that are relevant to students' lives (Jonassen, 1999) For the purposes of this study, meaningful learning focused on how information was made relative to students' lives and the true meaning that they are able to make from their learning.

*Constructivism-* Constructivism is a theory of learning, proposed as individuals creating their own understanding on the basis of interaction between what they already know and believe and ideas and knowledge with which they come into contact. (Resnick, 1989: Richardson, 2003) For the purposes of this study, constructivism focused on learning

that is guided through hands-on experiences, inquiry, and collaboration in order to make subjects relevant and internalized by the students.

## Chapter Two Review of the Literature

### Introduction

A major goal of the educational system should be to teach and engage students in a way that learning is meaningful to them. Meaningful learning can be described as helping students achieve a deep understanding of complex ideas that are relevant to students' lives (Jonassen, 1999). In other words, as discussed in chapter one, instead of memorizing facts and figures, learning should be made interesting and of importance to students. This study focuses on the possibilities of using constructivism to foster this type of learning. It was hypothesized that students who experience constructivist based social studies lessons will display a greater interest in social studies topics in the classroom students who have not experienced constructivist based social studies lessons.

The literature review presented in this chapter is organized to first look at theorists who developed the philosophies that have become the framework for what is known today as constructivism. Then, the review will examine student learning through the lens of the constructivist theory. Finally, the chapter discusses how constructivism looks when practiced in the social studies classroom.

### Educational Visionaries

The foundation for the constructivist theory began decades, and even centuries ago, by "educational visionaries" who helped to design the framework for constructivist classrooms of today (Fogarty, 1999). These theorists began the path of thinking and

developed their ideas for creating classrooms where students would be actively engaged in learning to help give it a fuller meaning (1999).

The work of theorists such as Johann Pestalozzi, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky is consistently seen as the basis for constructivist classrooms (1999). Field trips, “hands-on” lessons, data collection, experiments, and group work represent only a few of the ideas that first developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by these theorists. Examining their thinking not only helps one to understand this important theory, but how to go about better implementing it in today’s classroom settings (1999).

Johann Pestalozzi, a Swiss educational philosopher from the late 1700’s, developed ideas that are still very popular in today’s classrooms. As an educational psychologist, he believed that it was important for children to be able to use their senses when learning, therefore creating the idea of ‘object learning,’ or the hands-on approach (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). “Students learn best when teachers interest them in lessons through the use of objects or other concrete devices that encourage them to focus on the lesson at hand” (Null, 2004, p. 184). He developed beliefs and principles that helped to implement his approach to teaching: 1) all people can learn; 2) drawing, music, and physical activity are essential parts of learning; and 3) teachers can improve their teaching by discovering how the children in their classroom learn (Smith, Smith, & Pergo 1994). Pestalozzi felt that memorization and rote learning was mindless, instead, he worked to discover ways that the curriculum could be related to a child’s experiences at home and in their environment (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Pestalozzi’s approach to learning is still highly regarded today in the classrooms of the western world (1993).

In the early 1900’s, John Dewey founded the idea of learning through

experiences. He felt that knowledge and ideas emerge from situations where learners were able to draw them out of experiences that had meaning and importance to them (Dewey, 1916). In the classroom, there would often be a community of learners who were able to build their knowledge together (1916). But, experiences outside of the classroom were of great value as well, such as with field trips and community service projects (Fogarty, 1999). Dewey's philosophies are popular in the educational field today and have been studied by many philosophers who came thereafter (1999).

Decades later, Jean Piaget further expanded upon the ideas of John Dewey. He believed that the material world should be the starting point for learning because it is both accessible and contains complexities that can lead children to exploration (Piaget, 1973). He felt that "learners' interactions lead to structural changes in how they think about something as they assimilate incoming data" (Fogarty, 1999). By having experiences not only in, but outside of the classroom, children can take what they know and further make inferences on their own. Understanding is then built by this step by step involvement in one's own learning (Piaget, 1973). This is a major component to both the constructivist and learner-centered theories in that students should have experiences that not only keep them motivated and interested in the topics that they are learning about, but that they can use outside experiences in order to create their own ideas and expand their knowledge past what is included in text books (Green & Gredler, 2002).

In the mid-1900's the ideas of a philosopher by the name of Lev Vygotsky began being discussed in the educational realm. He felt that a major piece to learning is the social interactions that are fostered amongst both the students and the teacher in the classroom (Fogarty, 1999). This theory became known as the "zone of proximal

development.” Every child has a level of development that they have already reached, and a level that they could potentially reach through peer and teacher guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). He believed that for students to engage in the optimum amount of logical thinking and internalization, they must have a combination of whole class interactions, as well as work with small groups and/or pairs (Cobb & Bowers, 1999, Green & Gredler, 2002). As students work in pairs and groups, they collaborate with one another, having each learner bring the knowledge that they have from previous experiences or have obtained in the classroom setting to the rest of the group for everyone to discuss, enhance, and add to. When these types of social interactions take place, it is almost inevitable that the learning that takes place will be much deeper and therefore have a greater meaning for the students who took part in creating it (Fogarty, 1999).

### The Theory of Constructivism

Constructivism can be described as the way in which people construe a meaningful understanding of the world through the experiences they encounter and further reflection of those experiences (Littledyke, 1998a). In simple terms, constructivism is based on the idea that everyone, teachers and students, combine the knowledge that they have together in order to create personal meaning and active learning about a particular topic (Kelly, 1955). Students do not absorb and memorize what their teachers tell them; instead they are actively engaged in lessons to find their own depth and meaning.

It is important to understand that constructivism is a theory of learning, or meaning making (Resnick, 1989). As Virginia Richardson explains “individuals create

their own understandings on the basis of an interaction between what they already know and believe and ideas and knowledge with which they come into contact (Resnick, 1989; Richardson, 2003). New understanding is combined with prior learning and a readiness to learn. Individuals then decide how these new ideas and understandings fit into their already established views of the world (Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

Education is a vast field, with an innumerable amount of people, with greatly differing views, making contributions on a daily basis. Because of this, there are a variety of different perspective lenses that have been used to view the theory of constructivism. Although they have been able to come together in most regards, it is important to have an understanding of the different philosophies that are within each type (Richardson, 2003). Social constructivism is most often associated with the views of Lev Vygotsky. The social interactions that students have with their peers and teachers are extremely important to their learning; they are the source of knowledge (Fosnot, 1996). A group of students may come together to construct meaning that is culturally accepted, but then each student may then go and internalize this meaning in their own way (Richardson, 2003).

Radical constructivism is the idea that knowledge is constructed in the mind of each individual (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). Meaning is constructed from individual experiences and therefore there is not always one, objective answer. Often times, learners with similar experiences and background will have similar, compatible answers, but aspects of them may differ due to the differences within each individual (Hardy and Taylor, 1997).

Social and radical constructivism hold most of their differences in exactly who it



is that constructs meaning. In social constructivism, students will collaborate with others in order to create meaning, while in radical constructivism, students create their own meanings that will likely run parallel to those of others. The role of the teacher can be described in two different ways, depending on which perspective is being worked with. For example, a teacher can be seen as a collaborating partner from the social perspective, who asks open-ended questions and presents a variety of resources. In radical constructivism, the teacher plays more of a facilitator role, in that they will help students reflect upon their own thinking (Scheurman, 1998).

It is important to realize and keep in mind that the theory of constructivism is a broad continuum, each of the different types basically represent a different degree. When looked at from a broader view, the core design is the same (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). They each believe that students actively construct their own learning (Green & Gredler, 2002).

There are five principles, as listed by Alesandrini and Larson (2002), which cover the basic ideals of the constructivist theory, whether one is looking from the social or radical perspective. They are as follows:

1. Learning results from exploration and discovery
2. Learning is a community activity facilitated by shared inquiry
3. Learning occurs during the constructivist process
4. Learning results from participation in authentic activities
5. Outcomes of constructivist activities are unique and varied

The first principle explains that teachers must act as a strong support and guide for their students while they are constantly engaged in new experiences. Through

structured activities, students will be able to construct meaning about the experiences that they have prior to the activity and during the discovery process (2002).

When students collaborate with each other they are not only able to share ideas, but create new meaning from combining different points of view in order to solve problems. They must interact and reflect on their work with the entire group in order to see the deeper meaning in the goals that are to be accomplished (2002).

The third principle addresses the idea that learning occurs during the constructivist process. This means that students are learning and developing deeper meanings throughout the entire activity. Regardless of the prior knowledge a student may have, they will complete an exploratory activity that allows them to learn about the topic at hand. Learners will realize the meaning of what it is that they accomplished through their own self-assessment and reflection (2002).

The idea of “authentic” activities presented in the fourth principle, is that they are similar to things that students may encounter in the “real world.” Teachers create situations that are relative to the student’s lives, so that they can understand how it is important it is in “real life.” This not only helps to motivate students to participate in classroom activities, but it helps them to see how they are affected outside of the classroom as well (2002).

As principle five suggests, most often the results of the activities that are done have different results for each group of students. This is because all students learn and do things in different ways and will have different prior background knowledge that will help to lead them through the activities. This is how the perspectives of different students are bonded together to create a greater wealth of ideas amongst each student (2002).

The basic principles of the constructivist theory come together to form a system that when used properly will help to foster deeper learning. As Littledyke suggests “constructive learning is essentially meaningful learning” (1998b, 20). Learning is formed through the experiences that take place not only in the classroom, but throughout life. It is not enough for teachers to give students an activity to complete, they must guide them and ask them inquiry-leading questions to help them explore and activate their own ideas and knowledge further (Brooks, 1990). It is important for the teacher to play the role of the learner as well (1990). They must learn and discover new information about their students to guide them in a way that will create learning that is most meaningful to them (1990).

#### Constructivism in Practice in the Social Studies Classroom

Only recently has the potential for using the constructivist theory to teach the social studies curriculum come into discussion amongst educators (Scheurman & Yell, 1998). For the most part, social studies is conducted in a teacher-centered format, with lectures and a single textbook (Hope, 1996). This is not a conducive setting for learning that is of meaning, value, and of high interest to students (1996). The following section will examine what constructivism actually looks like in practice and how this can be implemented in a social studies classroom.

Brooks and Brooks (1993) developed five basic principles that will help start the applying of constructivist principles in any classroom, including social studies. They consist of the following:

- Pose problems that are or will be relevant to the students

It is important to make the connections with what you are teaching to real life for

your students. If these connections do not exist for select students in the class, add elements that will help them see how these topics or situations are going to be important in life (1993).

- Structure learning around essential concepts

It is important to teach students the “big idea” first and then break it down into smaller sections and ideas after the meaning has been made. Or, after teaching something from one perspective, switch to another in order to make sure that all views and opinions have been examined (1993).

- Be aware that students’ points of view are windows into their reasoning

Open-ended questions leave students room to further explore and explain their answers and/or reasoning. Let students know that there is not a “wrong” answer, but instead they may have a different perspective that deserves to be heard as well (1993).

- Adapt curriculum to address students’ suppositions and development

It is important to find a way to introduce topics so that they are exciting and of interest to students. When doing this, the different levels and backgrounds of each student need to be kept in mind. Integrate technology or other subjects into lessons when it is appropriate (1993).

- Assess student learning in the context of teaching

Students should not be competing against each other, but working together in order for everyone to achieve. Teachers should assess students’ work on the basis of what they have learned and what areas they may need more help with in the future. It is important to remember that “authentic assessment occurs most naturally and lastingly when it is in a meaningful context and when it relates to authentic concerns and problems

faced by students” (1993).

For constructivism to work in the social studies classroom there should be a variety of these aspects taking place. Open-ended questioning leads students to inquire further into why they think something may have happened in the past. It can also lead students to see the effects that a particular issue still has in today’s world. By sharing their ideas, students will be able to see a variety of perspectives and construct a greater knowledge of the issues that they are studying (Scheurman, 1998).

Another important aspect to the constructivist approach to social studies is the idea of using primary sources. A single textbook does not bring any excitement into the classroom. On the other hand, primary and secondary sources allow students access to the real evidence of what happened in the past. This information will lead students to analyze and share their own interpretations of what happened in the past, as opposed to simply reading about what took place (Copeland, 1998).

A constructivist teacher will set out problems and monitor student exploration, guide the direction of student inquiry and promote new patterns of thinking (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). In the social studies setting, it is important to present students with evidence and a key question to help them focus their exploration. Together, they can then work to construct their own meaning and share their interpretations with others (Copeland, 1998). At the end, they must be given time to reflect in order to internalize the process that they have gone through and make their own personal meaning (1998). Regardless of which constructivist perspective one chooses to look at, constructivism can be seen as a valuable approach to teaching social studies (Hope, 1996).

## Summary

Although there is a great deal of existing literature on constructivism, it is not often that a historical approach is taken (Null, 2004). Many of these educators of the past proposed ideas that are similar to today's idea of constructivism. By looking at their knowledge and the beliefs that they had in developing their own ideas, educators of today have assistance to successfully implement constructivist ideals in their own classrooms (Null, 2004).

As McCombs and Whisler (1997) explained "learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to the students' lives, needs, and interests and when the students themselves are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge." The role of the teacher is to guide students in a way that they will not only bring their prior knowledge to the classroom to activate new learning, but to take those experiences away with them for the rest of their lives. The active, exploratory experiences that children have in a classroom are essential for meaningful learning to occur (Rallis, 1995). The constructivist social studies unit will provide students with these necessary classroom experiences.

As paradigm shifts take place in education, constructivist ideas are beginning to step into the forefront for a closer examination, as was discussed in this section (Green & Gredler, 2002).

## Chapter Three Procedure

### Introduction

The previous two chapters of this study have helped to set the stage as to the reasons that this research has been deemed important by the researcher. The existing literature on the topic has been examined in order to assess the next steps that should be taken in the social studies classroom. The following chapter details the procedure that has been followed in order to test the theory in an actual classroom. The hypothesis that this study has examined was that fourth grade students who experience constructivist based social studies lessons will display a greater interest in social studies topics in the classroom than fourth grade students who do not experience constructivist based social studies lessons.

### Description of the Subjects

This study was conducted at an elementary school in southern New Jersey. The particular school is located in a suburban area that is on the fringe of a large city, Camden.

The following table displays the ethnicity groups that were in the particular elementary school and the state averages. The ethnic group averages for children in the state are similar to those found at this school, with a majority of the students being white, followed by African American, and then Hispanic (table 1).

table 1

## School and State Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	School in Study	State Average
White	87%	60%
African American	10%	16%
Hispanic	3%	15%
American Indian	<1%	<1%
Asian	<1%	8%

The median household income is \$54,280, which is about even with the state average (\$55,146) and well above the national average (\$41,994). Sixteen percent of the students received free and reduced lunch programs, while the state average is twenty-seven percent.

There are over 850 students enrolled in this school, along with over 40 classrooms, with an average of 17 students per teacher. This school offers a variety of programs for its students and for the surrounding community as well. There are enrichment programs such as EXCEL, remedial programs, computer literacy programs, programs for the arts, and many more. Besides these, the school also has a Latchkey program, an extended school year, peer mediation programs, and adult education courses as well.

This study involved the students of two fourth grade classes. These students ranged in age from nine to eleven. There were 26 students that were part of the group who partook in the class with a constructivist style of teaching. The female to male ratio was 15:11. The group of 24 students who were the control group, or those who did not



receive the constructivist teaching style, had a female to male ratio of 13:11

The two classes involved in the study were considered to have students that were academically comparable. While individual grades were known by the researcher, they were in no way being evaluated under the conditions of this study, as the researcher was strictly looking for a change in attitude toward social studies.

### Procedure

Before this study was able to be conducted, it was imperative for the researcher to first observe how lessons were being conducted in the social studies classroom prior to the study. Observations were conducted by the researcher and recorded in a journal. The cooperating teacher was also interviewed in order to learn more about the way that class was previously conducted.

Permission from a parent or guardian was required before the students were able to participate in a pre-test survey (appendix A). Once these were received from all those eligible to participate, a pre-test survey was administered to the students (appendix B). This instrument allowed the researcher to assess how the students in both the control and experimental group, felt about social studies prior to the study.

Social studies was only taught to the experimental and the control group three times in every six day period. The students in the experimental group experienced eight constructivist- based lessons (appendix C), that took place over a one month span.

The topic of study of these lessons was the United States government. Individual lessons covered material ranging from the Declaration of Independence, to the three branches of government, to the symbols of our country. Ingrained in each of these lessons, were the core values of constructivist-based teaching.

Each of these lessons included the basic constructivist-based principles. When information was being presented to the students, it was not conducted in lecture-style. Instead, they were given documents to examine, in order to let them form some of their own ideas. Their prior knowledge was activated through inquiry-leading questions. Students would then work in groups to discuss or find more information on their own. Often times, hands-on activities were completed, or aspects of the government were simulated, so that the students could see how the government really works. A trip to the state capitol was also included during this time (appendix C).

The researcher kept a journal in which not only were observations recorded, but any personal discussions with students about social studies were recorded as well. This would help add more evidence and possibly any reasoning and insight that was behind the results that were found. Also during the entire experimental time, the researcher observed as the control group was taught social studies, in the same way that it was previously conducted and recorded the observations.

Finally, after the experimental phase was completed, the students were given a post-test survey (appendix D). This survey allowed the researcher to assess how the students' attitudes toward social studies may or may not have changed.

#### Description of Data Collection Instrument

Data for this study was collected over an eight week period. A pre-test and post-test were both used to collect data for this study. The pre-test survey consisted of nine questions and post-test used ten questions of various types that allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the students' attitude towards social studies. The questions within these surveys allowed students to choose from selected answers as well as open

ended questions. The data from each test was then analyzed to see if there was any significant change during the course of the study.

This study also allowed for observational data to be collected by the researcher and recorded in a journal. This type of data not only consisted of observations that were made by the researcher, but data collected through personal interviews and interactions with students and cooperating teachers. The collection of this type of data was important for this research because it allowed the researcher better insight to the feelings of the participants.

## Chapter Four Analysis of Findings

### Introduction

Learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to students' lives, needs, and interests and when the students themselves are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge (McCombs and Whisler, 1997). The intent of this study was to examine the effects that a constructivist-style of teaching could have on student attitudes toward social studies. After reviewing the previous literature that has been written on the topic, two classes of fourth grade students were chosen to participate in this study. While they each participated in taking a pre-test and a post-test, it was only the experimental group that was exposed to eight, constructivist-style lessons. It was hypothesized that those fourth grade students who experience constructivist based social studies lessons will display a greater interest in social studies topics in the classroom than fourth grade students who have not experienced constructivist based social studies lessons.

### Tabulation of Scores

Each group of students, the experimental and control, were administered a pre-test which was used measure the attitude that the students had toward social studies before the study. The pre-test scores were used to calculate the mean and standard deviation scores for both groups. The mean for the experimental group was 17.1923, which was higher than that of the control group, 15.29167. The standard deviation for the experimental group was 3.5442 and 5.0775 for the control group (table 2).

table 2

## Pre-Test Means and Standard Deviation

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Mean	17.1923	15.29167
Standard Deviation	3.5442	5.0775

A post-test was administered to determine if any change in student scores took place within in each group. The experimental group had a mean of 18.0384 and the control group had a mean of 15.70833, each indicating that a change did occur. The standard deviation for the experimental group was 2.6605, while that of the control group was 5.4651 (table 3).

table 3

## Post-Test Means and Standard Deviation

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Mean	18.0384	15.70833
Standard Deviation	2.6605	5.4651

A *t*-test for dependent samples was conducted at the .05 alpha level in order to calculate if the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups showed a significant change (table 4).

With 25 degrees of freedom, the experimental group had a *t*-score of 1.7148. This

*t*-test shows a significant change at the .05 alpha level in student scores from the pre-test to the post-test.

The control group had a *t*-score of 1.0106, calculated with 23 degrees of freedom. This was shown to not be a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores at the .05 alpha level. Although the mean may have shown a slight improvement, it was not a large enough difference to hold any significance.

table 4

Summary of *t*-tests

	<i>t</i>	Degrees of Freedom	p
Experimental Group	1.7148	25	.05
Control Group	1.0106	23	.05

### Analysis of Data

It was hypothesized that those fourth grade students who experience constructivist based social studies lessons will display a greater interest in social studies topics in the classroom than fourth grade students who have not experienced constructivist based social studies lessons. The *t*-tests that were conducted support this hypothesis.

When the *t*-test was calculated on the student scores of the experimental group, a significant change was found. As the mean shows, the average score of the students' pre-test was 17.1923, while the post-test mean was 18.0384. The *t*-test conducted at the .05 alpha level then showed that this change was considered to be significant.

The students in the control group, who were not exposed to constructivist based lessons, showed no significant change in attitude from the pre-test to post-test scores.

While the mean may have been slightly raised, it is not enough to show a significant change.

Due to the fact that a significant change was found in the scores of those students who were exposed to constructivist teaching, it can be said that the hypothesis of this study was supported.

## Chapter Five Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

As research has shown, it is important that learning is made meaningful for students in the classroom. Through the variety of experiences that students have with a particular topic, learning has the opportunity to become much deeper and more relevant to the students' lives. It is believed that the ideals of the constructivist theory can foster the setting needed for this type of learning to take place. When students are interested and engaged in the classroom, it can be said that they will take on a more positive attitude toward what it is they are learning. This study examined the effects of constructivist style-teaching toward the attitude that students have toward social studies.

### Summary of the Problem

Will students who are exposed to the constructivist methods of teaching have a more positive attitude towards what they are learning? In particular, this study examines if students had a change in attitude toward social studies when they were presented with material through the constructivist principles.

### Summary of the Hypothesis

Constructivism is a philosophy of learning that has been brought into some of the classrooms of today. While a large amount of research has been completed on the topic, this study hypothesized that fourth grade students who experience constructivist based social studies lessons will display a greater interest in social studies topics in the classroom than fourth grade students who have not experienced constructivist based



social studies lessons.

### Summary of the Procedures

Before this study began, permission was granted from the principal and cooperating teachers at the selected site, an elementary school in southern New Jersey. Permission was then obtained from the parents of each participating fourth grade student (appendix A). The students were divided into two groups, an experimental and a control, containing 26 and 24 students, respectively. After some initial observations, each group of students completed a pre-test survey in order to assess the attitude that they had toward social studies prior to the study.

Over the course of one month, the experimental group participated in eight constructivist-style lessons and the control group experienced no change in teaching style. Both the experimental and control group then took a post-test. The data was then recorded and analyzed in order to see if a significant change took place due to this study.

### Summary of the Findings

A *t*-test was used to analyze the data of both the control and experimental groups. The first *t*-test was conducted on the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group. This test showed that there was no significant difference in their scores. However, when the *t*-test was conducted on the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group, it was evident that a significant change did occur.

### Conclusions

The hypothesis of this study was supported in that the students in the fourth grade who were exposed to the constructivist style of teaching did have a significantly more positive attitude toward the subject. The students expressed that they enjoyed the

interactions that they were able to have with one another. They also participated in a variety of activities that allowed them to see what it was they were learning about in practice. By participating in such a way that they were able to share and expand upon their own ideas, the students had a greater interest in social studies. Therefore, it is evident through this study that the students who were exposed to the constructivist-style lessons did have a greater interest in social studies than those students who had not been exposed.

### Implications and Recommendations

This study has implied that a constructivist style of teaching can have a positive effect on the students' interest and attitude toward social studies. Although this study was conducted on a small scale, it is evident that a significant change did occur within the experimental group of students.

In order to learn more about the topic of constructivism and the effects that it can have on students, the researcher suggests that the study be implemented on a much larger scale. While using two classrooms allowed for some insight as to the effects of constructivism, much more can be seen when the constructivist teaching style is implemented within a greater population.

It would also be beneficial for the study to take place over a longer period of time. There was likely a period of adjustment that took place for the students when the new teaching style was implemented. Therefore, if the study was conducted over a greater time period, the initial excitement that the students may have to the new style would be gone. Students would then be able to give more honest and insightful opinions due to the fact that they have had a greater amount of exposure to the constructivist teaching style.

In order to help the students overcome the excitement and/or confusion they may have felt over having a different teacher, it is also recommended that the same teacher use both teaching styles. This will allow the teacher to see which style the students seem to be more receptive to as well as keeping a consistent teacher for the students.

Although the hypothesis was supported through this study, there is always room for more research. By studying this topic further, educators can learn what needs to be done to reach students and make learning a meaningful experience for them.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Alesandri, K., & Larson, K. (2002). Teachers Bridge to Constructivism. The Clearing House, 75(3), 118-121.
- Brooks, J.G. (1990). Teachers and Students: Constructivists Forging New Connections. Educational Leadership, (Feb.), 68-71.
- Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. (1993). In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Cobb, P., & Bowers, J. (1999). Cognitive and Situated Learning Perspectives in Theory and Practice. Educational Researcher, 28(2), 4-15.
- Copeland, T. (1998). Constructing History: All Our Yesterdays. In M. Littledyke & L. Huxford (Ed.). Teaching the Primary Curriculum for Constructive Learning (pp. 119-130). Cambridge, Great Britain: David Fulton Publishers.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Dewey, J. (1916/1966). Democracy and Education. New York: Free Press.
- Fogarty, R. (1999). Architects of Intellect. Educational Leadership, (Nov.), 76-78.
- Fosnot, C. T. (1996). Constructivism: A psychological theory of learning. Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Green, S.K., & Gredler, M.E. (2002). A Review and Analysis of Constructivism for School-Based Practice. School Psychology Review, 31(1), 53-70.
- Hardy and Taylor. (1997). Von Glasersfeld's Radical Constructivism: A Critical Review, Science and Education, 6, 135-150.
- Hope, W. C. (1996). It's Time to Transform Social Studies Teaching. The Social Studies, (July/August), 149-151.
- Jonassen, D.H., & Peck, K.L., & Wilson, B.G. (1999) Learning with technology. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Publishing.
- Kelly, G. A. (1955). The psychology of personal constructs. (2 vols.). New York, NY: Norton.

- Littledyke, M. (1998a). Constructivist Ideas About Learning. In M. Littledyke & L. Huxford (Ed.). Teaching the Primary Curriculum for Constructive Learning (pp. 1-16). Cambridge, Great Britain: David Fulton Publishers.
- Littledyke, M. (1998b). Teaching for Constructive Learning. In M. Littledyke & L. Huxford (Ed.). Teaching the Primary Curriculum for Constructive Learning (pp. 17-30). Cambridge, Great Britain: David Fulton Publishers.
- McCombs, B.L. & Whisler, J.S. (1997). The Learner-centered Classroom and School: Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation and Achievement. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Null, W.J. (2004). Is Constructivism Traditional? Historical and Practical Perspectives on a Popular Advocacy. Kappa Delta Pi, (Winter), p. 180-188.
- Ornstein, A. C., & Hunkins, F. P. (1998). Curriculum: Foundations, principles and, issues (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Piaget, J. (1973). To Understand is to Invent: The future of Education. New York: Grossman.
- Rallis, S. F. (1995). Creating Learner-Centered Schools: Dreams and Practices. Theory Into Practice, 34(4), 224-229.
- Resnick, L.B. (1989), Introduction. In L.B. Resnick (Ed.), Knowing, Learning, and Instruction: Essays in honor of Robert Glaser (p. 1-24), Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Richardson, V. (2003). Constructivist Pedagogy. Teachers College Record, 105(9), 1623-1640.
- Scheurman, G. (1998). From Behaviorist to Constructivist Teaching. Social Education. 62 (1).
- Scheurman, G. & Yell, M. (1998). Constructing Knowledge in Social Studies. Social Education. 62 (1).
- Smith, L.G., Smith, J.K., & Pergo, F.M. (1994). Lives in Education: A narrative of people and ideas. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Von Glasersfeld, E. (1995). A Constructivist Approach to Teaching. Constructivism in Education. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind in Society. London: Harvard University Press.

**Appendix A**  
**Parent Consent Form**

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Kristi Arruzzo and I am a graduate student at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Randall Robinson as part of my Master's Thesis concerning students' attitudes towards Social Studies. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research.

The goal of the study is to determine if "constructivist-based" or, hands-on learning, will help to keep students more interested, therefore giving them a more positive attitude toward social studies.

Each child will be asked to complete a survey, once at the beginning and once at the end of this study, to see if their attitude or feelings, toward social studies have changed over this period of time. Any child who does not want to participate in this survey does not have to. Those who do participate will not need to submit any identifying information to me and their responses will be kept anonymous and private.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ or you may contact Dr. Randall Robinson at \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kristi Arruzzo

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher.

-----

\_\_\_\_\_ I grant permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not grant permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**Appendix B**  
**Student Pre-Test**



Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. There are no "right" answers and you should be completely honest! Thank you for your opinion!



1. Rank these subjects in the order that you enjoy them.

5 = enjoy the *most*      1 = enjoy the *least*

\_\_\_\_\_ Math  
\_\_\_\_\_ Science  
\_\_\_\_\_ Reading  
\_\_\_\_\_ Social Studies  
\_\_\_\_\_ Language/Spelling

2. Do you feel that Social Studies is an important subject for you to learn?

A – Social Studies is very important to me.  
B – Social Studies is sometimes important to me.  
C – Social Studies is not important to me.

3. About how much time do you spend studying and doing Social Studies homework a week?

A – 0-15 minutes  
B – 15-30 minutes  
C – 30-45 minutes  
D – 45-60 minutes  
E – Over 1 hour

4. On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel about the activities you do in Social Studies class?

5 – We always do really fun things that help me learn.  
4 – Most of the things that we do are fun and help me learn.  
3 – Some of the things that we do are fun and help me learn.  
2 – Once in awhile we do something fun that helps me learn.  
1 – We never really do fun things to help me learn.

5. Please discuss any activities that you really enjoy doing in Social Studies.
6. Please discuss any activities that you really *do not* enjoy doing in Social Studies.
7. On a scale of 1-5, how do feel about the *topics* that you learn about in Social Studies?
- 5 - I really enjoy learning about all of them. They are very interesting and exciting.
- 4 - I enjoy learning about most of them. Often, they are interesting and exciting.
- 3 - Some of the topics are interesting, but some of them are not.
- 2 - Sometimes the topics are interesting, but most of the time they are not.
- 1 - I find almost all of the topics we learn about to be very boring.
8. How do you feel that you do in Social Studies?
- A – I feel that I do very well in Social Studies.
- B – I feel that I do pretty well in Social Studies.
- C – I feel that I do okay in Social Studies.
- D – I feel that I do not do very well in Social Studies.
- E – I feel that I do poorly in Social Studies.
9. If you could change one thing about Social Studies, what would it be?

**Appendix C**  
**Social Studies Lessons**

## Social Studies Lesson One

### National Symbols

#### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will be able to identify a variety of national symbols and interpret their meaning and/or significance.

#### II. Materials:

- CD with “American” songs
- Pictures of a variety of symbols
- Pictures of national symbols
- Small statues/replicas of national symbols
- Encyclopedia/textbooks/internet or other available media

#### III. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

6.2 (Civics): B1, 2, 4; E8

#### IV. Anticipatory Set

A CD will be quietly playing songs such as “America the Beautiful” and the “Star Spangled Banner” throughout the class period. Students will be asked what they believe the meaning of a “symbol” is in order to be sure that they have an understanding of the term.

#### V. Input and Modeling

Students will be presented with pictures of a variety of symbols. Some of these include: recycling sign, poison sign, stop sign, the Philadelphia Eagle, and the Olympic rings. The meaning of these symbols will be discussed. The students will then be asked what some symbols of our country, the United States, may be. Students will likely notice the music playing and bring up the American flag in the classroom.

#### VI. Check for Understanding

The students will be given the opportunity to discuss what some symbols of

America are, or national symbols, with as little teacher prompting as possible. While the teacher is guiding the discussion, it is important for the students to share their own ideas. If they mention something that the teacher has a photograph or replica of, the teacher will then take it out to help discuss the different aspects and meaning behind the symbol. During the discussion, if not brought up by the students, the teacher will ask what the importance of these symbols is, such as pride for one's country.

#### VII. Guided Practice

After the large group discussion has gone on for a few minutes, the students will be split into smaller groups. In these groups, they will be asked to choose a national symbol that has not been discussed (some examples may be: the Liberty Bell, Mount Rushmore, the Statue of Liberty, the Gateway Arch, the Bald Eagle, and the Whitehouse.) Each group will have the opportunity to research this symbol, whether using the internet, textbooks, or encyclopedia.

#### VIII. Closure

After the groups have been given some time to learn about their symbol, they will give a brief presentation about what they have learned to their classmates. The students will be encouraged to ask questions and share their opinions at this time.

## Social Studies Lesson Two

### Federal, State, and Local Government

#### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will be able to identify the three different levels of the United States government (federal, state, local).

#### II. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

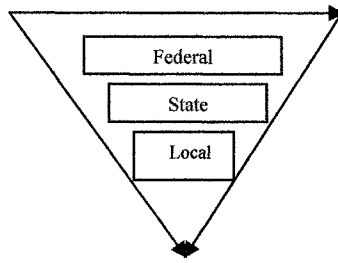
6.2 (Civics) A3, 4, 5; C2, 3

#### III. Anticipatory Set:

Before the students enter the classroom, their desks will already be arranged so that they are sitting in small groups. The following questions will be posed to the students for them to think about. “What is government? How is the government of our country split up? Does the same group of people who are in charge of making laws about students going to school decide what day of the week your garbage will be picked up?” The students will then have the opportunity to discuss these questions with their groups. At this time, the teacher will walk around, listening to the students’ ideas and further prompting/asking them questions to help them expand upon their knowledge.

#### IV. Input and Modeling

The students will have an opportunity to share what it is that their groups have come up with. It is expected that the students do not have any prior knowledge of the terms ‘federal, state, and local government.’ The teacher will then need to present these ideas to the students. In order to do this an upside-down triangle will be drawn on the board. The teacher may begin the discussion of these terms by filling in sections of the triangle as follows:



The discussion of what these terms mean will then take place. (Federal: The entire country, State: there are fifty and ours is NJ, Local: our town.)

#### V. Check for Understanding

It is important for the students to have an idea as to what each of these branches are in charge of. As they draw their own triangles, they will be able to fill in the role of each branch. (Federal: in charge of laws that effect the entire country, State: in charge of things that effect our entire state, Local: in charge of issues that effect our community).

#### VI. Guided Practice

In order for the students to understand this on a level that may be more relevant to them, they will be presented with the example of our school system. There is a superintendent and school board, who are in charge of making rules for all of the schools in the district. Then, the principal is in charge of things that affect just our school. Finally, the teachers are in charge of their classrooms.

#### VII. Closure

The students will then be asked to come up with a few of these scenarios on their own. It is expected that they will mention ideas such as stores or a sports league.

## Social Studies Lesson Three

### Federal, State, and Local Government (Continued)

#### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will be able to recall the three different levels of government (federal, state, and local) that were discussed in the previous lesson. The students will then be able to apply this knowledge, in order to see which level would play a role in given scenarios.

#### II. Materials:

- ‘Scenario’ index cards

#### III. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

6.2 (Civics) A3, 4, 5; C2, 3

#### IV. Anticipatory Set

The students will be led (with teacher prompting) to review the terms and definitions that were learned in the previous lesson. While they may remember, it will likely be necessary to examine the upside-down triangle again as well as a few examples that were discussed.

#### V. Input and Modeling

The students should be arranged into small groups. Groups should be made heterogeneously, so that students have the opportunity to share ideas with students of all different schemas, to make for the best expansion of ideas. Each group will be given an index card. On these cards it may say something such as “in charge of making sure the snow plow comes to your street after a storm” or “can declare a war” or “decides how much tax to charge you on the ‘x-box’ games that you buy.” The job of the students is to take some time to discuss with their groups which level of government that they think



would be in control of that situation.

#### VI. Check for Understanding

After approximately ten minutes, the groups are likely to have examined two or three scenarios. They will then be called back to the large group where they will be asked to share the situations that were on their cards and what it is that their group decided the level of government should be. Of course, they must explain why it is they feel this way to the entire class as well. Other students will have the opportunity at this time to share their opinions if it differs from that of the group.

#### VI. Closure

In order to leave the students with a final idea, they will be asked to think about who is in charge of fixing roads. It is assumed that different students will have a variety of opinions. If they do not see it on their own, the teacher will prompt them to realize that, sometimes, the levels may overlap, or have the same role depending on the situation.

## Social Studies Lesson Four

### The Declaration of Independence

#### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will be able to recall information that they previously learned about the colonies breaking away from England. The students will then be able to examine the Declaration of Independence and its importance.

#### II. Materials:

- Photo of the Declaration of Independence
- Large paper for front of classroom
- Note-taking sheet

#### III. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

6.2 (Civics) B1

#### IV. Anticipatory Set

The students will be given a moment to think about the following question, which should be a review: Why did the colonies decide that it was time to break away from England? Once they have the opportunity to look back, and they are able to use the resources that they have, they will be able to share what they remember with their classmates in the large group.

#### V. Input and Modeling

Once all of the important ideas have been mentioned, such as the fact that the colonists were treated unfairly, they were being taxed without representation, etc., the students will be handed a photo of the Declaration of Independence. After they have the opportunity to examine this, we will go over the “who, what, where, when, and why” of the Declaration. The students will be given a sheet to record this information so that they

can focus more on the discussion than the setup of their notes.

#### VI. Check for Understanding

In order to be sure that the students understand the significance of this document, they will be asked how it is like their own birth certificate. Students should be able to understand that the Declaration was signed exclaiming that we were free from England, and this is the start of our own country. So, it was like the “birth of our country.” The following phrase will also be pointed out “Everyone deserves the rights of Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” The students will share what they think those terms are and why it is that everyone needs them.

#### VII. Guided Practice/Closure

To make the signing of the Declaration of Independence meaningful to the students, it must be put into a situation that they can comprehend. The teacher will tell the students that \_\_\_\_\_ School has been treating our class very unfairly. They have taken away our recess and instead ask us to help clean the hallways and outside during this time. Not only that, but they have taken away our gym, music, and computer time because other classes wanted *more* time with these. As a class, we will draw up our own Declaration, explaining why we should leave \_\_\_\_\_ School and then each student will have the chance to sign the document.

The Declaration of Independence  
“The Birth Certificate of the United States”

*Who* was involved?

*What* happened?

*When* did this take place?

*Where* did this take place?

*Why* did this all happen?

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.  
Everyone deserves the rights of Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

## Social Studies Lesson Five

### The Constitution

#### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will be able to demonstrate a basic understanding of the principles behind the Constitution. This will be demonstrated through the discussion that takes place after a class activity.

#### II. Materials:

- Video: Charlie Brown's Constitution
- Copy of the complete Constitution for each student
- Constitution note sheet

#### III. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

6.2 (Civics) A1; B1, 3; C1, 2

#### IV. Anticipatory Set:

When the students enter the classroom, the teacher will be seated quietly at her desk. A note on the board will tell the students that the class has broken away from \_\_\_\_\_ School and they are now on their own. For approximately two minutes the teacher will just watch to see what the students do. Do they make their own rules? Does someone take charge, or does the class grow out of control?

#### V. Input and Modeling

Once the teacher decides that the time is up, the students will need to gather for a discussion of what just took place. They will be prompted to think about the problems that come with not having a government, laws, or a leader. The students will lead this discussion, with the teacher prompting them as needed to answer important questions about the basis behind the Constitution. The teacher will then give the students their own

copy of the Constitution, so that they can see what it looks like first hand, as well as discuss and examine the different parts.

#### VI. Check for Understanding

Once the students have an idea of what the Constitution looked like and why it was made, they will be involved in a discussion of the “who, what, when, where, and why” of the Constitution. In order to be sure that students are involved in the discussion, as opposed to taking notes, they will be given a worksheet. They will only need to fill in specific sections so that they are more focused on what is going on in the classroom than simply writing things down. Of course, it is important for them to have this sheet so that they can refer back to the information at a later time.

#### VII. Closure

As a final way to close the lesson, the students will watch a short excerpt of the Charlie Brown Constitution video. They will be able to see an interpretation of what the Continental Congress may have looked like as well as hear some important facts and ideas that were debated while making the Constitution.

## The Constitution

### “The Supreme Law of the Land”

Who were some of the people involved in making the Constitution?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

He was the President of the \_\_\_\_\_.

2. \_\_\_\_\_

He became known as the \_\_\_\_\_.

What did the Constitution really do?

1. It is a \_\_\_\_\_ for our \_\_\_\_\_.

2. It broke our government into \_\_\_\_\_.

3. It has three different sections:

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

When was the Constitution made?

1. It was written in \_\_\_\_\_.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ was the first state to approve it.

Where did this take place?

1. At \_\_\_\_\_ in the city of

\_\_\_\_\_.

Why did the United States need a Constitution?

1. It was a \_\_\_\_\_ for our new country.

## Social Studies Lesson Six

### Trip to the State Capitol

#### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will spend the day on a field trip at the state capitol in Trenton, NJ. They will be able to list and recall things that they have learned on the field trip. They will also be able to explain and share this information with the other students in the class when they return to school.

#### II. Anticipatory Set

The students have been aware of the field trip and the rules regarding it for quite some time. They will once again be reminded that on this trip they will see some of the things that we have been learning about in class actually taking place in 'real-life'. They have also been told that some of the things they will see will be coming up in our next lesson and that they can bring this information back with them to share.

#### III. Activity/Experience

During our trip, the students will be led by a tour guide as well as teachers and chaperones. Due to a student whose parent is a House Representative, our class will be able to sit in the actual Chambers. This is a wonderful experience for the students. They will also be exposed to symbols of our state, an explanation of how the state's government works, the Governor's office, and to see how representatives vote on bills/laws. All of these experiences really help to make government more meaningful to our students, as well as give them the opportunity to see the things that we have discussed during class in 'real-life.'

#### IV. Closure

When we return from the trip, the students will be asked to write down some of



the things that they learned while there. Once the teacher sees that everyone has done this, the students will be paired with a partner. During this time, they will discuss with each other some of the things that they saw, enjoyed, learned, etc. They then must pick their favorite of all of these to share with the class. This not only makes for a nice way to wrap-up the field trip, but it gives the students a chance to share what they have learned. It is hoped that by doing this, students will hear and be able to discuss things that they themselves may have missed, as well as have a feeling of pride when they share their own knowledge.

## Social Studies Lesson Seven Three Branches of Government

### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will be able to identify the three branches of government and the role of each branch.

### II. Materials:

- Three branches of government tree (constructions paper, glue, scissors, markers)
- Schoolhouse Rock Video: 3-Government

### III. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

6.2 (Civics) C2, 4

### IV. Anticipatory Set

In order to get the students excited about the three branches of government, the class will begin by watching and listening to the “3-Ring Government” song by Schoolhouse Rock. It has a tune that the students will enjoy as well as a bit of background and an explanation of each branch (legislative, judicial, executive).

### V. Input and Modeling

As a group, we will discuss the role of each branch of the government. This is a topic that some of the students may have had some exposure to before. Therefore, they will be encouraged to share the information that they know with the class. As we are going over the roles of each branch, the students will be shown pictures of the Capitol, Supreme Court, and Whitehouse in order to help them remember and understand what is involved with each branch. At this level, the students learn very simple versions of each branch, such as the legislature “makes laws.”

## VI. Check for Understanding

In order to see that the students understand each branch, some students will be asked to share what part of the government they think that they would enjoy being a part of. The teacher should also ask the students which branch they feel is the most powerful, in order to be sure that they have an understanding of ‘checks and balances.’

## VII. Guided Practice/Closure

In order for the students to wrap up what they have learned, and have something to look at to help them remember the material, the students will be able to work in pairs to construct a “branches of government tree.” They will be able to use materials that have been provided to create this. In the section for each branch, they must describe what the role of that particular branch is. These will then be placed around the classroom so that the students can not only share their artwork, but use them as a reference tool.

## Social Studies Lesson Eight

### Three Branches of Government (Continued)

#### I. Lesson Objective:

The students will be able to recall the information that they learned about the three branches of government in the previous lesson. The students will then be able to apply this information into a real-life scenario.

#### II. Materials

- Student desks should be arranged into three equal groups

#### III. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

6.2 (Civics) C2, 4

#### IV. Anticipatory Set

With only a small amount of teacher prompting, the students should be able to remember and discuss the roles of each branch of government for a small review of the previous lesson. The students will then be told that with their cooperation, they are going to become the government for today.

#### V. Input and Modeling

The students will each be assigned to a group, in which they will become a branch of the government (legislative, judicial, executive). With teacher guidance, the students will be able to role play a scenario in which they can see how the government really can work. The following situation will be explained: Our class won a school-wide tournament of “rock, paper, scissors.” This means that we have \$30 to spend any way that we would like to. The only exceptions: it has to be in a fair, safe, school appropriate way that everyone can agree with. Using your three branches, you must decide how this will be done. This must be completed by the end of the period.

## VI. Guided Practice

The roles that the students will play in this are as follows:

- Executive Branch: controls the money, makes recommendations on how to spend it. Also can make changes to legislature's suggestions if they feel it is necessary.
- Legislative Branch: Writes down how they want to spend the money, sends it to the executive branch for approval/agreement.
- Judicial Branch: Votes to be sure that the suggestions are fair and solves any disputes.

The teacher will need to guide the students throughout this activity, but allow them to really play the roles on their own with as little input as possible. It is also important to watch the time and be sure that the class does not grow out of control.

## VII. Closure

Once the students have come to an agreement, the class will gather as a whole in order to discuss what just took place. They can make discuss about what was difficult and how they could do it better in the future. The teacher will tell the students what she observed and help them to relate this to situations that can occur in the real government.

Note: If the students are worthy, the teacher may want to consider making their decision a reality!

Appendix D  
Student Post-Test

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. There are no "right" answers and you should be completely honest! Thank you for your opinion!



1. Rank these subjects in the order that you enjoy them.

5 = enjoy the *most*      1 = enjoy the *least*

\_\_\_\_\_ Math  
\_\_\_\_\_ Science  
\_\_\_\_\_ Reading  
\_\_\_\_\_ Social Studies  
\_\_\_\_\_ Language/Spelling

2. Have you noticed anything different about Social Studies over the past few weeks? If yes, what was it?

3. About how much time have you been spending studying and doing Social Studies homework over the past few weeks?

A. 0-15 minutes      B. 15-30 minutes      C. 30-45 minutes  
D. 45-60 minutes      E. Over 1 hour

4. Do you feel that Social Studies is an important subject for you to learn?

A – Social Studies is very important to me.  
B – Social Studies is sometimes important to me.  
C – Social Studies is not important to me.

5. On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel about the activities that you have been doing in Social Studies class?

5 – We always do really fun things that help me learn.  
4 – Most of the things that we do are fun and help me learn.  
3 – Some of the things that we do are fun and help me learn.  
2 – Once in awhile we do something fun that helps me learn.  
1 – We never really do fun things to help me learn.

6. Please discuss any activities that you really have enjoyed doing in Social Studies over the past few weeks.

7. Please discuss any activities that you really *did not* enjoy doing in Social Studies over the past few weeks.

8. On a scale of 1-5, how do feel about the *topics* that you learn about in Social Studies?

5 - I really enjoy learning about all of them. They are very interesting and exciting.

4 - I enjoy learning about most of them. Often, they are interesting and exciting.

3 - Some of the topics are interesting, but some of them are not.

2 - Sometimes the topics are interesting, but most of the time they are not.

1 - I find almost all of the topics we learn about to be very boring.

9. How do you feel that you do in Social Studies?

A – I feel that I do very well in Social Studies.

B – I feel that I do pretty well in Social Studies.

C – I feel that I do okay in Social Studies.

D – I feel that I do not do very well in Social Studies.

E – I feel that I do poorly in Social Studies.

10. If you could change one thing about Social Studies, what would it be?



