

The Multigenre Research Project: An Approach to Developing Historical Empathy

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This action research study explores how the multigenre research project develops historical empathy, or historical perspective taking skills, in a class of 22 fourth grade students. Much of the research in these areas focuses on the high school and university level. However, this study explored the degree to which upper elementary students were able to recognize historical perspectives, and whether the multigenre project format was conducive to developing this particular skill. The students in the study selected a historical topic from a list of historical subjects, then researched this topic, and displayed what they learned through multiple genres. The action researcher found that the multigenre research project increased students' understanding of the differences in historical perspectives.

Keywords: Action research, Elementary students, Historical empathy, Multigenre projects

Introduction

In recent decades, the elementary curriculum had been one of the most contentious areas of the social studies (Brophy and Alleman, 2006). In particular, educators have argued over what content from history and social sciences ought to replace the largely abandoned “expanding horizons” curriculum, which had come under attack by numerous scholars both inside and outside the social studies tradition (Crabtree, 1987; Egan, 1980; Levstik & Pappas, 1992; Ravitch, 1987). Although the debate over the substance of the elementary curriculum was far from being resolved, a new concern entered the discourse in the wake of the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB); the fact that the elementary social studies was being displaced by other content areas — especially math and literacy — because increased achievement in these

areas, not social studies, formed the substance of NCLB legislation (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Rock, et al., 2006; Wills, 2007). Not only has the time devoted to social studies instruction been reduced, but this trend exacerbated the problem that the quality of the social studies instruction was often superficial and poor to begin with (Bailey, Shaw, and Hollifield, 2006). Elementary students are more likely to memorize historical facts from textbooks and recall the information than actually investigate the past through the kind of inquiry approaches proposed by Vansledright (2002) and Levstik and Barton (2005). According to these scholars, an authentic historical experience involves having students engage in historical inquiry and employ thinking skills much like a historian. As other scholars have argued, one of the most important outcomes in an inquiry-based history curriculum is historical empathy, or perspec-

tive taking (Brooks, 2009; Yeager & Foster, 2001; Yilmaz, 2007). But how can teachers encourage inquiry-based history instruction and foster historical empathy within the time limitations of the curriculum that continues to value math and literacy over the social studies? One possibility is utilizing other core subjects' instructional time for an interdisciplinary project to enhance social studies skills and increase authentic historical experiences. An easy cross-curricular pair for many teachers is language arts and history, and one activity that may enhance historical empathy is the multigenre project.

The multigenre project involves extensive research of a particular, student-selected topic to create a final product in multiple genres to depict different perspectives of a topic (Allen, 2001, 2004; Cate, 2001; Grierson, 2002; Moulton, 1995; Suskind, 2007; Romano, 1995). This action research study investigates the effectiveness of using a multigenre project with fourth graders to enhance the students' historical perspective taking skills. This study seeks to add to the growing literature depicting what the development of historical empathy looks like in actual classrooms (Brooks, 2008; Doppen, 2000; Jensen, 2008; Kohlmeier, 2006; Yeager, et al., 1998), as well as demonstrate how social studies can be successfully integrated with language arts during an era in which the time being devoted to the social studies is being reduced in many states.

The Multigenre Research Project

A multigenre project involves researching a topic and reporting the results through multiple genres, each reflecting a different perspective. The teachers and professors who have implemented this project have found that multigenre projects increase opportunities for reading, writing, speaking, and problem solving (Cate, 2001; Romano, 1995). Allen (2001) describes it as a project that utilizes a handful of different genres, each illuminating

another side of a chosen topic to make its own point. Suskind (2007) defines the project in four main points: "a unifying topic, told through various genres, based on content, and exuding personal voice" (p. 404). The project allows students to approach a topic and its multiple perspectives from a variety of genres. Some genre examples include what we would think of traditionally such as letters, diary entries, an interview, a narrative, or poetry. But other unconventional examples, such as time lines, diplomas, obituaries, and puppet shows, can also be used (Allen, 2001, p. 71). One multigenre project that will be described below used the genres of political cartoon, a map, a letter written from the perspective of a soldier, and a poem to represent the different reactions and perspectives on the Battle of Appomattox Court House. Often, the project is accompanied by culminating information sharing production or presentation to display the fruits of the students' labor (Allen, 2001).

The majority of previous research done on the implementation of multigenre projects has been in college and high school courses. These researchers have found the project to be very successful and to provide a positive learning experience for their students (Cate, 2001; Moulton, 1999; Romano, 1995; 2000; Suskind, 2007). Only a few studies have worked directly with teaching the multigenre process to upper elementary students (Allen and Swistak, 2001, 2004; Grierson, 2002). No studies have attempted to assess the effectiveness of the multigenre project for developing historical empathy.

... found that certain genres seemed to be more conducive than others for displaying a historical perspective. These include first-person student-authored journal entries, letters, newspaper articles, and poems.

Historical Empathy

To be empathetic means demonstrating the ability to recognize another person's feelings or emotions. When one feels empathy for someone else, inherently there is a sentiment of "being in another person's shoes." However, VanSledright (2001) explains that displaying historical empathy is not so simplistic; one cannot merely look into the past and pretend as if they themselves were there. To think historically, you cannot, or should not think about how you would feel if you were in a certain position or context. Doing so would insert present bias, creating a skewed idea of past events and actions. Historical empathy involves approaching history as it was experienced by those in the past (Brooks, 2009). Lee and Ashby (2001), identify historical empathy as "where we get to when we know what past agents thought, what goals they may have been seeking, and how they saw their situation, and can connect all this with what they did" (p. 24). Yilmaz (2007) states that historical empathy allows one to evaluate the past "in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions, and actions of historical agents using a variety of historical evidence" (p. 331). Yeager and Foster (2001) note that some authors like Downey, Ashby and Lee, would rather use the term "perspective taking" instead of empathy because in order to understand the past successfully, one must consider a set of beliefs or values which are not necessarily his or her own (p. 15). In this study the terms "historical empathy" and "perspective taking" will be used interchangeably, in accordance with the research cited above.

There have been several research studies that demonstrate how students in upper elementary and high school might be engaged in perspective taking (Jensen, 2008; Doppen, 2000). In Jensen's (2008) fifth grade classroom, she used debate to foster the development of historical empathy. She found that her

students were capable of illustrating different historical perspectives when asked to debate in the perspective of one side of history or another. In both Doppen's (2000) and Yeager et al.'s (1998) research studies, sophomores and juniors in high school were observed to see if they gained historical empathy through reading multiple perspectives on President Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan. Both authors agree that having students analyze multiple perspectives of an event developed their own perspective-taking ability. Yeager et al (1998) found that students must first have a detailed knowledge of a historical event in order to demonstrate historical empathy. If students have knowledge of historical outcomes, they can use the "benefit of hindsight" to better understand historical actions (Yeager et al, 1998). Previous research on historical empathy has created some consensus on the positive benefits and implications for instruction. However, few studies have been conducted on elementary age students, and none have considered the effectiveness of a multigenre project for developing perspective taking skills.

The Cross-curricular Multigenre Project

Multigenre projects represent a promising activity for teachers who are looking for authentic cross-curricular projects that allow for the development of language arts and historical thinking skills — especially in places where these two areas overlap. For example, the International Reading Association encourages teachers to develop students' ability to:

recognize and evaluate author perspective and bias, synthesize information from multiple sources, ...[and] present findings in a variety of forms, including oral presentations or debates and written documents that may take the form of research papers, position pa-

pers, or writing from a specific role or perspective (International Reading Association. 2006, p. 32).

Thus, the multigenre project can help students achieve the generic critical literacy skills listed above as well as the domain-specific historical thinking objectives identified in the previous section on historical empathy. As noted previously, to achieve historical empathy, students must have a full knowledge of historical context, gained through an exploration of multiple perspectives (Yeager et al., 1998). These multiple perspectives can be gained by engaging different types of historical evidence including primary and secondary sources. Making sense of these sources requires a considerable amount of reading and comprehension skills.

Previously, discussion, debate, and essay writing have been used to develop students' historical empathy (Jensen, 2008; Doppen, 2000; Yeager et al., 1998). For example, in her action research study, Brooks (2008) sought to determine the impact that different types of frequently used writing assignments had on middle school students' ability to display historical empathy. Brooks had her eighth grade students examine a variety of primary and secondary source documents relating to the American Revolution. The students were given first and third person writing assignments to display their knowledge about a particular historical event. She found that the way the students were asked to write their historical conclusions either increased or decreased their ability to display empathy. First person writing allowed students to make more "inferential" conclusions, but decreased their ability to display historical empathy. Students using first person inserted more decontextualized thinking of the past, while third person narratives focused the students' attention on the accuracy of the material, but did not encourage as much inferential thinking. In multigenre projects students may employ either first person or third

person narratives (or both). As a result, the kinds of benefits of both kinds of writing that Brooks' outlined can potentially be achieved. Multigenre projects ask students to think about the information they have found, interpret the information (by way of thinking about the past from the perspective of historical actors), and display the information in an array of different genres to best present the perspective the author is trying to portray. Consequently, language arts and social studies objectives can both be achieved.

In conclusion, due to the marginalization of the social studies in the elementary grades, inquiry-based history instruction — particularly the development of historical empathy — is very rarely pursued. By utilizing the time devoted to language arts instruction, the social studies can receive more attention. Because history is the main disciplinary focus of the social studies curriculum and inquiry-based methods are the best way to foster historical empathy, the multigenre project, with its emphasis on exploring multiple perspectives of a topic, may provide teachers with an excellent way to utilize the language arts time to enhance the social studies curriculum.

Method and Setting

This action research study focused on two questions:

1. How is historical empathy, or historical perspective taking, improved due to the implementation of a multigenre project?
2. To what extent are upper elementary aged students able to develop historical perspective taking skills?

The action research was conducted by the first author, Ms. Lindsay D'Adamo, a pre-service teacher over a period of four weeks during a semester of student teaching. During the plan-

ning and implementation of the project, Ms. D'Adamo consulted with the second author, Dr. Thomas Fallace, who was her University Supervisor during the student teaching experience. Ms. D'Adamo collected and analyzed the data herself using an action research paradigm, but received feedback from Dr. Fallace and her cooperating teacher throughout the process. The two authors worked together to write the present article, but the first person accounts excerpted below belong solely to Ms. D'Adamo. Such collaboration is part of the action research process.

As Guba (2007) explains, action researchers “do not ‘discover’ knowledge by watching nature do its thing behind a one-way mirror; rather, it is literally created by the interaction of inquirers with the object into which they have inquired” (p. xii). Thus, action research was created and continues to be defined in direct contrast to traditional scientific research and its concerns with validity, reliability, objectivity, generalizability, and contamination of the data. Action research, is not “relativistic” in the sense that anything counts as knowledge (or that any answer is as good as any other), but it is “relativistic” in its acceptance that all knowledge is relative to its particular context and the inquirers embedded within it. Action research stresses spiraling cycles of planning, execution, and, most of all, reflection. (p. 15). Oja, & Smulyan, (1989) propose that “action research aims to improve educational practice by engaging teachers in the processes of planning, acting, and reflecting.” (p. 23). Ebbutt (1985) views action research as a “series of successive cycles, each incorporating the possibility of feedback of information within and between the cycles” (p. 164). Accordingly, Stringer (2007) argues that action research is characterized as a “spiral of activity: plan, act, observe, reflect,” and that “[a]t the completion of each set of activities, [action researchers] will review (look again), reflect (reanalyze), and re-act (modify their actions)” (p. 8-9). The reflection cycle is not

necessarily systemic, but instead it recognizes and allows for an emergent design and revisions to the intervention in light of further information and changes to the context. In action research, data analysis and collection occur simultaneously. Initial results, reflection, and outcomes can and will affect the subsequent results, reflection, and actions in an organic process.

Therefore, action research design is emergent, flexible, and responsive to the particular context and its participants. According to Reason (2004), “emergent developmental form” is one of the five key dimensions of action research (along with knowledge in practice, participation and democracy, many ways of knowing, and worthwhile purposes). As Reason (2004) explains, “Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process” (p. 273). Ultimately, the object of study in action research is the process of reflective action itself, not the analysis of the “objectively” collected data at a later time. The evolving reflective meaning-making of the participants is the primary focus of study (although the research questions can be focused on learner outcomes). The results are not meant to be generalizable or transferable; instead they merely suggest “the possible” in one educational context.

This action research study took place in a classroom of 22 fourth grade students, located in a suburban school in the northeastern region of Virginia. The class was made up of one African American female, four African American males, four Caucasian females, six Caucasian males, six Hispanic females, and one Asian male. The school is designated a Title I school, a government funded program providing supplemental funds to school districts with high concentrations of low socio-economic families to meet school educational goals.

In the Virginia fourth grade curriculum, social studies instruction is focused specifically on “Virginia Studies.” The students are tested regularly on all core subjects, (math,

science, reading, writing, and Virginia Studies) in a county-wide benchmark assessment to ready students for the end-of-the-year Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment. The school district mandates a 45-minute time block dedicated to Virginia Studies in fourth grade.

The language arts curriculum as dictated by the school district centers on reading comprehension skills and various types of writing (poetry, paragraph essays, narratives, etc.). The language arts block is 90 minutes with extra time used throughout the day for language arts extension (during a period called Intervention and Enrichment). Due to the flexibility in the language arts curriculum and the large amount of time allotted for enrichment and language arts instruction, Ms. D'Adamo was granted the opportunity to implement the multigenre project during the language arts block to supplement the social studies instruction.

Data was collected in several different ways. The students work throughout the process was assessed. A series of benchmarks were set up before beginning the project to guide students in their choice of topic, research, choice of genres, choice of perspectives, editing and unifying, and final production of the project. Such benchmarks included individual and small group meetings for guidance throughout the process as well as to assess where students needed assistance, and the completion of mini-assignments to conceptualize topics, genre choices and perspective choices individually. At each benchmark, for each student, Ms. D'Adamo reassessed and reflected on their progress and how to readjust the next class period to meet individual student's needs.

Students were asked to choose from a list of 13 topics from the Virginia Studies curriculum around the time of implementation. The implementation period of the project fell during the third nine weeks block of the curriculum, which includes famous African American and female Virginians, historical

events from the Civil War, and important Civil War leaders like Robert E. Lee and Abraham Lincoln. Students were required to present at least three genres, in three different historical perspectives on their topic as a way to demonstrate their understanding of historical empathy. Students were allowed to do up to six genres and perspectives, but no more in order to maintain the quality of student work. Students were given a list of acceptable genres to fit the curriculum and to enhance an accurate portrayal of historical perspective. Students had to include at least three of the following perspectives: slave's perspective (male or female), African American freeman's perspective (male or female), Native American's perspective, Confederate slave owner's perspective (male or female), or Union's perspective (non-slave owner; male or female). Students were also allowed to come up with their own historical perspective as long as it was discussed with the teacher.

Ms. D'Adamo also took anecdotal notes throughout the course of the study to trace how her meaning of perspective evolved in light of her interaction with the students. At the end of each day, Ms. D'Adamo wrote a journal reflection on the progress the students were making with historical empathy, the difficulties students were having with the project, the overall skills they needed to complete the project, and the difficulties she was having implementing the project in a classroom of 22 students with differing abilities. Student comments throughout the project process were also noted as she considered to what extent her students understood the concept of historical perspective taking. Students had the opportunity to invite parents, teachers, and other students to see their projects displayed in the end-of-project open house. The students stood by their project display boards to answer questions and to describe their genres.

In accordance with the design used by Jensen (2008), the final projects were assessed by using Jensen's rubric to determine the degree

to which students demonstrated the four elements of historical empathy (an understanding that the past is different from the present, that there were various perspectives in the past, the context in which the event took place, and the significance of the use of historical evidence). Jensen's rubric was based upon a set of categories used by Downey (1995). Ms. D'Adamo used Jensen's rubric to analyze her data because Jensen's study was also conducted in an upper elementary classroom (5th grade) in Virginia, the categories in Jensen's rubric accorded with the literature on historical empathy outlined above, and it aligned with the research questions for her action research study.

The Four-Week Multigenre Unit

During the first week, students were introduced to the project gradually. Terms like "multigenre" and "historical perspective" were introduced in varying ways. At the very beginning, Ms. D'Adamo used a Power Point to explain the overall layout and expectations of the multigenre project itself. This presentation was helpful in introducing the design of the project, but generated an array of questions and confused faces from the class, (rightfully so as the project presented so many new challenges for the students).

In order to develop an awareness of the historical perspective aspect of the project, Ms. D'Adamo spent the remainder of the first day guiding the students' understanding of "perspective" in general through the use of children's literature and a dictionary definition. While the children's literature was read, (two versions of the Three Little Pigs story), students were asked to listen for differences in the two stories. Once the stories were compared, it was determined that one story was more favorable for the wolf's "side of the story," the other for the pigs'. Ms. D'Adamo explained to students that this "side of the story" concept was the same as a "perspective." In her anecdotal notes, Ms. D'Adamo observed that the dictionary definition was not effective because it presented a very technical definition of the term. However, because students were familiar with the selected children's literature, this activity was more helpful in introducing the concept of perspective. Ultimately, the most effective way to explain the concept of perspective was by using popular examples, like *American Idol* judges, discussing the perspectives of a class-room argument, and by using synonyms for perspective like "viewpoint" or "side of the story." Overall, the students needed a good deal of guidance in understanding what perspectives are and even more in understanding why they exist in the first place.

On the second day, students were asked to review their definition of perspective, for which most said, "The side of a story." Then they were asked to explain what causes these differing perspectives. With some help, students were able to provide the following list of reasons why someone might have a different perspective: physical position (whether you were present to receive information or received it from a secondary source and how well you saw or heard the information), gender (boy/girl), age (adult/child), wealthy/poor, religious views, education, beliefs, bias, culture, and race. Then, students were asked to try to relate these differing perspectives to those in history. Ms. D'Adamo had planned on doing this more on the first day, but the simple concept of people having multiple perspectives in a given situation was difficult for them. Similarly, at first, students had a hard time understanding that history comprises of different viewpoints. In her anecdotal notes, Ms. D'Adamo wrote:

When I asked the students to think of different people who might have had different perspectives in history, I didn't get a response, (although with my help students were able to put together an extensive list of reasons why

someone might have a varied perspective). I asked students, "In history, would a poor person have a different perspective than a rich person? Students responded "Yes," but still had difficulty making the connection.

So as the class was introduced to the concept of displaying information in differing genres, she showed them examples of several genres written in multiple perspectives about a previous Virginia Studies topic, Jamestown. Ms. D'Adamo hypothesized that by using a familiar historical topic, students would be better able to connect the idea that history is comprised of multiple perspectives and these perspectives are called "historical perspectives." In fact, the students were able to identify the particular perspective of each genre, (a letter "written by" a colonist, a poem in the perspective of a Native American, etc.) with teacher guidance and hints from the text. In her anecdotal notes she recorded, "After some discussion about the genre examples, students were able to tell me that the Native Americans would have a different side of the story or view of things than the colonists. Another student mentioned that Pocahontas had a different perspective."

During the rest of the first week, students were given a check list of benchmark assignments to guide them through the completion of the project. Once students had chosen their topic from the list of 13 SOL related topics (e.g., Nat Turner, Battle at Bull Run, "Stonewall" Jackson, Virginia Declaration of Rights), students were given a KWHL chart to begin their research process. In the chart, students wrote what they already knew in the first column (K), questions about what they wanted to know in the second column (W), how they hoped to answer these questions (H), and finally what they had learned from their research (L). These two documents were important throughout the process and assessment of the project. Students were given "Resource

Folders" to store papers for the project. At the end of each day, the folders were collected to ensure that nothing went missing.

At the end of the first day using the KWHL chart, Ms. D'Adamo reviewed and assessed the types of existing knowledge and the level of questions asked in the "W" column. From this information, she put together an initial list of appropriate web resources, books, and pictures to help students begin their research. On the first day of research, students were asked to brainstorm different varieties of research methods. Students were able to think of books, internet, and encyclopedia. Ms. D'Adamo touched on the difference between primary and secondary sources as it is one of the Virginia Studies SOL skills for fourth grade. Ms. D'Adamo asked students if there is a way to hear history "straight from the horse's mouth." In her anecdotal notes from day four, Ms. D'Adamo wrote:

Some [students] said 'oh yeah!' and named journals or letters as a research resource option. They then went over the concept of primary sources versus secondary sources. Students had some trouble understanding that an old newspaper would still be considered a secondary source because it was from the period but not written by someone actually involved in the event. Students began researching but needed guidance in recording the research and researching the appropriate material.

To aid in the process of researching from appropriate sources and recording information that would help answer their questions, they were given "Source Record Cards" (see Appendix A). Students were also asked to record from which perspective the resource was. This was a hard concept for many students to grasp; many of the resources students at this level could use were written from the secondary source perspective of a historian from the

present as opposed to a letter or journal entry written by a primary source.

Throughout the research period, from the end of the first week throughout the second week, students were pulled for small group meetings and individual student teacher conferences. The small group meetings were grouped by topic area and were focused on the difficulties students were having with researching and sharing good information. The individual meetings focused mostly on selecting appropriate genres and perspectives to use for their personal multigenre project. Students were given “Genre Rationale Cards” to complete before the individual conference (see Appendix A). These cards helped students come into the meeting with an idea of how they wanted to write the information they found and in whose perspective they would write it. For the most part, students chose to do a letter or journal entry, a poem or a newspaper article, and a comic strip or picture with a caption. Some students tried to complete a timeline, but it was one of the hardest genres to complete within a particular historical perspective.

Throughout the third and fourth week, students spent a good deal of time writing drafts of their genres, peer-editing, and having individual conferences. During this time, Ms. D’Adamo was able to guide students with their struggles in writing within the different historical perspectives. However, the flexible nature of the project allowed many students to challenge themselves to write more than the required number of genres and explore more research options. But most enjoyably, it allowed Ms. D’Adamo to work one-on-one with every student in the classroom. The amount of guidance needed varied from student to student, and of course the type of guidance varied. Some needed considerable help with the writing process, whereas other students needed encouragement and reminders to keep the perspective of their genre in mind.

On the last day of the project, students proudly showed their hard work on tri-fold display boards. These boards were donated to the class, and the majority of the work done was completed in class. All students had a fair opportunity to complete their “masterpieces” and share them with parents, teachers, and other classes. Students were asked to display their genres, their “Source Record Cards,” and their “KWHL” charts. Before the visitors came into the classroom, Ms. D’Adamo discussed with the class how to share the information they displayed and to make sure they identified the different perspectives and why they included these perspectives.

Are Fourth Graders Capable of Writing Accounts of History in Multiple Perspectives?

To assess the effectiveness of multigenre projects in fostering historical empathy in fourth graders, Ms. D’Adamo modified a rubric used by Jensen (2008) in her action research project to assess historical empathy in fifth graders (see Appendix B). Table 1 reflects the students’ development of historical empathy in the final production of the project. Overall, it is clear fourth graders are capable of writing accounts of history in multiple historical perspectives. All students achieved a score of level two or higher in two out of four categories.

To be empathetic means demonstrating the ability to recognize another person’s feelings or emotions. When one feels empathy for someone else, inherently there is a sentiment of “being in another person’s shoes.”

Table 1

Development of Historical Empathy in Fourth Grade Class

Category	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Past is different from present.	0	13	9
Various perspectives exist in the past.	1	4	17
Past context reflects events which took place.	1	11	10
Information used is based on historical evidence.	0	11	11

The most significant progress students made in developing historical empathy was in their ability to understand that there were multiple perspectives in the past. Only five students out of 22 did not reach level three in this category, which means that most were able to identify differences between the multiple historical perspectives they chose. It was somewhat harder for students to describe the viewpoints of the perspectives they chose consistently and accurately. Although all students reached a level two or higher when differentiating the past from the present, this skill was also inconsistently demonstrated.

This type of inconsistency in differentiating the past from the present occurred especially when students wrote in genres like newspapers and short stories. For example, one student chose to write a short story about Ulysses S. Grant (the student’s topic) in the perspective of Grant himself. Although the student’s purpose in writing the short story was to give the reader a short biography of his life to explain how he became the leader of the Union army, he included that Grant eventually became President and died on July 23, 1885. Even though this information is accurate, from reading this story, it appears as if Grant is able to predict his own death. The student brought in informa-

tion known to us in the present, but that would not have been known during the Civil War.

When writing newspaper articles, several students, included a “Breaking News” type section to their story, similar to what would happen during a TV News cast. For example, one student, whose topic was on Jefferson Davis, wrote about Davis’ capture after the war was over and reported, “They sent Federal troops to retrieve him. Wait ... what’s this ... really ... already? I have just got news that last night the troops picked up his trail and captured him this morning.” The student, while trying to mimic something she saw often on television, included information that is not typically written in a newspaper article, and certainly information that would not be included in a newspaper article written in the perspective of a Northern news reporter in the 1860’s. The news of Jefferson Davis’s capture was undoubtedly something a Northern newspaper would report, but the information would not have traveled so quickly to be included in the same newspaper explaining that troops had been sent to retrieve him. She used her present day knowledge of a news report and did not take into account the speed, or lack thereof, of news travel in the past.

In terms of students gaining significant development in the area of recognizing differing historical perspectives, there was only one student who did not make any progress in the time of this study. Four students only reached level two, and the rest of the class reached level three. One student in particular was not able to reach level two at the time of this study. His topic was on Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion in South Hampton, Virginia. He came to meet with Ms. D’Adamo several times, and they discussed different options for writing within a historical perspective. He had chosen to write in the perspective of a White Slave Owner, Nat Turner (a rebellious slave), and a slave who stayed loyal to their slave owner at the time of the attack. He needed guidance in arriving at these perspectives, but nonetheless was sent on

his way to write with several ideas written on his idea map for each genre. The student had trouble with plagiarizing information from the resources he used. But more significant to this study, he had great difficulty in writing in a historical perspective. His short story was written like a typical fourth grade research report: "Nat Turner was a slave who wanted to start a revolt about it. So him and his slave friends started killing white people, over 40 to 50 people suffered. Then it stopped ... They made an attack upon Mr. Blunt, a gentleman who was very ill with grout [sick] ..." It is clear that much of the information was taken directly from one of the web resources provided to him. It is also clear that no real historical perspective is being portrayed.

Though most students were capable of identifying different perspectives, they were inconsistent in their ability to describe the viewpoints of these perspectives. Twelve out of twenty-two students did not reach level three because they included inaccurate beliefs or viewpoints some of the time. For example, one student, whose topic was on Robert E. Lee, wrote a letter correspondence between Lee and Lincoln. It was a very creative genre and perspective selection, but the student writing in the perspective of Lee to Lincoln inaccurately described the reasons for which he resigns from the United States Army to join the Confederacy. He wrote, "Mr. Lincoln, slavery gives you your cotton ... The south tries and tries to reach the high demand of cotton. You're against slavery, so I resign from my position to join my state of Virginia in the south." The student's writing contains some historically accurate information; Lee did resign to join his home state of Virginia in the Confederacy. However, slavery and cotton production was by no means his most pressing reason for resigning from his position within the United States Army. Therefore, as you can see from this example, students at the fourth grade level are certainly capable of identifying differing historical perspectives and creating an

appropriate genre to depict a particular viewpoint. However, students at this level will most likely have a harder time accurately describing perspectives of such complicated histories due to the amount of contextual information and research required. (For further examples of student work, see Appendix C).

Conclusion

This study found that the multigenre research project model was an effective way to foster historical empathy. Although not all students reached the highest levels on the rubric they all showed growth in historical perspective taking. Ms. D'Adamo found that certain genres seemed to be more conducive than others for displaying a historical perspective. These include first-person student-authored journal entries, letters, newspaper articles, and poems. This finding confirmed Brooks's (2008) study, which found that first person fictional accounts of the past was an effective way to develop historical empathy, even though it lead to many factual inaccuracies. One of the best projects was authored by a student doing a project on the Battle of Fredericksburg. His poem was written in the perspective of a Union soldier conflicted about whether he should march to his death or leave his army to go back home. Other genres presented some problems for students attempting to use them such as newspaper articles and timelines. The students' difficulties with these genres seemed to be due to their inexperience with the genre combined with their inexperience with writing in a historical perspective. For example, two students tried to create a historical timeline for their topic, but could not effectively portray a perspective, even when their other genres did.

This project not only provided an excellent extension to the language arts and Virginia Studies curriculum, but it also allowed the students to develop an important historical thinking skill: historical perspective taking. Al-

though not all students achieved level three in all four categories of the rubric to assess historical empathy development at this stage, with further practice, we are certain that most students would be able to achieve these levels. Many students began the project with difficulty articulating what a “perspective” was, and certainly even more difficulty defining “historical perspective.” By the end of the four week project, students were able to identify and write in three or four differing historical perspectives to present research on their topic. These perspectives were portrayed in multiple genres, for which they had to, in many cases, learn how to write as well.

The project was just as challenging for the teacher. Ms. D’Adamo often brought home 22 resource folders to review to ensure that students were on the right path. She wrote individual notes to students to make certain that even if they did not meet with her in a conference, they were still able to succeed in the next class period allotted for the multigenre project. Ms. D’Adamo went to the library daily during the research days to get more books for the students who needed more materials. Every day a new challenge presented itself, but as a class and research team, they worked through them. Despite the challenges, the project gave the students a sense of purpose and was something that all students, no matter their ability level, could do. The students were thoroughly engaged and enjoyed participating in the project. But, more importantly, they learned content and skills that they can carry with them throughout the rest of their history curriculums. We would highly recommend using the multigenre project to enhance historical empathy.

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