

Committed to Differentiation and Engagement: A Case Study of Two American Secondary Social Studies Teachers

Derek Anderson¹ and Tanya Cook²

***Abstract** This case study examines two 10th-grade US History teachers who collaborated to create and implement an integrated, thematic eight-week unit on war with an emphasis differentiated instruction. Drawing on the National Council for the Social Studies (2010) framework for powerful and purposeful social studies instruction, the case study uses multiple sources of data, including 38 lesson observations, analyses of the teachers' lesson plans and student work, and interviews of teachers. Initially, the teachers were successful at engaging students in simulations, small-group discussions, and higher-order thinking. As the unit progressed, however, the teachers reverted to transmission-style teaching with an emphasis on breadth over depth. Changing teaching practice requires overcoming barriers associated with prior experiences and deeply-held beliefs about teaching and learning.*

***Keywords:** Differentiation, Thematic instruction*

Introduction

The words “boring” and “useless” are often associated with the subject of social studies beginning at the elementary level and continuing through high school (Guidry, Cuthrell, O'Connor & Good, 2010; Tanner, 2008; Zhao & Hoge, 2010). Researchers link students' negative attitudes towards social studies to dull instructional methods and increases in curriculum demands (Guidry et al. 2010; Hinde, 2005; Pederson, 2010; Tanner, 2008; Zhao & Hoge, 2010).

Intensifying accountability models since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have resulted in a greater emphasis on English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics, thus marginalizing social studies instruction, particularly at the elementary level (Anderson, 2014; Guidry et al. 2010). According to a report by the US Center on Education Policy, since the enactment of the NCLB, 44% of districts have

¹ Northern Michigan University

² Northern Michigan University

reduced instructional time designated for social studies. By the time students enter secondary education where social studies is more emphasized, students do not have the content knowledge secondary teachers are expecting (Guidry et al. 2010; Hinde, 2005).

Secondary educators in the US are accountable for hundreds of content standards. When looking at US History, there are 65 high school content expectations (HSCEs) and 86 sub-HSCEs for Michigan students, where this study took place. The astonishing number of social studies content standards puts pressure on secondary social studies teachers, which is greatly heightened when students enter high school already behind in their content knowledge (Guidry et al. 2010).

The challenges and stresses of covering an overwhelming amount of content has prompted teachers to adopt more teacher-centered instructional methods. Most commonly, teacher-centered instruction is textbook-driven, resulting in students developing negative attitudes towards social studies, as they are not engaged or experiencing any real-life connection to the material (Guidry et al. 2010; Hinde, 2005; Tanner, 2008). This is concerning as secondary students who are bored and have negative attitudes towards learning are at higher risk for school dropout (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Scheider, & Shernoff, 2003).

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has taken an assertive role in combating teacher-centered, textbook-driven teaching. They posit that in order for our youth to become responsible, active citizens and for the future of our democratic society, social studies instruction needs to change. With a goal of helping students “make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (2010, p. 1), NCSS recommends powerful and purposeful social studies instruction, which consists of instruction that is “meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active” (p. 1). Students need to be encouraged to think critically, to develop a deep understanding of core concepts rather than a surface understanding, and to have opportunities to connect to core values of democracy on a personal level (NCSS, 2010).

Likewise, students desire social studies lessons that are “useful and challenging” and “fun to learn” (Zhao & Hoge, 2010, p. 218). Teachers often want to teach using powerful and purposeful social studies instruction, but numerous barriers exist. Overcoming barriers to engaging, student-centered teaching is a demanding but worthwhile pursuit. Much can be learned from ambitious, committed high school teachers who strive to engage students in authentic, evocative, and personally relevant social studies tasks.

Purpose of Study

In this case study, we examined two 10th-grade US History teachers at a large, rural high school in the upper-Midwest. The teachers were faced with newly implemented, intimidating state-mandated content standards, large class sizes, rising accountability, and low student engagement. To counter these daunting realities, the teachers decided to work together on an ambitious goal to create and implement an integrated, thematic eight-week unit on war involving increased differentiation and powerful and purposeful social studies instruction (NCSS, 2010).

The purpose of this case study is to take an in-depth look at these two high school social studies teachers who proclaimed their passion and desire to improve their social studies practice in an era where social studies instruction is not at the forefront and schools are experiencing continuous cycles of reform, budgetary cuts, and incessant increases in administrative and societal expectations. Using thorough and multiple sources of data, including more than 30 lesson observations, analysis of the teachers' lesson plans and student work, and interviews of teachers, we sought to examine the extent to which the teachers were successful at meeting their ambitious goal.

Theoretical Framework

Powerful and purposeful social studies instruction follows a student-centered approach in which students are actively learning through problem-solving, hands-on inquiry, and collaboration (NCSS, 2010). When students are fully engaged in the learning process, the classroom environment experiences less disruptive behavior, which thereby increasing students' academic development (Kalina & Powell, 2009; Shernoff et al. 2003).

These essential elements of powerful and purposeful social studies are rooted in Constructivist Learning Theory (Kalina & Powell, 2009; Windschitl, 2002). Constructivism derives from the work of Jean Piaget (1953), Lev Vygotsky (1962), John Dewey (1938), and many others who studied how individuals acquire and develop knowledge. Constructivism is the idea that learners construct their own meaning through inquiry coinciding with Piaget's (1953) theories of individuals building upon their existing knowledge through personal experiences. A teacher's role in constructivist learning is as a facilitator and guide for student achievement. Vygotsky (1962) argued that individuals learn in their own zone of proximal development where they seek assistance from peers

and teachers to reach a deeper level of understanding (Kalina & Powell, 2009). Within constructivist learning, teachers strive to center instruction around a central theme relevant to students' lives and to guide students towards resources and opportunities for self-discovery to develop a deep understanding of the underpinnings of the theme (Kaiser, 2010; Windschitl, 2002).

Constructivist learning can take different forms in the social studies classroom, all of which involve students' cognitive engagement with history, geography, civics, or economics at a level that challenges them appropriately. The high school social studies teachers we studied sought to use thematic and differentiated instruction to engage their students in an eight-week war unit.

Thematic instruction allows teachers to anchor and connect their subjects' curriculum around key concepts through the development of authentic themes (Barton & Smith, 2000; White, 1995). Predicated on the theory of constructivism, the goal of thematic instruction is to provide students with opportunities to apply and build upon their critical and analytical skills through inquiry while making strong bonds between abstract ideas (Barton & Smith, 2000; Jewett, 2007; McBee, 2000; White, 1995). Within social studies, thematic instruction has shown to be more effective than the traditional chronological approach as it evokes student engagement and a deeper understanding of content (White, 1995). Although research on the topic is not exhaustive, particularly at the secondary level, results are suggesting that students who participate in integrative thematic instruction test as well and sometimes better than students in traditional settings (Hinde, 2005; Stephens, 2007; Vars & Beane, 2000). This aligns with Dewey's (1938) idea that learning takes place when experiences have meaning and importance to the learner.

In today's secondary social studies classrooms consisting of 30+ students, academic diversity is inevitable and extreme, especially since social studies is the subject least likely to be tracked by student ability. Central to constructivism is the need for teachers to address the wide range of ability levels and learning styles of their students. Because not every student will reach the prescribed outcome at the same rate or with the same supports, teachers must differentiate their instruction to address learner variance (Tomlinson, 1995; 2000). Differentiated instruction is "flexibility in content, process, and product based on student strengths, needs, and learning styles" (Levy, 2008, p. 162).

Content Differentiation refers to ensuring that individual learners are provided with a continuum of building blocks, appropriate to each student's zone of proximal development, so that all students can master content standards. Traditional teacher-centered classrooms

implementing a one-size-fits-all curriculum fail to take into account individual students' knowledge and experiences. Differentiation of the Learning Process involves providing students with multiple learning activities and peer groupings, taking into account individual abilities, learning styles, and interests. Product Differentiation provides students with various options to demonstrate what they have learned (Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 1995).

Limited research has been published on differentiated instruction in secondary social studies classrooms, which raises a serious issue as a sophomore-level social studies US History class encompasses a vast range of learners. Arguably, a US sophomore-level social studies course, like the one that is the focus of this paper, has the greatest need for teachers who use differentiated instruction. With many high-achieving students electing to take Advanced Placement courses starting the following year, sophomore social studies courses include all students, non-tracked by ability.

Although most secondary social studies educators acknowledge the benefits and challenges of addressing classroom academic diversity, most still revert to traditional, textbook-based instruction (Guidry et al. 2010; Hinde, 2005; Tanner, 2008; Hootstein, 1999). The two teachers that are the focus of this paper attempted to address this challenge of learner variance and student disdain for social studies by creating and implementing an integrated, thematic unit on war involving increased differentiation and powerful and purposeful social studies instruction.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study included two 10th-grade US History teachers, from an approximately 2,500-student K-12 public school district in the upper-Midwest. Both teachers were Caucasian and female, with seven and 21 years of experience. Their high school serves approximately 1,146 students grades 9 through 12, 91.5% Caucasian, 5.2% American Indian, 1.1% African American, 1.1% Asian, and 0.5% Hispanic. Students within the school district represent a wide range of socio-economic levels, including 33% who qualify for free- or reduced-lunch.

The teachers each teach three sections of US History with an average of 30 students per class, including a wide range of ability levels from students with learning disabilities (LD) who receive in-class support to gifted and talented students.

Data

In order to explore the extent to which the teachers were successful at meeting their ambitious goal of using thematic and differentiated instruction to engage their students, we used a case study design to examine the participants within their daily context, in order to gain an intensive, holistic description and analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2011). Case studies allow for a detailed and contextual analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Yin (1994) asserted that one benefit of case study research is its insight into the boundaries between what is known about a phenomenon and what is not known. Several elements of case study research reveal those boundaries. When cases can be studied in real-life contexts, richer description and analyses are possible. In this study, we not only talked with the teachers about their planning, delivery, and assessment of social studies, we observed them in action extensively, thus strengthening the empiricism of the study.

We used multiple and extensive methods of data collection with simultaneous qualitative analysis to increase breadth and depth of understanding and to increase validity through triangulation (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). We conducted 38 lesson observations within the 8-week unit. We administered two 1-hour interviews with the teachers during the planning stages of their thematic, differentiated war unit. About halfway through the unit we conducted a 3-hour interview with the participants and another lengthy interview following completion of the unit. Data sources also included extensive document analysis of teachers' lesson plans, materials, student work, and assessments.

To analyze the interview transcripts, lesson observation notes, teachers' lesson plans, and student work, we began by using constant comparison method to create initial codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Next, we used focused coding continuously to arrange the existing codes into broader conceptual categories until the data reached a point of saturation (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout the coding process, we attempted to bracket our own experiences and assumptions through reflective note-taking and regular critical conversations, as well as by relying heavily on the participants' own words.

Findings

In this study, we investigated the extent to which two teachers were successful at meeting their ambitious goal of addressing the challenge of learner variance and student disdain for social studies by creating and implementing an integrated, thematic unit on war

involving increased differentiation and powerful and purposeful social studies instruction. In the following sections, we will examine the teachers' unit plan and associated materials, their implementation of the eight-week plan, and the teachers' thoughts and reflections. Unless otherwise noted, our narrative descriptions of the teachers' actions derived from our 40+ hours of observations of their teaching and materials, as well as student work.

Extensive Unit Plan

Through collaborative efforts, the teachers developed a thematic unit plan covering the Spanish American War, World War I (WWI), and World War II (WWII). The goal of the unit was to address at the three wars collectively using essential questions intended to spark students' higher-order thinking skills. The teachers developed 10 essential questions to be interwoven throughout the unit plan for leading discussions and for students to reflect on and journal about. Examples of the 10 essential questions are: "*What is war?*" "*Is war ever just? If so, under what conditions?*" "*Does war cause national prosperity?*" and "*Is it the responsibility of the United States to be the world's policeman?*" The teachers' unit plan incorporated other differentiated daily activities such as simulations, computer research, think-pair-share, and primary and secondary document analysis.

To assess student learning throughout the unit, the teachers' intended plan incorporated formative pre- and post-test assessments, periodic portfolio checks, teacher-made quizzes, choice list projects, and a summative final exam. The pre- and post-test consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions. Throughout the unit, students were to keep all of their work within their social studies binder for the teachers to assess periodically. The final exam was a two-part exam. The first half was a test consisting of 38 multiple-choice questions and 12 matching questions. The second half included an essay on the ways the concept of war changed throughout the three wars, using historical facts to explain if they thought wars could be just. In addition to the essay, students were to choose two additional projects from the list of 10 options. Projects ranged from creating political cartoons to creating a graph to illustrate the costs of WWI and WWII.

Unit Implementation

As is expected in the realm of teaching, classroom instruction does not always go as planned. In this section, we will look at the first few weeks of instruction, the middle of the unit in which an instructional shift occurred, and the last half of unit instruction.

Beginning instruction. Unit implementation started on track with the first two essential questions (“*What is war?*” and “*Is war ever just?*”) leading student-centered lessons. Differentiated techniques were frequently interwoven throughout the first few weeks including the following: a class state debate simulation on determining whether the United States should go to war, open-ended discussion questions, think-pair-share opportunities, and a *realities of war* choice list project. Lesson observations revealed a high level of student engagement throughout the first couple of weeks of instruction, especially within the simulation lesson. Students exhibited high on-task behavior through active participation, quality peer discussion, eye contact, with minimal amounts of side conversations or glazed-over looks. Coinciding with our classroom observations, the teachers described the state debate simulation as having high differentiation and student engagement. For example, one of the teachers said:

Students are grappling with events, making decisions, debating, having to use a big skill set in order to participate. Everyone has to participate because the students are in groups of three or four, and the group has to come to a consensus because they get one vote to share and everyone has to be able to respond and [share their vote rationale] for each year from 1914-1917. I think it worked really well. You feel like they’re getting it.

The teachers also integrated short video clips into early lessons to provide another source of information for students to connect to the print content. The modernity of the video clips seemed to engage the students; all students’ eyes were focused on the screen, they were taking notes, and nearly every student participated in post-clip discussions. The teachers presented the students with prompts related to the video clips, which sparked students to make real-life connections. For example, during the *realities of war* segment, students investigated the types of weaponry was used at that time, what life was like for soldiers, and how those concepts compare with weaponry and the lives of soldiers today.

Instructional shift. Classroom observations revealed that despite the teachers’ effective use of the first two questions from the 10 essential questions they planned to weave throughout the entire unit, the essential question focus became an afterthought as the teachers moved through the unit. The packet was intended to focus the students on higher-order thinking questions and discussion around specific themes. Instead, the teachers used more transmission-style teaching dominated by lecture and storytelling.

In our mid-unit interview, teachers concurred that the essential questions were no longer a central focus. One of the teachers stated, “We have lamented the fact that we

haven't been using the journals the way we intended to." In the post-interview, one teacher explained why the essential questions were ignored as the unit progressed:

We feel like we didn't do what we set out to do which was connect [all three wars] through the essential questions. We didn't make the connections as tightly or as frequently as we wanted to do because we didn't take the time or didn't have the time.

In addition to moving away from the essential questions, classroom instruction was not focused on looking at the three wars collectively as planned. WWI and WWII were covered using a more traditional chronological approach. Along with the shift away from a thematic approach, their perceived need to cover content caused the teachers to shift away from their planned material. Because the state debate simulation carried over into two class periods rather than the planned one, the teachers felt compelled to play "catch-up." One teacher expressed feeling pressured to get through it all with not enough time. As we will discuss in the next section, the need for content "catch-up" and the decreased emphasis on the essential thematic questions led to a shift towards more teacher-centered lessons.

Last half of unit. As the teachers moved away from the essential questions, lectures mixed with teacher-led whole-group discussions became more prominent. They touched on two more of the essential questions; however, fact-based content overruled essential question analysis and discussion. Differentiated techniques were still frequently incorporated, mostly through Process Differentiation, such as think-pair-share, one-minute essays, video clips, and analyzing primary documents; yet, these techniques were typically combined with teacher-centered instruction rather than as part of student-centered lessons like the simulations and debates they did at the start of the semester. Consistent with our lesson observations, teachers agreed that they returned to their old, more traditional social studies approach. One of the teachers stated during an interview, "There were some choices we made because we had things from previous teachings that we knew worked and were like our fall back. We didn't execute the plan as we wanted to."

Lesson observations indicated that as teachers struggled to stick with the thematic, student-centered approach, students struggled with staying engaged throughout lessons. Throughout the eight-week unit, there were always a few students who were not engaged in daily lessons; however, our observations consistently revealed more off-task behavior in the teacher-centered lessons compared to more student-centered lessons and activities.

Teachers' Unit Reflections

Following their eight-week unit, the teachers were dubious about their success at differentiation and powerful and purposeful social studies instruction. One of the teachers noted:

We have mixed feelings about [the unit]. I think we had really good intentions and decent plans, but it's reality when it comes to dealing with lack of time. We wanted to make sure we hit the content and were making those thematic reflections, but we were so rushed with covering the content that I felt like we weren't doing content justice and making sure [the students] had the basic elements of war. We feel like we didn't do what we set out to do which was connect [all three wars] through the essential questions.

The teachers expressed internal conflict in regards to letting go of traditional, high content-driven instruction for thematic, student-centered instruction. They felt students would not be able to engage in higher level thinking without knowing the basics. One of the teachers commented:

So, we wanted to have this rich conversation about civil liberties: *In times of war, should they sacrifice their civil liberties?* We wanted to have a big conversation about that, which we did a little bit, but when we were talking about WW1, we didn't have time to get into depth about it, and so without the content base we couldn't have that rich conversation.

With the amount of time the teachers spent creating this unit and their frustration with the outcome, the teachers were apprehensive to repeat it. One teacher remarked:

I think we are playing with this idea, do we want to do war in this manner again? I think perhaps condensing it down and doing war for 8 weeks. Maybe it doesn't work, so maybe we go back to a more chronological approach as opposed to thematically. But I think we would still embed social and political themes throughout, and instead of us interweaving the themes, the kids would bring up the themes.

The other teacher added:

If we do it again, is it worth it to put more time in because we spent a lot of time in the summer and through October, and it was just like "eh" because we didn't execute according to plan, and we taught poorly in compared to what we've done previously.

Despite the teachers' mixed feelings towards their unit implementation, they were proud of their students' accomplishments. The students' scores did improve from pre-test to post-test with the class average increasing from 43.7% to 73.3%. In addition, the class average on the summative assessment portion of the final exam was 78.2%, which the teachers indicated was similar to other years.

Though the teachers did not stick with their intended student-centered approaches throughout the unit, they were pleased with the development of their students' thinking processes. One of the teachers noted:

I'm proud of the fact that [the students] were at least thinking about war in terms of its implications on society, and whether or not it's just and are questioning it, like: *Should we blindly agree with what the government is doing?* [They] were even questioning me. I'm happy with their thinking process and questioning skills they have developed throughout this unit.

Discussion

The two high school social studies teachers in this study set out to teach an eight-week unit using powerful and purposeful social studies (NCSS) with an emphasis on differentiation. The teachers wanted to teach differently from how they taught typically, and prior to the unit, they had a clear vision of how they wanted their teaching should be conducted. During our initial interview, one of the teachers commented, "I've got the picture. I know how I want to do it. After taking courses and going to countless conferences and workshops, I know how I want to change the way I teach."

The most effective teachers tend to be most open to change (Fullan, 2007; Richardson, 1990). There is a glut of research on teachers' resistance to change; however most of that research has examined teachers' responses to external pressures to change, rather than to changes the teachers themselves want to make (Pajares, 1992). Successful change in teaching practice requires that teachers change their beliefs first (Borg, 2011). In order for teachers to change their actions, they need a clear sense of what they want their new teacher behaviors to consist of. The two teachers in this case study wanted to change and were able clearly articulate their vision.

For example, in contrasting their typical methods for delivering and assessing course content, the teachers explained how they wanted to embrace differentiated instruction. One of the teachers described differentiation as, "Allowing for multiple

approaches for students to play with their learning and show what they know; finding different ways for kids to learn and for them to really bring in to who they are.” She contrasted differentiated instruction with an explanation of traditional social studies instruction: “I think it is very teacher-centered with prescribed outcomes that are closed-ended. The kids don’t have any input. It’s very regimented and a lot of historical trivia.”

Differentiation is essential to powerful and purposeful social studies teaching; however, effective differentiation requires more than being knowledgeable of its definition; it requires practice and knowledge of breaking down content for the individual student through differentiated content, process, and product (Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 1995; 2000). For much of the unit, the teachers were successful at differentiating, particularly their assessments. One of the teachers commented, “A lot of the end products we are giving are culminating activities. We give them choices they can do a song, a poster. I think kids are hungry for opportunities to fly and they are crying out for a chance to show off their stuff.”

Despite their success with differentiating the students’ learning products, the teachers’ use of differentiation for the learning content or process was limited (Tomlinson, 1995; 2000). Our observations of nearly 40 lessons revealed that when the teachers differentiated their teaching (learning process), their students were more engaged through participation, enriched discussions with peers, and on-task behaviors. Differentiated instruction leads to students being appropriately challenged resulting in less cause for boredom or feelings of overwhelming difficulty.

Prior to teaching their unit, the teachers described effective differentiation and declared that they intended to make it a priority. In the early stages of the unit, they did differentiate the learning process for their students, with great success. As the weeks went on, however, the teachers returned to a more traditional, transmission style of teaching. As their unit progressed, the teachers in this study seemed to face barriers in the way of their quest to engage students in powerful and purposeful social studies.

Onosko (1991, 1992) asserted that there are five barriers in the way of deep, engaging social studies:

1. A tradition of transmission-style social studies instructional model
2. A curriculum emphasis on breadth
3. Large class sizes
4. Lack of teacher prep and work time
5. High number of courses taught per day

The teachers in this study faced large class sizes (average of 35 per class), had to teach five classes per day, and were allotted only one prep period each day, which certainly hindered their change efforts. It was the first two barriers, however, that kept them from fully implementing the type of teaching they set out to do.

The three barriers Onosko identified regarding teacher time could be classified as first-order barriers to change (Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 2007). On the other hand, the first two barriers, though still part of intuitional structures, are related to teacher beliefs and are therefore second-order barriers to change. First-order barriers to change in teaching practice tend to be extrinsic to the teachers' sphere of influence (Ertmer, 1999). First-order barriers involve logistical and procedural practices. Second-order barriers to teacher change, however, involve teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (Ertmer, 1999; Richardson, 1990). Second-order barriers are often tacit and not even recognized by teachers (Kerr, 1996). Because second-order barriers are deeply rooted and imperceptible, they are far more difficult to overcome than first-order barriers (Ertmer, 1999).

In this study, the teachers were able to overcome first-order barriers rather easily, without regression throughout the eight-week unit. At the start they were also able to surmount the second-order barriers, but after a couple of weeks they reverted to long-held practices. In particular, the two teachers could not overcome Onosko's (1991) first two barriers; they could not forgo a transmission style of teaching or emphasize depth over breadth of curriculum. The two teachers' attempts and powerful and purposeful social studies teaching were attenuated by their experiences as students and teachers where social studies consisted of neutral, fact-based, teacher-centered instruction.

The teachers began their unit with an emphasis on small-group work and simulations, which the teachers found to be successful. Yet, as the unit progressed, we observed the teachers doing more of the talking. Their plan was to focus students' thinking and writing around 10 essential questions. Early in the unit, the questions played a large role in how class time was spent; however, of the 38 lessons we observed, only six lessons focused on the essential questions, all of which occurred early in the unit.

The teachers expressed frustration that their students lacked content knowledge, and therefore felt compelled to transmit knowledge to them using traditional teacher-centered methods. For example, one of the teachers remarked, "There are certain aspects that we want the students to know. I can't have them go into higher order thinking if they don't know the basics." Ironically, early in the unit when they had their students

participate in a simulation, which required higher-order thinking, the students performed admirably, even though they lacked content knowledge.

Social studies teachers have always complained about students' lack of knowledge (Guidry et al. 2010; Hinde, 2005). One of the teachers in this study vented, "I hate that they don't know as much as they used to when they come to me. If they don't know certain things, I just feel like as an American citizen they need to know these things." With their growing frustration over their students not knowing some of the "basics", the teachers reverted to their deeply ingrained beliefs that social studies knowledge trumps higher-order thinking. As the weeks went on, the two teachers could not overcome the second-order change barrier of a transmission-style of teaching social studies.

Their attempts at cognitively-demanding thematic instruction were also thwarted by their propensity to emphasize breadth of coverage over depth. The two teachers felt compelled to "get through the material." They recognized during the planning process that teaching in a thematic, student-centered manner would require them to leave some content out. One of teachers noted, "There is just so much cool stuff we could do, but we have to pick the best stuff." White (1995) described how thematic instruction emphasizes depth of coverage:

[Thematic instruction] forces the teacher and student to identify fundamental ideas within a subject. This can only be done if teachers selectively and judiciously abandon less important content in favor of more important ideas. The view that all content is of equal value simply is not feasible in theory or practice (p. 161).

Covering content is a primary component of most social studies teaching (Barton & Levstik, 2003). The two teachers began their unit emphasizing depth over breadth, but as the unit progressed, they began to recognize that they were not going to be able to cover as much as they had planned. One of the teachers described how they got behind schedule: "The simulation took longer than we planned, so we had to cram two days into one." Even though both teachers spoke positively about the simulation activity, and it was clear that the students were engaged throughout, the teachers still obligated to use transmission-style instruction to cover all the planned material. Their deeply held beliefs about content coverage won out over their new commitment to focusing on depth using thematic instruction differentiation.

Conclusion

Teachers who set out to deliver powerful and purposeful social studies are to be commended. The two high school social studies teachers who were the focus of this case study set out with an ambitious goal of teaching an integrated, thematic eight-week unit on war with an emphasis on differentiation. Prior to teaching the unit, they proclaimed their passion and desire to improve their social studies practice in an era where social studies is increasingly marginalized, class sizes are growing, and administrative and societal expectations seem insatiable. Their unit and lesson plans reflected this desire, and at the start of the unit, the teachers were successful at meeting their goal; however, by the end of the eight-week unit, the two teachers reverted to their old practices of transmission-style of instruction with an emphasis on breadth over depth. Our analysis of multiple sources of data, including 38 lesson observations and three lengthy interviews, suggests that the teachers faced second-order barriers to change. They encountered conflicts between their long-held tacit beliefs and their new espoused beliefs about teaching high school social studies.

Much has been written about the role of beliefs in transforming teaching practice. In order for teachers to make significant, lasting changes to their teaching practices, they have to acknowledge how their deeply-held beliefs about teaching and learning, and how their educational experience, differ from how they want to teach (Sheingold, 1991). There is great debate about whether change in beliefs must precede change in practice (Pajares, 1992); however, it is generally agreed that reflection is essential to change (Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2011; Schön, 1991). Likewise, collaboration increases the likelihood that teachers will change their practice (Schmoker, 2006).

The teachers in the study were conflicted about their attempt at changing the way they teach. Though proud of their initial success, the teachers recognized the pull to retain their regular practices. They acknowledged the barriers in the way of deep, engaging social studies instruction (Onosko, 1991), yet their beliefs are evolving through their new experiences, reflections, and collaboration. When teachers launch ambitious goals and recognize the challenges of changing how they teach, powerful and purposeful social studies can prevail (Schmoker, 2006).

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