An investigation of the tools and strategies used to present multiple perspectives in the classroom

Christopher P. Madden
Rowan University

Recommended Citation
Madden, Christopher P., "An investigation of the tools and strategies used to present multiple perspectives in the classroom" (2004). Theses and Dissertations. 1189.
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1189

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 LibraryTheses@rowan.edu.
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TOOLS AND STRATEGIES USED TO PRESENT MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES IN THE CLASSROOM

by

Christopher P. Madden

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science in Teaching Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University June 24, 2004

Approved by __________________________

Professor

Date Approved ____________________________

© 2004 Christopher P. Madden
ABSTRACT

Christopher P. Madden
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TOOLS AND STRATEGIES USED TO PRESENT MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES IN THE CLASSROOM 2003/2004
Dr. Marianne Cinaglia
Master of Science in Teaching

The research question for this project is what are the tools and strategies teachers are using to present multiple perspectives to their students? The data sources for this research included classroom observations, teacher interviews, student questionnaires, and document analysis. Four different teachers were interviewed and had their classes observed. There were a total of 16 observations containing detailed field notes. Twenty-seven students filled out the questionnaire. Documents used in the classroom as tools were collected and analyzed for this research. Four main strategies for presenting multiple perspectives in the classroom were found: open discussion, current events, alternative texts, and movies or film clips. These four strategies were found in all of the data sources and in higher percentages than other strategies mentioned or observed. Implications for the use of these strategies to present multiple perspectives in the classroom are discussed.
# Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction ........................................................................................................1
  Statement of Research Problem and Statement of Purpose ...........................................1
  Data Collection .............................................................................................................3

Chapter II: Review of the Literature ..................................................................................4

Chapter III: Methodological Approach ...........................................................................10
  Design .......................................................................................................................10
  Subjects and Sample Size .........................................................................................10
  Data Collection ..........................................................................................................11
  Data Analysis .............................................................................................................13
  Limitations and Assumptions .....................................................................................13

Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion ..............................................................................15
  Part I: Findings .........................................................................................................15
    Is there more than one side to a history lesson? ....................................................17
    Is it necessary to focus on more than one historical perspective? .......................18
    What does your teacher do to effectively show you more than historical perspective? ..............................................................................20
    Are there any races, ethnicities, religions, or genders that you believe deserve more focus in your history lessons? ........................................26
    Why is it important for you to learn more than one side to every story? ..........29
  Part II: Discussion .....................................................................................................29

Chapter V: Conclusion ....................................................................................................36

List of References ..........................................................................................................40
Tables and Charts

Figure 3.1: Student questionnairre regarding multiple perspectives in the classroom... 13
Table 4.1: Findings of the tools and strategies according to data sources................. 21
Chapter I

Introduction

Statement of Research Problem and Statement of the Purpose

How are secondary social studies educators providing students with multiple perspectives in history? The purpose of this research is to investigate the kinds of strategies and methods teachers are using today to answer this question. It is well documented that most American history textbooks take the position that white Europeans founded and molded the United States (Nieto, 2000; Boyle-Baise, 1996). Additionally, research conducted by the National Science Foundation shows that a majority of history teachers use a textbook chosen for the course as the principal source of knowledge in the classroom (Foster, 1999). This reliance on textbooks limits possibilities for students to gain a full multicultural awareness of the different stories history tells. Nevertheless, not all educators believe in a multicultural curriculum, arguing rather that alternative interpretations of American history disrupt the traditional story of the United States. Alternative views on history may challenge “the privileged positions of those individuals and groups who have benefited from dominant ideologies and prevailing distributions of power” (Cornbleth 1998, p.622). But what about the other cultures and ethnic groups that make up America? In what ways do they contribute to the formation of this world superpower? This research argues that not enough educators emphasize the contributions and importance of these multiple cultures, classes, and ethnicities. Further, this study
seeks to investigate and examine the ways in which teachers in one school currently
address multicultural education.

Sonia Nieto (2000, p.305) defines multicultural education as “a process of
comprehensive school reform that rejects all forms of discrimination and promotes
pluralism. Multicultural education is a process that promotes democratic principles of
social justice. And multicultural education is basic education that is important for all
students”. The United States is made up of the most diverse ethnic, cultural and
linguistic school population on earth (Foster, 1999). Until educators can appreciate all
the cultures of American history, they “cannot appreciate the potential of those who sit
before them, nor can they begin to link their students’ histories and worlds to the subject
matter they present in the classroom” (Delpit, 1995, p. 182). Without acknowledging the
diverse makeup of the classroom, positive and maximum learning cannot take place. It is
critical that social studies teachers relate the richly diverse American history to all the
students. This study argues that history must include critical thinking and in order to do
this effectively history must teach multiple interpretations of historical events. Critical
thinking requires more than rote learning of course content. Teachers should provide
students with the opportunity to analyze history, thereby allowing them to come to their
own conclusions. American history has often been portrayed as the story of how this
nation became the richest and the most powerful country in the world; however the
emphasis of this story often excludes the perspectives and contributions of many who
have not achieved wealth and power. The populations of most public schools in New
Jersey consist of students from a wide array of cultural backgrounds. It is important for
students to understand the contributions of different types of people throughout history.
Students understanding such ideas will promote an acceptance and understanding of present cultures, thus enhancing the learning experience.

Data Collection

This research uses four methods to collect data: teacher interviews, classroom observations by the researcher, document analysis, and a student questionnaire. There are extensive observations of teachers who have been identified as promoting multicultural awareness in their classroom. Interviews took place with these teachers and other educators with a multicultural background. Interviews provided data that allowed the researcher to examine and compare what was found in the literature and what was found in the data. Observing classes, a student questionnaire, and interviewing teachers produced information that shows what is being done in the classroom to promote more than one perspective in history. Furthermore, the results emphasized what methods and strategies are working, and what more can be done to provide the students with a more multicultural learning experience.

Chapter two is a review of current and relevant literature regarding multiculturalism and multiple perspectives in the classroom. Chapter three is a general discussion of methodology. This includes a description of the research setting, the data collection approach and instruments, and a description of how the data will be analyzed. Chapter four consists of the findings and discussion of the research. And Chapter five is the conclusion, which includes the implications of the research and suggestions for further research.
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

"America has always been a tale of peoples trying to be a People, a tale of diversity and plurality in search of unity. Cleavages among [diverse groups]... have irked and divided Americans from the start, making unity a civic imperative as well as an elusive challenge" (Barber, 1992, p.16). The discipline of history, whether American, European, world, or ancient, is much more than an arbitrary set of facts published in a heavy textbook. True historians not only know the facts of a period in time, but they understand the implications of who owns the facts, of whose story is being told and by whom. Many theorists and researchers believe the need for student exposure to multiple perspectives in history (not just American history) is essential for a number of reasons, including the growing global interdependence and the diverse makeup of secondary schools. It is estimated that by the year 2026, the non-white and Hispanic enrollment will makeup 70% of the population in the nation’s schools (Foster, 1999). Research indicates many teachers are effectively providing students with an array of viewpoints in history. And more importantly, many teachers are allowing students to investigate history and come to their own conclusions; however, there remains an increasing need for more work in this area. The multicultural movement continues to grow in America because the historical legacy of education in this country is based on acts of separatism and inequality (Jones, 2002).

Content should include contributions from all cultures, races, religions, and classes. In many schools there has been a shift in curriculum over the past few years to provide more emphasis on a multicultural education. In Maryland, for example, a
curriculum focusing on the contribution of African-Americans to the history, art, and culture of Maryland will be introduced at the beginning of the 2004 school year (Kaltenbach, 2003). Although many teachers do not have control over the curriculum they teach, research states that they can control the methods and strategies used to cover the state standards. The following paragraphs provide referenced insights into the conceptual and empirical frameworks secondary teachers are exploring to help students better understand multiple perspectives in history.

Recent literature emphasizes the growing need for multicultural education in American schools. This reform effort has caused curriculum changes and, in turn, affords teachers the opportunity to teach and examine history from the views of all cultures, races, classes and religions. According to Sonia Nieto, a well-known and influential multicultural advocate, our country’s public schools are undergoing great changes that reflect the populations growing diversity (Nieto, 1999). Nieto believes that public schools in America reflect society, and that society is growing more unequal everyday (Nieto, 1999.) Culture, communication, and values are key interdisciplinary concepts around which content should be organized (Banks, 1991). Furthermore, curriculums must be infused with multicultural education, not simply add-ons (Gay, 2004). With more knowledge and training, teachers can learn to create lessons and units that include diverse cultures as well as content that are necessary for the students to fulfill curriculum requirements. Teachers must also identify their own personal and cultural values in order to properly plan and communicate with students from diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (Banks, 1991). They must be willing to share their understanding of these values and then provide students with the opportunity to evaluate and share their own
cultural values. Since students of all backgrounds bring strengths and talents to their
learning, educators need to realize that affirming the diversity of the makeup of public
schools in America is to everyone’s benefit (Nieto, 1999.)

One way to ensure that students are provided with the opportunity to study
multiple perspectives is to open the classroom to discussions of alternative views of
history. Such an interactive approach between teachers and students leads to an
appreciation of diversity (Boyle-Baise 1996). Students must be able to relate to one
another in the classroom if they are to fully comprehend ideas of multiculturalism. Ooka
Pang (1991) suggests that children learn to group people based on cultural differences,
and that they acquire many societal beliefs regarding those groups before they enter
school. History classrooms, then, offer many opportunities for broadening cultural
awareness and acceptance. The classroom becomes a place where the teacher creates
units that both cover content and allow the students to investigate viewpoints different
from what they know and from what might be present in the textbook. Teachers have to
be willing to share their own cultural beliefs as well as learn cultural values from their
students and colleagues (Nieto, 2000). If this type of atmosphere occurs, then the
development of multiple perspectives may happen naturally for the students and teachers
(Nieto, 2000).

In American history, it is possible to teach the major themes of the course by
examining local history. Major concepts such as democracy, nationalism, equality, and
diversity can be approached from the local level to give students a familiar connection
(Danker, 2003). Students need to understand that ideas they are learning may have
originated where they live. The idea that history is made up of local events and local
people shows the students the importance of all cultures, races, religions, and classes (Danker, 2003). Since local history contains the contributions of various people responsible for settling and developing the communities of this nation, integration of local history into the curriculum would definitely present multicultural perspectives (Danker, 2003). The study of local history also offers a number of projects that would strengthen the theme of presenting several viewpoints. Teachers can plan nearby field trips, assign interviews with family members, invite guest speakers from the community, and research population distributions around the area (Boyle-Baise, 1996).

The use of primary sources in the classroom requires critical reading and interpretation on the part of the student. It also requires teachers to go beyond basic lecture, memorization, and note-taking tasks and adapt new methods that allow the students to become actively involved in the lesson (Bolick, 2002). A slave narrative is a great way for students to investigate the life of a former slave and relate what they have learned to information in their textbook (Bolick, 2002). Trade books can be used to highlight cultural diversity in many different social studies themes (Boyle-Baise, 1996).

Understanding what misconceptions or stereotypes students hold is a crucial step to presenting multiple perspectives in the classroom (Nieto, 2000). If educators understand people of other backgrounds, and teachers speak languages other than English and treat differences among individuals as skills, than all students and our nation as a whole will benefit (Nieto, 2000). One activity used in a middle school classroom prompted the students to complete sentences regarding lives of Native Americans long ago and the lives of Native Americans in modern times (Ooka Pang, 1991). This particular assignment produced results that proved most of the students held inaccurate
and idealistic perceptions of Native Americans (Ooka Pang, 1991). This exercise indicates to the teacher that more focus needs to be placed on how Native Americans lived and the contributions they made to the country. Assignments that identify stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases are practices that address problems that students are having with regards to multiple perspectives in the history classroom (Merryfield & Subedi, 2003).

World history is also a major component of most secondary social studies curriculums. Many students have misinformation and a general lack of knowledge about the world (Merryfield & Subedi, 2003). Using current events as a tool in the classroom is a great way to understand problems different groups of people are faced with (Boyle-Baise, 1996). Many of the problems today resemble, or are possibly related to, problems found in history. Current events contain social issues that are more likely to include multiple viewpoints than the stories that are told in the textbook (Boyle-Baise, 1996).

No longer can curriculums avoid the reality that diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural groups have made contributions to every aspect of nations’ histories and cultures. If teachers of history commit to telling the true story of past and present day times, multicultural education with its emphasis on competing and contributing stories must be a critical and integral part of schooling (Gay, 2004). Teachers in today’s society must be knowledgeable and comfortable with the presentation of multiculturalism (Tan, 2002). A teacher who is competent with concepts of multiculturalism will establish norms and procedures for inclusion that will make all students feel accepted and connected to one another (Tan, 2002). In order for all of America’s children to be adequately educated, teachers must consider the efficacy of history and tradition in the standard routines of
teaching and they must use critical self-reflection to bring to the surface deep-rooted assumptions about race and culture (Jones, 2002). In order to present students with multiple perspectives the classroom must include respect, understanding, and accommodation of diverse cultures (Tan, 2002).

According to the literature, it is necessary for teachers to understand and to promote more than one perspective in the classroom. Teachers exploring diversity and encouraging their students to the same are effective ways to achieve multicultural goals. All of the literature stresses the importance of the teacher’s knowledge. If the teacher does not have the knowledge or the tools to present multiple perspectives, then the students will not grasp these ideas of diversity and its importance. This research is being conducted to answer the question: “How are secondary social studies educators providing students with multiple perspectives in history?”
Chapter III

Methodological Approach

This research study is being conducted to explore what types of strategies and methods are being used in secondary social studies classrooms to provide students with multiple perspectives in history. The research is qualitative and involved interviews, classroom observations, and student questionnaires that began in January 2004 and continued through May 2004.

Design

The research being conducted is a qualitative observational case study. This is a within-site case study since only one school was used. The field study observed procedures and behavior in the natural setting. Along with observations, the study involved a number of interviews with suitable subjects and a questionnaire.

Subjects and Sample Size

The subjects of this study were selected from the population of social studies teachers and students at Williamstown Middle School. Since this is a case study, a group of participants who interact with each other, share the same space, and identify with one another were selected for the research. These groups consisted of four social studies teachers and their students. Only the input from students in these teachers’ classes was considered. For this study, approximately four teachers and 120 students were used as subjects. Twenty-seven students completed the questionnaire. Purposeful sampling was used to identify students who responded to the questionnaires.
Data Collection

Four types of data are used during this study: observation, interviews, student questionnaires, and analysis of documents. The researcher is an observer participant; in this role, while the researcher is part of the research environment, he is not an active participant. The researcher is not detached from the subjects, so establishing rapport was critical to the study. Descriptive field notes are taken for every class observed. The presentation of multiple perspectives in history and all other classroom details is also noted. Descriptions of all events in the classroom are critical to the research. These field notes must be accurate in describing the multiple methods being implemented in the classroom.

Interviews are conducted with all teachers in the sample. These interviews are used to address questions that cannot be obtained from the field notes. Using purposeful sampling, key informant interviews are held with students who understand when multiple perspectives are implemented and the benefits of such methods. A focus group interview may be beneficial to the research. Bringing the teachers and key informants provides valuable insight to what strategies and methods are effective for promoting multiple perspectives in the classroom. A student questionnaire is used to obtain significant student feelings regarding this topic. Only students who return the permission slip are going to answer the questionnaire. Document analysis is used when appropriate for the study in the following ways. Primary and secondary sources used during effective lessons are analyzed to examine why the document contributed to a successful lesson. Providing multiple perspectives in the classroom can be done through the use of both
primary and secondary sources. Analyzing such documents adds to the accuracy of the data conclusions.

In this study, the observer/interviewer becomes one of the instruments. The field notes taken during observation must be accurate to ensure that the data are valid and reliable. Observations must accurately describe what occurred in the setting that was studied. Member checking, that is, having the participants review the field notes for accuracy, enhanced reliability. Teacher interviews are audio taped to enhance the accuracy of the data collection. A check for internal validity determines if the patterns and interpretations of the researcher reflect what actually occurs in the classroom. Triangulation determines if the researcher's patterns and interpretations are valid. For example, if the researcher observes a pattern, then the pattern is confirmed during an interview with a key informant, and agreed upon during member checking, then the pattern is considered internally valid. Questions for interviews are developed after time spent observing. When strategies and methods are observed in the classroom, then the researcher knows what to look for and what to ask. A student questionnaire (see Figure 3.1) is used to obtain the maximum amount of input from the students in the classes the researcher observes. These questionnaires are used to compare tools and strategies the students believe are being used with the strategies the researcher observes and the teachers say they use.
Data Analysis

Field notes and interview results were transcribed, organized, coded, summarized, and interpreted. The data was organized into major codes and sub-codes. Major codes included teaching strategies and student responses to the strategies. Sub-codes under teaching strategies included the multiple strategies observed, and sub-codes under student responses included the different responses received from interviews and observations. More codes emerged as the data collection began. Once data was organized by codes, the researcher checked additional data to make sure they were consistent with the codes. Data was summarized and interpreted while more data was being collected. This helped the researcher to identify patterns and strategies.

Limitations and Assumptions

There is only one setting for the entire data collection period, so the study was limited to approximately four secondary social studies teachers and their classes in a
single small town middle school. The members of this town differ in class and race. Many families are upper middle class, while others are part of the lower class. The predominant race is white, but there is an African-American population in this community. The limited scope and duration of the study, the small sample size, and the non-randomness of subject selection limited the study’s generalizability. Establishing rapport with the students was a limitation for the researcher. Anytime an adult comes into the room the natural setting is disturbed, so it is important that the students feel comfortable with the researcher. Rapport is established by participation in daily activities, possibly common interest, and by the researcher acting comfortably around the students.
Chapter IV

Findings and Discussion

“I think to live as a modern citizen in our world is to try to understand many multiple perspectives and to try to find common ground so that we can live together; and I think through social studies we can do that.”—8th grade social studies teacher at Williamstown Middle School

As discussed in Chapter I, this research describes what secondary teachers are doing to promote multiple perspectives in the social studies classroom. This chapter includes all of the results of my research. It is important to note that this research is limited in scope because the subjects are either teachers or students from the 8th grade at Williamstown Middle School in New Jersey. Williamstown Middle School is a small town school with approximately 1,300 students. At this school, 8th grade is the second year of U.S. History, so, much of the data relates to lesson presentations on the Civil War, which is where the classes were when I was conducting my research. The first section of this chapter will be the findings of my research. Following the findings will be the discussion of my findings.

Part I: Findings

The research was conducted and data was obtained over a three-month period using four different methods. Through the use of triangulation within my separate data sources I have come up with four findings that answer the major question: “How are secondary social studies educators providing students with multiple perspectives in history”? According to my data sources, there are a number of methods implemented outside the textbook, the main one seems to be alternative texts, such as primary sources,
to provide the students with more than one perspective. The second method I found in my research was the use of current events. Some of the teachers observed and interviewed place more emphasis than others on current events; therefore they were used in different formats. The third method used to provide multiple views is the show of appropriate movies in the classroom. And the fourth method the research found to be effective was an open discussion where students and teachers both share their ideas. These four findings will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter.

The first method I used for my data collection was observation. I observed four different teachers in social studies classrooms and used field notes to document what tools and strategies are being used to promote multiple perspectives. I also conducted interviews with the four teachers I had observed. I audio taped these interviews and transcribed them at a later date. All of the teachers selected for observation and interview have been in the classroom for at least 15 years. The third method of data collection was the student questionnaire. Twenty-seven students filled out the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of five questions directly related to multiple perspectives in the classroom. Before handing out the questionnaire I field-tested the questions with six students I specifically chose. I chose students that ranged in academic ability so I could determine if the questions were clear. This was an attempt to produce maximum results from the questionnaire. The last method of data collection was document analysis. I collected an enormous amount of worksheets, handouts, political cartoons, primary sources, secondary sources, and anything else I thought relevant to the presentation of multiple perspectives in the classroom. All of the documents analyzed for this research were used in the classroom during one of my observations. The first part of this chapter
is a presentation of the data according to the questions on the student questionnaire. The ideas expressed in the following five questions were also used in the teacher interviews.

1. *Is there more than one side to a history lesson?*

A. Student Responses

This question was used as tool to get the students thinking about the topic.

Following the question was a direction to explain so that students would not simply write yes or no. Out of the 27 questionnaires that were filled out, 26 students answered yes. The one student who answered no did not appear to understand the question. This student wrote:

“No, because we talk about everything and most students ask many questions so the lessons cover pretty much everything.”

Most of the students commented about there being two sides to every story and that it is necessary to study both. One student used a great example to support their argument that there is more than one viewpoint to history. This comment reads:

“Yes, I believe this because everyone has their own interpretation of things and a different point of view. For example, in the Civil War, the Confederates had different battle names because they had a different viewpoint.”

Another student writes:

“Some people see the situation differently than others. It helps us to understand it better when we look at it from other’s views.”

Another thought introduced by one of the students was the idea of who was writing the history. This student wrote:

“The way history is written is different because the people who write it have different views. For example, the Civil War, there are two different views North and South. They both have different stories.”

B. Teacher Responses
Tools such as primary sources may not always be found in the textbook. All of the four teachers that I observed used the textbook as the most important guide for the class. But they did not use the textbook as the most important source of information. In an interview one teacher stated:

"The textbook will sometimes give you a paragraph of something, is a paragraph enough? I say no. The book may only give you one paragraph on the Chinese in the gold rush, but there is much more to share."

Another teacher stated during an interview:

"The textbook is usually the winners perspective."

2. Is it necessary to focus on more than one historical perspective?

A. Student Responses

All 27 students who filled out the questionnaire feel it is necessary to focus on more than one historical perspective. One student varied from the other 26 in his response by writing:

"I think we should focus on one main perspective. If we learn about one and there is no more to learn about that one than that’s when you move on to another."

Many of the student responses were similar in regards to the necessity of studying multiple perspectives in history. As with the first question, many students emphasized that there is more than one side to every story. Some of the students did give more insight than just the idea that there is more than one side to every story. The following student excerpts show excellent understanding regarding the presentation of multiple perspectives.

"Yes, because you can’t just study one thing when learning history. It’s sort of like a puzzle, you can’t just have one piece to finish and make the whole scene of the puzzle; you have to have all the pieces. To understand history, you have to learn and study all of its perspectives."
"Yes, because it’s good to know the different beliefs and point of views from everyone. If you just learn one side of a story then you’re being told one story and you can’t make your own point of view. If we don’t focus on it then how will we know how everyone felt, not just the majority?"

"Sometimes looking at the enemy can help us out even more."

"By studying multiple viewpoints students get a better understanding of what’s going on."

"Yes, because you can’t criticize another person’s views until you know what they believe."

B. Teacher Responses

The teacher interviews also provided insight into the importance of presenting multiple perspectives in the classroom. When asked why it is important to present multiple perspectives to the students, two of the teachers responded:

"I think it is important because it is the real world an the world is such a difficult place. Everybody has a different place that they are coming from. Everybody thinks differently. And I think that one of our jobs in social studies is to help kids think."

"They see that there is at least two sides to every argument, whether it is history or not. They see what some of the different arguments are, and they can, and sometimes do, apply to today with current events. It can make them think. Think before they come up with their own opinion on things."

One teacher believes that the ethnic makeup of the class will have an impact on what perspectives are to be focused on in the lessons. The following statement is not how I observed this teacher, but rather how they have seen lessons conducted throughout the course of their career.

"Yes, it is important if you have a mixed class. The makeup of the class, the teacher, how far you want to take it? You have to attract their interests."

Following this statement I asked the teacher about exposing cultures and perspectives that may not be present in the classroom. This teacher responded:
"It is important to expose kids to cultural enrichment. I will do things for cultural enrichment. If I didn't do it, when else are they going to get it? They're not. As educators, we have to do that."

The emphasis on multiculturalism over the past ten years has created new opportunities for teachers and students. One teacher (50 years of age) discussed in an interview the difference between a history class today and when he went to school.

"When I went to school it was the white people's history, that's all it was. It was though any minorities in the country never did anything worth noting. Absolutely that has changed. The diverse population of this school, they all want to hear about their own thing. Where does my people come in?"

That statement: where does my people come in; is a theme that was found during the teacher interviews, the student questionnaires, and observing classes. The next section of this chapter will discuss what educators are doing to address this theme.

3. What does your teacher do to effectively show you more than one historical perspective?

This section of the chapter answers the major question of the research: what are secondary social studies educators doing to provide students with multiple perspectives in history? As mentioned, the results from this research are limited to 8th grade U.S. History classes at Williamstown Middle School. Through triangulating data, I have found four categories of tools or strategies that are being effectively used at Williamstown Middle School to provide the students with more than one perspective in their history classes. The four categories of sources outside of the textbook are as follows: alternative texts, current events, movies or film clips, and open discussion. These four categories are confirmed strategies because at least three of the data sources corresponded with one another. There were a number of other tools and strategies that were found in the data, but these four are where the focus is being placed in the classroom.
The student questionnaires produced many more answers than the four stated above. But if the strategy or tool was not mentioned in a teacher interview, or was not observed in the classroom, its use cannot be considered reliable. Table 4.2 displays the breakdown of the findings according to my data sources regarding the question: what does your teacher do to effectively show you more than one historical perspective? For the purpose of this chart, student responses have been grouped according to these categories. The wording of some of the student responses may have been different than it appears in Table 4.1. For example, if a student responded that the teacher allows them to share their opinion, that response was grouped in the open discussion category. The base numbers used in each category represents the number of total responses from the questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

Table 4.1 Findings of the tools and strategies according to data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method/Strategy</th>
<th>% of Student Responses N=27</th>
<th>% of Teacher Responses N=4</th>
<th>% of occurrence during observation N=16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative texts</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open discussion</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies/film clips</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current events</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Student Responses

As seen in Table 4.1 the most common student responses regarding multiple perspectives in the classroom fit into the open discussion category. This category includes allowing the students to share the ideas as well as the teacher giving multiple views. From talking with the students and teachers, and observing classes I learned that
the teacher would explain whatever he/she could in response to the student’s questions or ideas. One student writes:

“My teacher lets all the students share what they think to the whole class. And my teacher shares his opinions to the class.”

Other students respond quite the same:

“He asks for other people’s opinion so we can see how other people react to the matter.”

“My teacher allows us to share what we think with the rest of the class. It helps us see what everyone else thinks and we understand it better.”

“We talk about it. We debate. He teaches us to have an opinion on whether we think the historians are correct or not.”

“He lets everyone share what they think about it.”

“He answers other people’s questions and he takes good notes which covers a lot. Taking peoples questions shows what they think and that shows more than one historical perspective.”

“He explains it vividly, and shows us pictures. We read background information on the topic. He makes it funny. And we take a little bit of notes and have an open discussion about it.”

Though not a large percent of the students listed movies or film clips as a strategy, it was observed quite frequently. One student writes about movies:

“My teacher gives worksheets, and when he has the chance he shows clips or parts of movies. These things help people think about things more. It helps them understand more.”

B. Teacher Responses

All of the teachers that were interviewed believed that open discussion and sources outside of the textbook are beneficial and effective to presenting multiple perspectives to the students. One teacher, who happens to be black, stated:

“When you talk history you may have students who have questions but are afraid to ask because they do not want to offend anyone. I share with my students how I use to feel when I was a child and the teacher would talk about slavery. It is a very touchy topic. I
don't know if black children still feel this way. I have had white students ask me black questions that they will not ask other black students. A lot of black folks are very mad. I guess it goes back to slavery. I know people are ignorant. I don't get mad. You can plant a seed in students so that they don't remain ignorant. SHARE YOUR LIFE! There has got to be sharing of life. It just so happens that I am a minority, so I share that."

The inclusion of discussion and multiple sources of texts by the teachers in this study is well documented. The following statements come from other teacher interviews:

"Primary or secondary sources can share perspectives. I read so that I can share with the students all these different views. The teacher should have the knowledge first, than use other materials to inform the students."

"I think primary sources are excellent because they are open to interpretations and viewpoints and I always like using primary sources that are coming from different places. For example, a primary source that defends slavery, and another that looks at the human rights of slavery."

"Lately I have found political cartoons to be helpful. I have used political cartoons more in the last two years than I have throughout my career and I think that gives you a good way because everyone sees a political cartoon in a different way. Some political cartoon writers will tell you that they don't even understand a cartoon when they are writing it, it is always open to interpretation."

There was also very good feedback from the teacher interviews regarding the use of current events in the classroom as a tool for providing students with multiple perspectives. The following responses come from the interviews:

"I found an article dealing with segregated proms even this year. Share that with students. Sitting down and talking breaks down walls."

"I usually do current events on Friday. I have an article I will share with them and give them copies. We read it together and discuss it. It can be any number of topics. The big ones this year are the war and gay marriages. We have gotten good discussions. We have taken articles from Newsweek magazine and read articles about gay marriage from both sides. And the kids are very opinionated about that. One side or the other. There are even gay kids in my core. I know they are gay. So you know it is an issue that kids are going to have to deal with. Just seeing that there can be right answers on both sides. There is no right and wrong. Both sides of that issue have some good. With the war it has been more of what is right and wrong with the with the war. Should we be there or should we not? They all have opinions. It has gotten pretty heated some days."
"I think that using newspaper articles helps to bring multiple perspectives into the classroom. You will have people that look at the article and say 'Yeah, I agree with it', and you will have kids that say 'No, that is completely wrong'. From there you can really get to a great discussion. I think editorials are great. I know the Philadelphia Inquirer on a regular basis will have editorials with two different viewpoints on a topic. I think that is helpful."

"I have used the gay marriage issue, though not entirely similar, to tie into slavery. A lot of the arguments critics are using against gay marriage are the same arguments that were used to defend slavery. So, there is another thing with perspective. I think current events get kids thinking. It's going on now. I'm never going to see a slave. But I see people in our society who aren't treated like other people and now I start to think in my head, 'Oh, wait a minute, now I get it'. There are not 100% parallels, I'm not an expert in the area, but there enough parallels in my opinion to make the point, and that is what we want the kids to do. We want them to think and we want them to come away from the subject excited. And we want them to see that life is complicated. An there is more than one answer."

The teachers also stated that movies could be used to provide multiple perspectives in the classroom.

"Different films show different perspectives."

"The movies we have access to here are basically, 'Isn't this guy a great American'. Than you can read things with the students that show a completely different perspective. Other movies can help. I am showing the movie Glory next week. That is the free black man's role in the Civil War. Why they want to get in. To prove they can fight."

C. Field Notes

The most frequently used strategy I observed during my classroom visits was the use of alternative texts. In nearly every class I observed the teacher had an additional reading or picture to share with the students. One teacher used political cartoons on a daily basis. Many of these political cartoons dealt with the war in Iraq, but led to discussions about the Iraqi perspective. A different example was the defense of a Southern writer of a slave society. Another teacher used a reprinted newspaper article from a Trenton newspaper in 1797 that was an ad selling a slave. I also observed numerous classes where a teacher was reading the autobiography of a Holocaust survivor
with a class. One teacher used a series of books by a lady named Joy Hakim. This series of books covered U.S. History through the perspectives of many different peoples, including women and minorities.

The teachers I observed frequently used open discussion. This discussion came in many forms. One of the teachers I observed would often ask the students, “Why”? An example of this is “why do you think many Southern slave owners would defend the institution of slavery when we know it is so wrong today”? Students were encouraged to play with the ideas and attempt to see both sides to historical events. This type of activity seemed to keep student interest and cooperation at a high level as compared to classes I observed that were strict lecture and notes. Another observed example of effective use of open discussion was accomplished as group work. Students would work in groups on different topics. Then they would present their topic to the class, and their classmates questioned them for clarification and further information. I observed a number of students role-playing during this activity. In another class the teacher spent the day sharing her trip to Africa with the students. She allowed the students to interrupt and ask questions. She shared the African culture with many students whom had never left South Jersey.

Current issues were used in many of the classes I observed. Many of them were pertaining to the war and gay marriages. One current event that was shared with the class by their teacher dealt with Mexicans and their feelings towards Americans. This article brought up deep-rooted feelings stemming from the Mexican-American War over 150 years ago. This current event introduced issues that were never discussed when the class studied the Mexican War. Another current event that provided multiple perspectives
dealt with using former president Andrew Jackson’s face on the $20 bill. This author suggested that Jackson, who was a Tennessee slaveholder and who ordered the Eastern Native American tribes to move west of the Mississippi, should be replaced with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the $20 bill. One more current event regarding multiple perspectives dealt with the Latter Day Church of Christ and one of its members being charged with incest in Utah. The guilty party had four wives and 17 children. This article introduced a lifestyle that most of these eighth grade students were unaware had existed.

I also observed movies being used as a tool for providing multiple perspectives. The film Glory was shown to provide students with the free black man’s perspective during the Civil War. Clips from the movie Schindler’s List were shown in another class. These clips provided students with an opportunity to examine life for a Jewish person during World War II. One teacher downloaded a film from an Internet site. This film dealt with a group of rap artists in Columbia. The focus on their music was the harsh surroundings they lived in. These rap artists lashed out against American rap artists for the unrealistic portrayal of their lives.

4. Are there any races, ethnicities, religions, or genders that you believe deserve more focus as a topic in your history lessons?

A. Student Responses

Of the 27 students that filled out the questionnaire, 13 of them felt that there was a need to focus on other races, ethnicities, religions, or genders. Many of their answers differed. The most common responses dealt with religions. Some examples are as follows:
"I think that the Middle Eastern races and religions need to be learned because the war with Iraq has caused people to think ignorant things."

"I think that we should talk a little bit about everything or most of the big religions because it would show what the people believe in and most students want to know about other religions."

"I think that the religions of many of the people in history weren't focused on enough because maybe their religions affected certain decisions or choices they made. Their religion might have had an impact on why they were famous in history."

Other student responses dealt with placing focus on Jews, blacks, women, or other nationalities besides Americans.

"I think that women and blacks should be focused on because we don't hear much about them and how they played a role in the world."

"I think that blacks and Jews deserve more focus. They had it rough in history and they deserve to have their struggles shared and discussed."

"I would like to focus on genders because I want to focus on the fact that women couldn't vote and they formed a group to decide they were mistreated."

"In my opinion, many people are not heard. The Russians in WWII, the Mexicans in the Mexican War, etc..."

"Yes, because everyone always speaks about the blacks and whites. But no one really explains what the other countries or nationalities went through to get to our country or if they helped our country."

Of the 14 students that responded no to the question, their answers could be placed into two groups. The first group felt that emphasis in history class should be placed on what was important. Some examples are as follows:

"No, history is history and if it was important or influenced something, then it is worth studying and focusing on. There really isn't a race or group or a color of people who deserve more attention than any other thing in history."

"I think that they shouldn't focus on a specific race, religion, etc., but focus on whomever served a purpose in the event that's being studied. It would be helpful to cover as many as possible, so that students feel a connection to the person."
"No, it doesn't matter what race, religion, ethnicity, or gender you are. History is history and that's what we learn about."

The other group of students who responded no believed that they covered a variety of perspectives in their history classes.

"Not really because when you study history you cover a lot of the different varieties of people in the world."

"Not really because we learn about the different ethnicities while things are going on in other places. (Example: 54th regiment in the Civil War)"

B. Teacher Responses

All of the teachers I interviewed believed they were trying to provide the students with a balance of perspectives in the classroom. Here is one of the teachers' thoughts:

"It is important for them to understand why different groups of people came to this country, because often times it is the same reasons that their ancestors came, except for slaves. The other groups have come, and the ones that are here today, all came for the same reason, opportunity. And they doing some of the same things that the other immigrants did, living in one apartment. Like back in the day with the Irish and the Italians in the cities. And they all working in the same place, running the same business. To me it is just a continuation. And there is more people coming to the American dream. Freedom and opportunity, and they may not be living well here, but it is better than were they came from. And hopefully the next generation will have it even better and so on and so on. Even when students are white, they want to know what the Irish or Italians did, how did they get here."

One teacher was very honest in disclosing a situation where he felt he had not provided the students with the best learning experience regarding multiple perspectives. He stated:

"A few years ago one of the girls in my class had an uncle who a pilot that was killed on 9/11 and she was very sensitive to it. So I did not spend a lot of time covering 9/11 with that class because of her sensitivity to it. But I always second-guess myself because this is such a huge issue, this issue of terrorism. This issue of people who are against the modern world, and I think it is an issue that we are going to live with for the rest of our lives and I don't know that I was doing my kids a service by not focusing on that topic. I was trying to be a nice guy."
5. Why is it important for you to learn more than one side to every story?

A. Student Responses

This last question produced very similar results as the second question. Some of the students introduced new ideas, but many of the students repeated what they had already stated. Here are some examples of new thoughts introduced by the students:

“It's important to know more than one side of the story because not everyone tells the truth all the time so knowing both sides helps people draw out what's true and what's not true.”

“In the past, present, and future, every single person will have an independent view on a problem. No one can change that. That brings diversity and lets the best possible outcome come forth.”

“It's good to learn both sides so that you don't get a wrong idea or conclusion that is inaccurate about the story. To get a different outlook can make the story more understandable.”

“Because we can learn how they thought and why they thought it. If you listen to one point of view then you are limiting yourself to know the truth.”

“If we learn the different sides to every story then that could increase our knowledge and understanding on why certain people did that or why they made a certain decision. It could be a very positive benefit because it could help us understand history as a whole.”

“When we learn more than one side, we realize that not everything is black and white, and we need to learn that as growing minds. We learn to look at things from other viewpoints.”

“It is important to learn two sides because you might change your opinion when you hear what someone else thinks about the subject. Bad things could be stopped. Example: Germans could have learned that Jews did nothing wrong and did not want to harm anyone.”

Part II: Discussion

Many of the ideas and strategies mentioned in Part I of this chapter reflect what I read in recent literature. Classroom presentations were enriched because the teachers observed have an abundance of knowledge and do not solely rely on the textbook to teach
their lessons. The student subjects were being exposed to multiple perspectives because their teachers felt it was important for them. The makeup of the student body in this setting is somewhat diverse. The student subjects who participated were both female and male, and came from many different backgrounds; including Polish, African, English, Irish, German, Italian, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Indian. I believe that helped me gather data that is more valid than if all the student subjects had been one nationality.

The data gathered provided me with insight into what is being done at the secondary level to provide students with more than one perspective in the classroom. I examined why strategies for promoting multiple perspectives are necessary, what is actually taking place, and what is not taking place. According to the data, both the students and teachers in the study believe that learning more than one perspective in history is beneficial. All of the teachers I interviewed and observed were using strategies in their respective classrooms to provide the students with more than one perspective. Through observation, interviews, and a student questionnaire, I was able to identify four strategies or tools that are being effectively used at Williamstown Middle School. As previously mentioned, these four strategies are alternative texts, open discussion, movies or film clips, and current events. I feel that these four are being effectively used because a percentage of three of my data sources mentioned them. If a student mentioned it, a teacher mentioned it, and I observed it used in class, I considered the strategy to be effective.

All of the teachers I observed always allowed their students to share their ideas. No two people think alike, so allowing many different students to share their ideas and perspectives brings diversity of thought to the classroom. Teachers sharing their own
ideas and experiences can bring new perspectives to the students. With multiculturalism come themes of sharing and respect, and what better way to share and respect than to sit down and talk with one another. It is not uncommon to have students in a class that come from another country with a completely foreign culture. If that particular student is given the opportunity to share their life experiences then it is a positive learning experience for the entire class. Open discussions are an effective strategy for giving students a chance at exploring more than one perspective in the classroom.

Many of the student responses showed a level of comprehension and acceptance that surprised me. When a student wrote a response about the Germans accepting the Jews it showed me that the teacher had effectively presented a new viewpoint to this student. The use of an autobiography of a Holocaust survivor had provided this student with a new perspective. Before watching Glory, not many of the students in one of the observed classes had any idea that black men had fought so bravely in the Civil War. Many students felt the need to study more about religion, some were more specific in stating that they should learn more about Middle Eastern religions. I believe this is because their teacher had opened a new door to the Muslim faith through the use of current events. The use of current events in the classroom over the course of the past year definitely includes the current war in Iraq. This was evident in my field notes taken from classroom observations. Current events gave the teacher an opportunity to enlighten the students to religions and lifestyles that are completely different than the lifestyles these students are living.

Primary sources give one perspective of an event in history. If multiple primary sources are used in the classroom, then multiple perspectives are shared with the students.
Some of these primary sources observed were letters written in defense and against slavery. The teacher did an excellent job at emphasizing the difference in feelings between the authors of the two letters. Using primary sources can lead to productive discussions that would allow students to formulate their own historical interpretations based on what they have read. Instead of relying solely on what the textbook says, teachers can provide students with more than one account to the story and have the students come up with ideas. The use of historical novels or historical fiction can also be a great way to gain student interest while exposing them to a new viewpoint. Pictures, such as political cartoons, allow students to come up with original ideas that apply to different viewpoints. A picture may appeal to many students more than a written document. Teachers can provide students with pictures intended to be analyzed. Analyzing these pictures can produce various thoughts, encouraging all the students to share their perspectives. The use of alternative texts is a way to appeal to all the students in the class in order to provide them with more than one perspective. All of these examples help the students to understand that multiple perspectives are beneficial to learning history and to understanding problems of the world today.

Using movies and film clips in the classroom can bring a new perspective to the students. So long as the movie is checked for accuracy, it can be an effective tool for giving multiple viewpoints. But, using movies or film clips can be like using primary sources by only showing one perspective. It may be necessary to show clips of movies that show different perspectives in order to adequately and accurately give the students history. If done correctly, movies and film clips will expose students to multiple viewpoints.
But some of the data show that multiple perspectives are being used in the classroom in a limited way. Some of the students felt that women and blacks should receive more focus. This is a difficult task to accomplish because of curriculum requirements. There are topics of history (in the case of this study U.S. History) that must be covered over the course of a school year. Many of those topics exclude women, blacks, and other peoples who may not receive equal treatment in history textbooks. But from what I observed, the teachers and the curriculum at Williamstown Middle School have done a successful job at providing the students with more perspectives than just those in the history textbook. For example, one teacher spent a whole day on the women’s role in the Civil War. Many may argue that one day is not enough, but when a teacher has to cover the entire war in three weeks, one day is better than no time at all.

As stated, much of this data pertains to the Civil War. Had I collected data from a world history class, the student responses may have been much different. From what I observed in the classroom, the teachers went out of their way to give the students more than one perspective. In this case, the major perspectives I observed were Northern, Southern, women, free black, and slave. The results from the questionnaire strengthen the argument that it is necessary to provide students with multiple perspectives.

Discussing current issues in the classroom is a definite way to encourage students to see more than one perspective. At this day in age cultural differences are being exploited because of war and terrorism. In order for students to understand why this is happening, it is necessary to study all the perspectives of those involved. The teachers at Williamstown Middle School are doing an excellent job of getting their students to think and examine why these current issues are taking place. Issues in the world today can be
analogized to important issues in history. This is an opportunity for the teacher to relate a
topic where the students may have some background knowledge, and apply it to a topic
they need to learn. The use of current issues is a great way to expose students to new
perspectives. This allows them to broaden their own views on the critical issues in the
world today. Examining current issues is easier because of the amount of material at the
time the event is occurring. This fact can help students to understand that sometimes
history is someone's selection of only one view of the historical event. Current issues
deal with multiple perspectives, so it is necessary for teachers to incorporate such
techniques into the classroom to ensure the students are receiving more than one
viewpoint.

Many of my findings correlate with what I read in the recent literature. Open
discussion means that the teacher and the students share their ideas. Effective teachers
will help students understand the lesson by using examples from the students' culture
(Tan, 2002). As discussed, another effective technique for giving multiple views was the
use of movies or film clips. Using an accurate film in the classroom can recreate an event
in history as if it were taking place right in front of the student's eyes (Morales, 2001).
The use of primary sources is a great tool to give the students a personal statement from
someone who was living at that point in history. They can also be used as a tool to show
students how history can get twisted. Middle school is a time when students are
experiencing psychological and physiological changes, therefore literature can help these
students to understand some of those changes (Morales, 2001). Students at this age level
are very impressionable. To provide them with only one viewpoint does not give them
the full understanding of whatever history lesson is being studied. One student wrote a
response about how it is important to learn both sides so that you can make your own opinion. If a student is provided with only one side to a story than they made hold that side to be true without examining what else may be taking place.
Chapter V

Conclusion

“How are secondary social studies educators providing students with multiple perspectives in history?” Through extensive research and data collection, it was found that the 8th grade social studies teachers that were used in this research are providing their students with multiple perspectives using open discussion, alternative texts, current events, and movies or film clips. The teachers I interviewed all believed that it is essential to show students more than one perspective. These teachers were willing to deviate from the traditional methods of textbook use and lecture and notes for strategies that have more student appeal. Keeping student interest is a key factor when opening the student’s minds to more than one perspective. It is essential to show these multiple views in order to give the students an accurate portrayal of history. It is also essential to guiding these students into productive citizens capable of formulating their own opinions. Using alternative texts, open discussions, current events, and movies or film clips, students are gathering various viewpoints in history and in the modern world.

The presentation of multiple perspectives in the social studies classroom is important for more reasons than just understanding history. Educators must accept the responsibility of trying to mold all of their students into productive citizens in today’s society. This research did not examine if the students transferred the multiple perspectives being presented in class to their everyday thinking. But, in a few classes, students were observed as having changed, or opening up, their perspectives. After reading a chapter on Auschwitz, one student said aloud, “I had no idea it was that bad”. This student now has a new outlook on Jewish people and the struggles they have been
through. Teachers, especially at the 8th grade level, have the ability to plant a seed in students that can change their entire outlook on society. Many students come from homes where diversity is not accepted or encouraged. When discussing gay marriage, some students have definite beliefs of right or wrong on the issue. Allowing the students to discuss the issue while explaining the important themes of acceptance that must be present in a multicultural society may influence some of the less accepting students. These students present a challenge for a teacher trying to encourage multiculturalism. But the teacher still has the responsibility to plant that seed of diversity, in the hope that one day the student will accept and understand the importance of a multicultural society. More research needs to be conducted in order to find out the extent to which students are transferring information learned in the classroom to their everyday thinking.

Multiculturalism is not something that should be restricted to the social studies classroom. Many courses, specifically language arts, can provide themes and examples of multiculturalism. Some of the examples found in the literature and the data collection can be used in other subjects. For example, in language arts or art class, students can examine the many contributions of Latino and black American writers and artists to our country’s history. A major goal for educators is to create lifetime learners and positive contributors to today’s society of their students. In order for this to occur, multiple perspectives and viewpoints must be understood and accepted. This is not just the responsibility of the social studies teacher, it is the responsibility of all the teachers.

As a social studies teacher, the imperative theme of multiple perspectives in the classroom will always influence my lessons. I do not believe the make-up of the class will influence the type of perspectives that will be covered in the lesson. I believe the
subject will dictate how my lessons use multiple viewpoints. It is important for classes that are all white to learn about the different races that contributed to the subject. Likewise, it is necessary for classes that are black, or all Latino, to learn and understand more than just the black or Latino contributions to the subject. The various techniques I observed in the classroom will help me because I had the opportunity to see how they worked. The use of alternative texts, such as primary sources or political cartoons, is something that can be used everyday in the classroom. Such tools require the students to critically think while providing them with more than one viewpoint. I will use current events, in some form, on a daily basis. It may be just discussing something new in the news for three minutes. I feel it is critical to have the students up to date on the major issues in the world. Allowing the students to share and discuss their viewpoints encourages them to be accepting of various perspectives. If the teacher and class are willing to listen to and accept a students’ ideas, then hopefully that student will do the same for the rest of the class. Open discussion is a great way to have students respecting one another in the classroom. The techniques I read in literature that I did not observe will be used as guidelines for which I can find an effective strategy to provide multiple perspectives in the classroom.

Conducting this research has given me the opportunity to learn what current literature states regarding multiple perspectives in the classroom and compare that with what is happening in the classroom. The teachers used as subjects in this study are providing their students with various different viewpoints and perspectives in the classroom by using open discussion, alternative texts, current events, and movies or film
clips. This type of research is necessary in order to further the theme of multiculturalism in schools.
List of References


