Project-Based Learning: Implementation and Reflections of an Advanced Placement American Government Class

Arren M. Swift
University of South Florida, arren_swift@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the Other Education Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Project-Based Learning: Implementation and Reflections of an Advanced Placement American Government Class

by

Arren M. Swift

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction
Department of Teaching and Learning
College of Education
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Michael Berson, Ph.D.
Ilene Berson, Ph.D.
Darlene DeMarie, Ph.D.
Stephen Thornton, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
May 29, 2019

Keywords: simulations, perspectives, narrative, and video-elicitation

Copyright © 2019, Arren M. Swift
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God. I have enjoyed this educational journey but I know I would not have been able to accomplish this task alone. I have taken comfort in Your word throughout this endeavor.

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* (Jeremiah 29:11)

*I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.* (Philippians 4:13)

To my wife, I can hardly find the words to express all the support, wisdom, and love you have shared with me to make this dream a reality. Your tireless work raising our boys and endless sacrifices helped me dedicate the time to succeed. You have motivated me and pushed me to become the person I am. I love you.

To my sons, you both inspired me to work hard. The excitement you showed me as I walked through the door each night motivated me to complete this journey so I could spend more time with each of you. I love both of you.

I appreciate all the support from my parents, grandparents, and in-laws. I know each one of you contributed to this endeavor through motivational words, actions, or prayers.

My major professor, Dr. Michael Berson, has been a guiding light since I first inquired about the program. You have effectively modeled what a professional and caring professor is. I appreciated all the words of wisdom you have shared and will always appreciate what you taught me.
The outstanding educators on my committee Dr. Ilene Berson, Dr. Darlene DeMarie, and Dr. Stephen Thornton have each inspired me to become a better student, teacher, and person. You have challenged me and pushed me to grow and I am forever thankful.

I am in the debt of my outstanding colleagues who listened to my ideas, challenged my thoughts, and supported my work. Mr. Lally has been a constant friend always willing to listen to my thoughts and offer encouragement. Jane Lucas has been supportive in my endeavors at every turn and because of her I was motivated to practice methods I believe in. Mrs. Windon has provided the painstaking task of editing my work and for that, we are all grateful!

Lastly, I appreciate all the students who have been in my class. Without you, I would never have known the love of teaching. I appreciate your willingness to try the new methods I brought to class and the candid feedback you provided. Your insights, experiences, and kind words helped me more than you know.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ v

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1  
  Rationale ..................................................................................................................................... 5  
  Purpose ....................................................................................................................................... 9  
  Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................................. 10  
  Conceptual Framework .............................................................................................................. 17  
  Research Questions .................................................................................................................... 19  
  Method ....................................................................................................................................... 19  
  Definition of Terms .................................................................................................................... 20  
  Importance of the Study ............................................................................................................. 23  
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 23

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature ....................................................................................... 25  
  Experiential Learning Theory ..................................................................................................... 26  
  Social Studies Curriculum History ............................................................................................ 27  
  Projects ...................................................................................................................................... 32  
  PBL in AP GOV ......................................................................................................................... 38  
  Challenges to PBL ...................................................................................................................... 46  
  Advanced Placement .................................................................................................................. 48  
  Teacher Inquiry ........................................................................................................................... 51  
  Student Perspectives .................................................................................................................. 52  
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 56

Chapter Three: Methods ............................................................................................................. 58  
  Purpose ...................................................................................................................................... 59  
  Research Questions .................................................................................................................... 60  
  Design ....................................................................................................................................... 61
Chapter 4: Teacher Enactment of Project-based Learning

Introduction to Data Collection

Situating the Findings .................................................. 105
Life Experiences ............................................................... 106
Entering the Profession .................................................. 107
Enactment of PBL .............................................................. 107
Environmental Factors ..................................................... 108
Administrative Support .................................................... 109
Planning for PBL .............................................................. 109
Textbook ........................................................................ 110
Allocation of Time ............................................................ 112
The Election Project ........................................................ 113
Student Engagement ....................................................... 118
Scaffolding ................................................................. 120
Debate .............................................................................. 123
Post-Debate Lessons ....................................................... 124
Entry Events ................................................................. 129
Directions ......................................................................... 130
Topic Selection ............................................................... 133
Game-Based Learning .................................................... 135
Abstract

The aim of this qualitative case study was to investigate the process of the enactment of a project-based learning method in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course and the effects of contextual factors, the beliefs of the teacher, and environmental factors had on the planning and implementation of PBL-aligned tasks. This study also investigates the experiences and perceptions of students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course that enacted project-based learning.

The study was conducted to add to the literature on project-based learning. Research on the steps a teacher takes to enact project-based learning can enhance understanding of the method and provide an increased understanding of implementation.

This was a qualitative case study. The research was gathered using narrative inquiry, examination of documents, and observations to investigate teacher enactment of a project-based learning task. Semi-structured video-elicitation interviews, document analysis, and observations were conducted to investigate the experiences and perceptions of students who used project-based learning tasks in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class.

The research of a teacher enacting project-based learning resulted in the identification of teacher’s beliefs as the foundational element for constructing pedagogy. Through the enactment of project-based learning, three themes emerged: the need for communication, alignment of tasks to key concepts, and flexibility. The perceptions of students in an Advanced Placement
American Government and Politics course confirmed the importance of student choice, the value of collaborative and social learning experiences, and the desire to discuss controversial issues.
Chapter One:

Introduction

As an educator, I often reflect on my experience as a student to build upon the lessons and activities I found memorable. To this day, I can recollect, the projects that encouraged me to construct knowledge and develop an understanding of events and concepts. I took an interest in opportunities that provided choice and allowed me to utilize my skills to prove mastery. Projects increased my interest in the class, provided a new way to showcase my skills, and inspired me to investigate topics more in-depth. In many classes, I struggled to learn, but the teachers who utilized project-based learning found a method to inspire me.

This is a study of teacher enactment of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course and the perceptions and experiences of students in that class. Social studies instruction has commonly been characterized by broad surveys of content that require students to aggregate and apply frivolous knowledge to lower level thinking tasks (Saye & Social Studies Inquiry Research Collaborative, 2013). As social studies teachers work to combat the perception of educating students through the memorization of facts and applying lower level thinking, the inclusion of inquiry-based learning, such as project-based learning and problem-based learning should be included in the curriculum. Inquiry involves students in a deeper, more active exploration of questions and topics as they seek their own understandings and problem solutions (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Rossi (1995), even teachers who are motivated to use project-based methods face dilemmas in balancing
contradictory beliefs about what is desirable, necessary, and possible as they seek to promote student inquiry in their classrooms.

Project-based learning has become a popular approach to instruction throughout social studies classrooms (Larmer, 2018; Lo, 2018). Teachers have noted that students have the ability to engage strongly, learn effectively, and find relevance in Advanced Placement coursework through project-based learning (Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018). As educators infuse project-based learning into Advanced Placement curriculum it is important to understand the planning, implementation, and reflections of the method.

To explore the project-based learning method, I have selected the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course because of the work of Parker and Lo (2015). They created project-based learning tasks that have been researched and found to be successful in preparing students for the Advanced Placement exam and for developing learning skills (Parker & Lo, 2015). Using projects developed and shown to benefit students helps to add validity to my study. Lo (2018) points out that, “not all projects are created equal, and some projects may even feel like gimmicks that teachers use to break up the monotony of lectures and homework” (p. 18). Utilizing the projects that Parker and Lo have designed in my classroom provided high-quality project-based learning assignments that create valuable opportunities to explore teacher planning, implementation, and reflections. Despite the proclaimed success of these projects, teacher use and the reflections of learning using project-based methods is not fully known.

Many educators believe knowledge in education is something that is produced far away from the school by experts in a rarefied domain. Kincheloe (2003) states, “teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor and quality is ever to be achieved” (p. 18). Through this investigation, I expanded my role as the classroom teacher by conducting
research. Anderson and Herr (1999) claim the teachers’ role in research needs to be expanded, “it is only through problem-solving in ‘messy’ school contexts that the agenda can be moved forward, with the aim of developing education for children” (p. 20). I explored the process of planning, integrating, conducting, and reflecting on the implementation of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. I considered the environmental factors of the classroom and school that influenced enactment. The communication of my beliefs, skills, and life experiences provided an understanding of the elements that influenced my enactment of project-based learning. I believe this study provides a detailed account of the steps I took as a teacher implementing an inquiry-based task that can add clarity to the process. I also identified the challenges I faced throughout the implementation process.

The study utilized the experiences and reflections of the teacher and students in the class. Many high school students describe their school experiences in terms of anonymity and powerlessness (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Nightingale & Wolverton, 1993; Noddings, 1992; Poplin & Weeres, 1992;). Through this study, I sought to empower my students by providing them with an opportunity to share their voice. Mitra claims, “Large school size, segregation by age and ability, and a view of students as clients further increase the sense of distance between teachers and students” (2008, p. 1). I attempted to narrow the distance between myself and the students by using questions that focused on student perspectives to understand their experiences with project-based learning.

Research has been conducted that identified important benefits of student voice to help serve as a catalyst for change in schools, including helping to improve teaching, curriculum, and teacher-student relationships (Fielding, 2001; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). As students become
part of a professional learning community that engages in exchanging ideas; providing support; offering critiques; and sharing expertise; schools benefit (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). The students helped contribute a new perspective of project-based learning that educators can review to help determine how this method affects students. Knowledge was constructed by the students through their transformation experience of grasping and transforming content through four learning modes of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting according to Kolb (1984).

In the study conducted by Parker and his colleagues (2011), students in the first year of the project voiced frustration with the "engagement first" design principle (p. 533). Many students found it frustrating, arguing that without sufficient background information, "we don't know what we're doing" (Parker et al., 2011, p 552). Many of those students preferred the traditional structure of the class, where the foundation is presented first (Parker et al., 2011).

The second year of the study presented different challenges such as students who valued a more direct approach to teaching to the test.

Okay, this is where I had my biggest struggle with the course. ... I thought I was taking an AP course so that I can get AP credit for college because that was what I wanted. I have taken all these other AP classes, and it's designed to enable you to do well on the test, and in this course I found myself doing a lot of work that was not preparing me directly for the test. It may have been interesting and, you know, engaging, and, you know, you learn stuff, you learn a lot of different skills; but you might not have been directly learning about things that was on the test. (Parker et al., 2011, p. 554-555)

If indeed project-based learning is rooted in constructionism and constructivism; if project-based learning is founded in the personal interests and motivations of the learner; and if the learning artifacts are representations of a learner’s knowledge; then it is paramount that we come to understand how learners negotiate projects and what they learn during project-based learning lessons (Grant, 2011). Beckett (2005) argued that students’ perspectives on project-based
learning have been too simplified. “What students do with and say” about projects is “complex,” and improved studies should communicate “the dilemmas” students face (p. 195). This research attempted to address the complexity and to focus on the students’ viewpoints of project-based learning.

**Rationale**

Long considered an elite track for the most talented and ambitious students, AP classes are now seen as beneficial for any students willing to challenge themselves — and public high schools are increasingly treating access to them as a basic educational right (Watanabe, 2013). Increasing access to AP classes for all students is an honorable goal if the students are equipped with the skills and desire to achieve success. I have had students with the lowest level reading ability on the state assessments in my AP classes. I have had students who were enrolled in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program who were required to take an AP class and were enrolled in my course against their will. The AVID program is a college readiness program that was designed to help students acquire skills they need to be successful in college. I often find students in my class who do not have the skills to be successful or motivation to learn. The AP course requires students to be able to read above grade level, comprehend what they read, and express their thoughts coherently through written assignments. The school where I teach has an open access policy and any student who selects to sign up for the course is enrolled regardless of the skill level. I believe this practice continues to be a disservice to the student and continues to swell the population of AP classes.

Enrollment in Advanced Placement courses has increased annually in the United States from 2008 through 2018 (College Board, 2018). In 2018, 326,392 students took the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics exam (College Board, 2018). The number of
students taking the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course has increased by at least five percent annually over the last 10 years (College Board, 2018). Yet, national pass rates in most Advanced Placement Social Studies courses are below 60% (College Board, 2018).

The multiple-choice sections of the exams are scored by computer. The free-response sections and through-course performance assessments are evaluated by experienced AP teachers and college professors, called readers, who spend a week in June scoring answers at the AP Reading. Each subject’s chief AP Exam reader, a college professor in that subject, selects readers from among applicants who provide information about their education, experience, and association with the AP Program (Advanced Placement College Board, 2018).

Scoring of the AP exam typically starts two years prior to the use of the test (Advanced Placement College Board, 2018). Guidelines are first established by the development committee composed of high school teachers and college professors. Then it is enhanced during the scoring process each year.

Three to seven hours of the total seven-day AP Reading period are devoted to reviewing the scoring guidelines and securing consistency in their application. The objective is to combine two essential components: (1) the guidelines developed by the Reading leadership and (2) each reader’s professional assessment of the response as seen through the lens of those guidelines. The scoring guidelines for each question have an associated scoring scale designed to allow readers to make distinctions among answers. Because the scoring guidelines and their accompanying scales are tailored to individual questions within each exam, they allow each answer to be appropriately scored (Advanced Placement College Board, 2018).

Education reformer John Dewey feared that too much material covered, or a poor methodology employed, would reduce the study to factual minutiae and, if that were the case, Dewey (1938) would rather see social studies abandoned. Advanced Placement courses are
known for breadth at a fast pace, not deep experiential learning (Parker, 2018). Due to the structure of AP courses, it would be easy for a teacher to practice pedagogy that reduces the course to the memorization of facts. I believe instructional methods in social studies courses must change, to provide memorable experiences that lead to growth and the development of skills that are useful beyond the classroom, and, I suspect project-based learning may be a method to help make this change. Pedagogical methods that provide opportunities for investigation, interpretation, and perspective are some of the goals of social studies instruction (Barton & Levstik, 2015). Project-based learning provides an opportunity for students to investigate topics, interpret sources and develop a perspective.

According to Kilpatrick, (1929) a project is a physical construction that conveys an idea or solution. It is an opportunity for students to engage in a topic that incorporates their interests, affording students the chance to explore a topic to develop deep, meaningful research through inquiry. This leads students to a higher level of understanding and has the potential to solve problems while informing others of major issues. Projects allow students to demonstrate knowledge through creative expression that encourages their use of talents and skills (Larmer, 2018).

According to Larmer and Mergendoller (2010), every project needs seven essential elements: a need to know, a driving question, student voice and choice, twenty-first-century skills, inquiry and innovation, feedback and revision, and a publicly presented project. The opportunity for a student to explore a significant topic, perform research, work with other students to accomplish a goal, and create a way to present this knowledge, would be a sound pedagogical approach to higher level student learning.
Many educators are integrating PBL into Advanced Placement classes as a method to make the curriculum more relevant to students’ interests (Adams, Lo, Goodell, & Nachtigala, 2017). Projects allow a student to explore an issue or a problem by utilizing a variety of skills such as research skills, teamwork to accomplish tasks, creativity in presentation style, technology application to communicate and find sources, and public speaking skills through presentations. These skills help the student to develop an understanding of the concepts and, therefore, they present an opportunity for discussion (Larmer, 2018).

The methods available to teach the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course have expanded thanks to the contributions of Parker and Lo (2011, 2013, 2015, 2016). Parker and Lo (2016) have developed a project-based learning curriculum that drives the content of the course through five simulations. According to Parker (2018), simulations cultivate curriculum-focused experiential learning as students step into the shoes of candidates, journalist, campaign managers, lobbyists, and voters. These five projects have been tested and have shown promise in preparing students for the AP exam while providing deep learning opportunities (Parker et al., 2011). The schools where the study was conducted showed equal or improved AP exam scores in comparison to companion schools who did not enact the PBL simulations (Parker et al., 2013).

I replicated these projects in the course I taught to provide the students with well-constructed simulations. Using project-based learning tasks supported by research helped add validity to the study. Although many teachers use projects as a side dish or time filler (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010), project-based learning is a methodological approach to education that drives the curriculum of the course (Parker, 2018). Using one of the projects developed by
Parker and Lo, I gathered information on teacher implementation and the reflections of the teacher and students.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to add to the knowledge of project-based learning, which will identify the benefits project-based learning may offer, as well as the challenges and obstacles that might occur through the process. In this study, I captured the process of teacher planning, implementing, and reflecting on a project-based learning task. I investigated environmental factors and how a teacher’s beliefs, skills, and life experiences influenced the enactment of a project-based learning task. Students’ perspectives and experiences of learning in a class that uses the project-based learning method added knowledge about the method. Through this study I aimed to provide more evidence for educators who are considering the utilization of project-based learning in Advanced Placement social studies courses. Prior scholarship (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Lambros, 2004; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2004) has identified project-based learning as a successful strategy to motivate students to play a positive role in the classroom and in their learning experience, thereby increasing their engagement in the classroom. It is an approach that may be relevant not only to other AP courses but also similar advanced high school courses in other countries. “Perhaps, then, we have demonstrated how a reasonably high-quality, breadth- and exam-oriented curriculum, one that enjoys considerable public confidence, can interact with real-world projects that aim for a kind of learning and knowing that are deep and transferable” (Parker et al., 2011). Parker’s quote reflects the increasing belief that project-based learning can be an effective and valuable method of teaching in Advanced Placement classes.
My research provides a deeper analysis of the role of a teacher in implementation and how the method alters or enhances the student experience. The ability to reflect on the experiences of the teacher and students provided a rich narrative that informs and presents an opportunity to refine an increasingly popular instructional method.

**Theoretical Framework**

Kolb’s theory of experiential learning was used to guide this study, but, to fully understand his work one must examine the work of Dewey. Dewey’s development of experiential learning was founded, in part, to address the negative repercussions of traditional teaching approaches such as students’ “loss of impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced” (Dewey, 1938, p. 26). Dewey’s conception of experience was developed in his works, *Experience in Nature* (1925) and *Art as Experience* (1934). Dewey took a naturalist approach, claiming that the individual will adapt to the environment. In this adaption, habits are formed and routine ways of doing things are developed. When the routine way of doing things is no longer effective a problem has developed that requires reflective thought and investigation (Miettinen, 2000).

Dewey identifies five phases of reflective thought. The first phase is the indeterminate situation occurring when routine ways of doing things are accomplished without reflection. Uncertainty emerges when the normal course of action is interrupted causing a state of uncertainty to emerge. The disturbance of action is essential as a precondition of reflective thought by bringing about hesitation and delay, which is essential to thinking (Dewey, 1989, p. 201). The reflective thought starts with studying the conditions, resources, aids, difficulties, and obstacles of action (Miettinen, 2000).

The second phase is the intellectualization or the ability to define the problem.
The way in which the problem is conceived decides what specific suggestions are entertained and which are dismissed; what data are selected and which rejected; it is the criterion for relevancy and irrelevancy of hypotheses and conceptual structures (Dewey, 1991).

Studying the conditions of the situation and the formation of a working hypothesis is the third phase identified. In this stage, analysis and diagnosis take place. Conditions include material objects and the social conditions that are necessary to resolve the problem. In this stage, a guiding plan is developed.

The fourth phase is reasoning, in which the meaning of ideas are communicated and linked to others. At this phase, thought experiments can be conducted, allowing the researcher to begin at the start of the cycle again.

Testing the hypothesis by action is the fifth stage during which the situation can be reconstructed to determine if the consequence deducted from the fourth phase can be realized in practice. The testing of the hypothesis does not always lead to its confirmation. However, the hypothesis makes learning possible, because the outcome can be compared to the initial suppositions implied in the hypothesis.

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey expressed his disappointment about the nondualist conception of experience, covering the individual and the world (Dewey, 1925). The work was being interpreted principally in an individual and psychological way. Dewey says that had he an opportunity to rewrite *Experience and Nature* he would give it a new name, “Culture and Nature” (Dewey, 1988, p. 361). He would use culture in its anthropological sense (Miettinen, 2000). He regarded it as philosophically important that culture comprises both artifacts and humans in their mutual interaction (Miettinen, 2000). The concept of culture covers the variety of human activities and practices necessary for understanding the thinking and actions of
individuals (Dewey, 1988). In this late text, Dewey examines the interaction between an individual and culture as the basic unit of analysis.

Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory is grounded heavily in the work of Dewey, which aligns with the focus on implementation and perceptions of project-based learning. This theory was originally formulated to construct arguments for the utility of the social theory known as the Learning Style Inventory that was previously constructed in 1960 (Miettinen, 2000). The main application of the theory was to manage and gain control of individual learning by inventing a learning style (Kolb, 1976). Kolb suggested experiential learning theory is a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior (1984). I utilized Kolb’s experiential learning theory to guide the study with the key concentration on how PBL affects the teacher’s and students’ perspectives of learning.

Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory is conceptualized through several components. The first component is an experience (Kolb, Rubin, & McInture, 1971). In my study, the experience was the teacher’s planning, implementation of a project-based learning task, and the perceptions and experiences of the teacher and students in the course. The research will focus on one of the five simulations crafted by Parker and Lo (2015) for the course. Specifically, the project developed by Parker and Lo (2015) used in the study will be the Elections simulation. The second component was to reflect on observations about that experience (Kolb, Rubin, & McInture, 1971). I gathered research through the examination of documents and conducted journaling to capture the process of the teacher. I conducted observations and interviews, to communicate the student experience. The third component was to analyze responses and form new ideas (Kolb, Rubin, & McInture, 1971). I reviewed documents, the teacher’s journal, and transcriptions of video-elicitation interviews. I coded the data for themes and explored the effects
of those themes on learning. The fourth element was to test these new ideas in new experiences (Kolb, Rubin, & McInture, 1971). I modified Kolb’s fourth step by presenting the research of this study as a resource to help educators plan to use PBL more effectively by becoming more aware of the process and implications identified in the study. As educators utilize this research they will have an opportunity to put what was learned into practice. Thus, they will complete Kolb’s fourth step of the experience.

Kolb states that each of the phases of the model is a “different form of adaption to a learning model” (1971, p. 28). A separate individual ability corresponds to each phase of the model.

Learners, if they are to be effective, need four different kinds of abilities—concrete experience abilities (CE), reflective observation abilities (RO), abstract conceptualizing abilities (AC) and active experimentation abilities (AE). That is they must be able to involve themselves fully, openly and without bias in new experiences (CE). They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives (RO). They must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories (AC) and they must be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (AE) (Kolb, 1984, p. 30).

Kolb’s experiential learning theory recognizes the work of Vygotsky as the first to articulate the developmental focus that learning from experience is a process in which human development occurs (Kolb, 1984). Kolb’s experiential learning theory is an elaboration on Lewin’s four-part experiential learning model: 1) concrete experience; 2) observations and reflections; 3) formation of abstract concepts and generalizations; and 4) testing implications of concepts in new situations (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). Kolb draws on the research of Lewin, Dewey, and Piaget to develop a model that illustrates the process of learning from experience.

Kolb’s experiential learning theory is a dynamic view of learning based on a cycle driven by the resolution of the two dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction (Kolb
& Kolb, 2008). This structure is broken into four different forms of knowledge or learning styles: divergent, assimilative, convergent, and accommodative. The use of Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory has aided researchers by providing a tool that identifies a participant’s preference. According to Kolb, “learning, and therefore knowing, requires both a grasp or figurative representation of experience and some transformation of that representation” (Kolb, 1984, p. 42).

People who have a diverging learning style are best at examining situations from multiple perspectives. It is called diverging because a person who learns in that style performs better in situations that require the generation of ideas (Kolb, 1984). Often this type of learner tends to be imaginative, emotional and specializes in the arts. People with diverging learning styles prefer to work in groups.

Assimilative learning style attributes help the learner understand a wide range of information and put it into logical form (Kolb, 1984). An assimilative learner is often less focused on people and more interested in ideas and abstract concepts. People with an assimilative learning style often prefer reading and lectures, and appreciate time to think things through (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb claims that an individual with a converging style is best at finding practical uses for ideas (1984). This type of learner excels at solving problems and making decisions based on finding answers to problems. Converging learners like technical tasks as opposed to social issues. This type of learner enjoys experimenting with new ideas, simulations, and practical applications (Kolb, 1984). This type of learner is often focused on the completion of objectives. For example in the Elections simulation the converging learner might focus on conducting
research, articulating their thoughts, and developing a political campaign advertisement without interacting with peers to determine their stance.

The fourth type of learner identified by Kolb is an accommodating learner (1984). This type of learner enjoys learning from hands-on activities. Often this learner enjoys carrying out plans for new and challenging experiences. An accommodating learner prefers to work with others (Kolb, 1984).

The Experiential Learner Theory developmental model (Kolb, 1984) defines three discrete stages: acquisition, which occurs from birth to adolescence through the development of basic abilities and cognitive structures. Specialization, which occurs during formal schooling through the early part of professional work. Through social, educational, and organizational socialization, the development of a particular, specialized learning style develops. And, finally, integration in mid-career where non-dominant modes of learning are expressed. Development through these stages is characterized by increasing complexity and relativism in adapting to the world (Kolb & Kolb, 2008).

Integrated deep learning is a process involving a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to helping the learner move from specialization of learning methods to integration of multiple methods. This is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner "touches all the bases"-- experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting--in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 17).

Kolb and Kolb claim that deep learning is divided into three levels (2008).

In the first level learning is registrative and performance oriented emphasizing the two learning modes of the specialized learning styles. The second level is interpretative and learning oriented involving three learning modes, and the third level is integrative and development oriented involving all four learning modes in a holistic learning process (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 17).
Kolb and Kolb provide a description of what the three levels of learning often look like in a classroom setting (2008). The traditional course lecture often represents the first level emphasizing the learning modes of reflection involving little action. It is common to see teachers proctor multiple choice tests to assess the ability to commit facts to memory. Second level learning can be achieved by adding more extensive tasks such as “learning assessments that involve practical application of concepts” (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 18). According to Kolb and Kolb (2008), advancing to the third level can be done “where reflection supplemented by action serves to further deepen conceptual understanding” (p. 18). Linking these to the conceptual material related to the experience adds the fourth learning mode, abstraction, and integration through completion of the learning spiral (Kolb & Kolb, 2008).

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study. Kolb (1984) claims that any “classroom session can be viewed as having degrees of orientation toward each of the four learning modes in the experiential learning model, labeled as effective, perceptual, symbolic, and behavioral, to connote the overall climate they create and the particular learning skill or mode they require” (p. 197). Since this study used Kolb’s model to explore the perceptions and experiences of the teacher and the students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course that uses project-based learning as a major pedological component, I examined the process of constructing a curriculum to address the four learning models and perceptions of the functionality of the task. Additionally, I investigated the ability of PBL to access three levels of deep learning through the students’ experiences in a PBL class.

Kolb (2009) proclaims people can “learn how to learn” (p. 297). By consciously following a recursive cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, they can increase
their learning power (Kolb, 1984). As I communicated how I planned, integrated, supported, and reflected on using a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class, it added knowledge on the process. The student perspective of project-based learning added knowledge of the students’ experience with the material, as well as reflection on what was learned. It assessed their willingness to think, and their ability to take action to display learned knowledge. This perspective is needed to help educators examine project-based learning fully.

**Conceptual Framework**

Kolb’s learning style inventory was created to fulfill two purposes. First, the inventory serves as an educational tool to increase individuals’ understanding of the process of learning from experience and their unique, individual approach to learning. Additionally, it provides a research tool for investigating experiential learning theory (ELT) and the characteristics of individual learning styles (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). The tool was designed to increase awareness of how an individual learns and then to expand his capacity to control his learning process. The inventory is a tool that can facilitate communication among different learners and educators in order to construct a dialogue on the most effective learning environments (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). The tool is best presented not as a test, but instead as an experience in understanding how one learns. Kolb and Kolb (2013) suggest, “To facilitate this purpose a self-scoring and interpretation book that explains the experiential learning cycle and the characteristics of the different learning styles along with scoring and profiling instructions is included with the inventory” (p. 98). The idea is that the process would create self-awareness that would help facilitate change. It would not lock a person into one learning style (Kolb, 1981).
Items for the inventory were developed for each learning mode by a panel of four behavioral scientists familiar with the experiential learning theory. The list was then given to 20 graduate students to rate each word or phrase for social desirability. A list of 12 items composed of a word or phrase was selected to represent each learning mode (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). The list narrowed to nine items after testing, identified three items that produced nearly random responses (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). The scale was adjusted in 1985 to account for reliability concerns resulting in 12 scored items in each scale (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). Several minor revisions were made leading up to version 4.0. In version 4.0, nine learning styles are identified that expand on the original four of accommodating, assimilating, converging, and diverging. According to Kolb and Kolb (2013) the nine-style typology “better defines the unique patterns of individual learning styles and reduces the confusions introduced by borderline cases in the old 4 style typology” (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). The nine learning styles are experiencing, imagining, reflecting, analyzing, thinking, deciding, feeling, acting, and initiating (Kolb & Kolb, 2013).

I explored the planning, implementation, experiences, and perceptions of a project-based learning task through the interaction and effect they had on the original four learning styles identified by Kolb (1984). I explained the steps I took to implement a project-based learning task that utilized multiple learning styles. I reflected on what I experienced in the process and what my perceptions were of using a project-based learning task in my Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. I investigated how students perceived project-based learning’s effect and the experiences they had through the course of one project. To improve communication and identification of skills from each learning style, interview questions and data analysis were guided around Kolb’s four learning styles.
Research Questions

The following questions were explored:

1) How does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class?
   a) What contextual factors help shape how a social studies teacher enacts PBL into instruction?
      i) How do the social studies teacher's beliefs, skills, and life experiences influence enactment of PBL?
      ii) How do the social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment?
   b) How does a social studies teacher apply PBL principles in planning for instruction?
   c) How does a social studies teacher implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum?

2) How do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and perceive enactment of PBL?

Method

I chose to use a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study strategy. The focus of the research questions indicate the selection of a descriptive case study was an appropriate research method. A case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995). This was a case of the implementation of a new method in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class.
I used narrative inquiry as a methodological strategy to employ stories as data (Elliot, 2005). The stories described the process of enactment through a description of the context, my beliefs, skills, experiences, environmental factors, instructional planning, and implication of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class. I kept a researcher journal and evaluated documents to enhance my accounts, reflect on my experiences as a teacher, and to communicate the process of planning and implementing project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government class.

I believed the use of video-elicitation interviews provided rich data on students’ perspectives of enactment of a project-based learning method in my class. I conducted three semi-structured video-elicitation interviews, with four participants, to gather descriptive accounts from students in my class. On three separate occasions, each participant was interviewed three times individually. During each interview, the participant viewed a video of their American Government and Politics course implementing a project learning task. Video-elicitation was used to invoke responses and develop rich data. The addition of the students’ perspectives of project-based learning added a new voice to the extant literature.

**Definition of Terms**

To facilitate the understanding of this study, the following terms are defined:

- *Project-based learning*: PBL is “a pedagogical technique that situates learning in complex problem-solving contexts” (Hmelo-Silver, 2004, p. 261). This is an active learning strategy that requires students to construct knowledge. This process includes investigation, research, construction of something, a presentation, and an opportunity to make corrections. This process requires students to do something to demonstrate an
understanding of curricular concepts. In this study, the project-based learning task is a simulation of a presidential campaign.

- **Video Elicitation Interview**: This is a qualitative data collection method used in this study. The researcher will interview the participants, AP American Government and Politics students, and view with them the proceedings of a video-recorded class. During this process, the researcher will probe the participants to comment and reflect on their viewed behavior (Lyle, 2003; Powell, 2005). Video election interviews are used to invoke responses from participants. The method enhances the data collection by providing responses with deeper descriptions. The method allows the researcher to ask questions related to what is occurring in the video and can enhance understanding of events occurring in the film.

- **Advanced Placement**: The placement of a student in a high school course that offers college credit if successfully completed (Oxford University Press, 2018). The Advanced Placement courses are designed to mirror a first-year college class. The course is known to be rigorous by requiring students to analyze documents, make historical connections, and articulate their knowledge through written responses. Each course challenges students to master a large volume of content on a wide range of curricular goals. The course utilizes college-level textbooks and covers concepts that are more complex and numerous than standard high school courses.

- **Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course**: This course provides a college-level, nonpartisan introduction to key political concepts, ideas, institutions, policies, interactions, roles, and behaviors that characterize the constitutional system and political culture of the United States (College Board, 2018). This class uses primary
source documents to help students construct an understanding of relationships and interactions among political bodies that explain the actions of people. This course is equivalent to a one-semester introductory college course in U.S. government (College Board, 2018). AP American Government and Politics is a senior level course that students take to complete a graduation requirement. The school has decided that this course will be conducted over the course of two semesters, which provides additional time to develop concepts.

- **Case Study:** A case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context (Simons, 2009). A case study should include in-depth, multifaceted investigation with great details from multiple data sources (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). This is a detailed investigation of a specific event or occurrence that resulted in a descriptive account. Through a rich description of the event, the researcher created an opportunity for readers to understand elements in such detail they find it transferable.

- **Teacher Inquiry:** Is the recognition of teacher practice as the development of a personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985). Johnson and Golombek (2002) describe it as “systematic exploration that is conducted by teachers and for teachers through their own stories and language” (p. 6) This form of narrative inquiry is an investigation of personal professional actions, events, or occurrences with the intention to learn more about an issue or process that could lead to an improved understanding.
Importance of the Study

This study explored the process of a teacher implementing project-based learning in an AP American Government and Politics class. The environmental factors of the classroom and the influence of the school were examined. My beliefs, skills and life experiences were communicated to provide a record of numerous variables involved with the implementation of PBL in an AP American Government and Politics class. I believe understanding the experience and perspectives of the implementing teacher and students in the class has the potential to help inform educators. The new literature will help lead to the capability of improving the implementation and practice of project-based learning.

This study is relevant to the field of education and, specifically, to the study of project-based learning. Little research has been conducted on teacher implementation or the student experience in project-based learning. Therefore, the findings of this case study will contribute to a body of literature that will inform educators of the process involved with the implementation of PBL and the perspectives of high school students in an AP American Government and Politics course. Thornton (2017) has suggested, “we need more studies that focus behind the classroom door” (p. 33). This study helped answer that call by exploring the perceptions of four 12th grade students engaged in the project-based curriculum in a social studies classroom.

Conclusion

As pedagogy in social studies classes continues to shift to a student-led approach, it is valuable to know how a teacher enacts the method in their classroom. To develop a more complete understanding it is important to consider how the new methods affect students’ attitudes, behaviors, and physiological well-being. The purpose of the present study was to explore teacher enactment and student perceptions of project-based learning in an Advanced
Placement American Government and Politics course. In this study, I examined documents and used stories to describe the process of planning and enacting project-based learning. Four students were interviewed through a semi-structured interview approach to create an account of their perceptions and experiences of the effects of using project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. Chapter two will review the literature on experiential learning, project-based learning, Advanced Placement, teacher inquiry, and student perceptions to help establish a foundation to bring understanding to the research.
Chapter Two:

Review of the Literature

The literature review begins with an overview of the experiential learning theory, progressive education, and the application of both to educational methods today. The use of projects and the instructional method of PBL was examined and utilized in the Advanced Placement program to explore the value of students’ perspectives. The literature on experiential learning theory was searched using the terms “Kolb learning theory” and “Dewey learning theory” on the Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO) database. The sources of progressive education were identified in course readings for Transforming the Curriculum, a doctoral level class taken with Dr. Thornton at the University of South Florida, and supplemented with contemporary perspectives on progressive thought. The contemporary perspectives were identified by using the EBSCO database and using the search term “progressive education.” The use of projects and PBL as an instructional method was searched on the EBSCO database using the terms “projects,” “Kilpatrick,” “Hmelo-Silver,” “Parker,” and “Lo.” Information on the Advanced Placement program was gathered from the AP College Board website and knowledge was added to the study through the investigation of peer-reviewed journal articles and statistical information found on the EBSCO database using the search terms “Advanced Placement,” “AP Government,” and “AP Social Studies.” I investigated the value of student perspectives through searching the EBSCO database for the terms “student perspectives,” “student voice,” “the value of student voice,” and “students’ views.”
Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning theory draws on the work of prominent 20th-century scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development. John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, and Paulo Freire worked to develop a dynamic, holistic model of the process of learning from experience and a multi-linear model of adult development (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Experiential learning theory is a view that learning occurs as a process driven by human adaptation through a process of action, reflection, experiences, and consideration (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Kolb describes “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). This process of adaptation is prevalent in many areas of life including the classroom.

Experiential learning is viewed as a different approach from traditional education. In a traditional approach, the teacher is the subject matter expert who disseminates information and knowledge to the student (Thornton, 2001). This “outside-in” approach is contrasted with the “inside-out” approach of experiential learning that seeks to tap the internal interest and intrinsic motivation of learners building on their prior knowledge and experience (Kolb, Kolb, Passarelli, & Sharma, 2014). In experiential learning, the educator’s role is to create an opportunity for students to reflect on and make meaning from experiences. In this approach, educators must adapt their role to help learners move around the cycle, thus moving from the facilitator, to subject matter expert, to standard-setter and evaluator, and to coach (Kolb et al., 2014).

According to Kolb experiential learning theory is based on six concepts:

Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes. All learning is re-learning. Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Learning results from synergetic transactions between the
person and the environment. Learning is the process of creating knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 4).

The six concepts are applied to a learning cycle composed of four parts that include experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting. This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle where the learner touches all the bases in a process (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). It is between the stages that Kolb and Kolb (2009) suggest that “experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes” (p. 298). As the learner transitions from the concrete learning experience to some reflective observations, these observations are condensed into abstract concepts from which implications can be drawn (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). The implications can be tested and then serve as guides to create new experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

Social Studies Curriculum History

The standardization of the high school curriculum from 1890 to 1920 drew heavily on liberal arts education, often excluding the social sciences. As colleges looked to create more standardization modern classes such as science, history, and French were encouraged because they were conceived as suitable for all people to study. To regulate college entrance a desire for educational standardization emerged throughout the country, the Committee of 10 convened in 1893 (Thornton, 2017). A few short years later, in 1899, the Committee of Seven met and both committees agreed that students should attend 12 years of school and history or civics should be taught at every level of school (Fallace, 2009). In 1916, the Bureau of Education released a report on the Social Studies in Secondary Education (Evans, 2006). The report recommended a new scope and sequence to social studies education, including two new courses; one covering community civics while the second course would be a culminating course where students would explore the problems of democracy (Fallace, 2009). Social Studies became a new field as a result
of the 1916 report that communicated concern for helping the diverse, changing society adjust to the demands of the industrial world (Thornton, 2017).

During the Progressive Movement, Dewey’s work was referenced heavily by numerous educators and curriculum creators (Fallace, 2011). In *How We Think*, Dewey claims that thinking includes the process of discovery and a process of testing, and, that focusing on facts as facts interfere with discovery (Dewey, 1971). Dewey argued thought allows the escape from pure impulsivity or purely routine action. It also allows the creation of artificial signs serving to remind one of the consequences and ways of securing and avoiding them (Dewey, 1971). Proper education should train students in the formation of careful, alert, and thorough habits of thinking (Dewey, 1971, p. 58). Dewey goes on to explain that the process of thought should include both induction, the process of discovery, and deduction, a process of testing (1971). Dewey believed that the focus on facts as facts interferes with discovery and if the teacher assumed sole responsibility for the education of general principles, the pupil gets no training (Dewey, 1971). In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey communicated his belief that we learn by sharing experiences and that those experiences could be developed from a different curriculum for different students (Dewey, 1916). The purpose of education was democratization that could happen through the fostering, nurturing, and cultivating process that encouraged the valuing of others (Dewey, 1916).

The thoughts of Dewey in *How We Think* and *Democracy in Education* were expanded upon by Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick (1929) proclaimed instruction was dominated by recitation and learning by memorization saying education became a “regime of coercion” and “aimless dawdling” (p. 4). He thought education should focus on purpose (Kilpatrick, 1929). Engaging students in projects would enhance their learning and allow them to make connections the the
real world. “Children can express their uniqueness discover their classmate’s individualities and shape reciprocities among caring, concern, and learning” (Kilpatrick, 1929, p.4). According to Kilpatrick (1929), a project was a purposeful act emphasizing action. Through projects, students would work together, an attribute Kilpatrick (1929) believed to be not only democratic but also moral. Dewey (1971) suggested, “education is logical if it concerns the formation of careful, alert, and thorough habits of thinking” (p. 58). The learning process through the use of projects was logical and increased satisfaction and promoted continued learning (Kilpatrick, 1929).

As progressive educational ideas clashed with traditional education, the development of an influential textbook swept the country. The progressive curriculum that focused on social interaction, democratic classrooms, holistic learning theory, and integration of knowledge was popular during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s (Beane, 1997). Rugg’s problem-solving curriculum used current issues from around the country to introduce the content of the social studies (Thornton, 2001). Rugg argued previously students were not ready for the problems of the world. His text would expose students to the type of thinking that would be needed in the future (Thornton, 2001). Rugg credited Dewey for this child-centered approach to education and claimed Dewey’s work was a turning point for education (Fallace, 2011). Problem-solving was seldom a typical method in history class during this time period (Thornton, 2001). Through the use of the textbook Rugg’s goal was to create a social citizen but during the 1940s his work was called communistic and educators adopted new curriculum (Evans, 2006).

Over the next 30 years, the dominant theme would be the heavy dependence on textbooks as part of the social studies curriculum (Thornton, 2001). During the 1940s, Tyler (1949) was in disagreement with the way curriculum was being developed, claiming that the curriculum is about learning experiences, not a list of topics to cover. Education should find a student’s
interests and broaden and deepen those topics (Tyler, 1949). Tyler (1949) argued that education should teach tolerance, creative thinking, sensitivity, and self-direction. The method of teaching should include opportunities to use knowledge because learning takes place through experiences (Tyler, 1949).

During the 1950s, the social studies curriculum was charged with not being rigorous, condemned as lethargic because of its domination by teacher-led transmission of information (Thornton, 2017). The 1960s brought change with the adaption of the views of Tyler, Bruner, and Taba resulting in social studies that was less teacher-centric (Thornton, 2017). Learning how to think, to make informed decisions is the most valuable aspect of schools (Bruner, 1960). Bruner (1960) though education required drill and practice to develop structure but the way to educate was to ask questions that could be answered to take one somewhere. Students should know what it is like to be completely absorbed in a problem and education should be interesting, broad, and diverse (Bruner, 1971). The New Social Studies transformational thought started early with Taba. Taba (1962) claimed that the main core of school subjects ought to be the basic ideas, concepts, and modes of thought that organize concrete facts and events. She was fearful that social studies was so full of facts that ideas such as the causes of immigration would not emerge (Taba, 1962). The thorough study of a few examples may result in better understanding than superficial coverage of many (Taba, 1962). Taking time to deeply learn major concepts would allow thinking to take place in the classroom. Taba (1932) claimed that only through expressions in active behavior can one discover how or what a person thinks. The New Social Studies of the 1960s was aimed at active student inquiry, however, much instruction was scarcely more than the transmission of facts, thus contributing to the reasons that led to the failure of the New Social Studies (Evans, 2006; Thornton, 2001).
According to Evans (2006), the 1980s became known as the revival of history throughout the social studies. The broad course selection in the social studies was blamed for the decline and fall of history teaching (Evans, 2006). The national Council for the Social Studies was inspired to create a definition for social studies education and develop standards to guide instructional planning (Evans, 2006). The government actions of a nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind legislation ushered in the high stakes testing era, leading to teacher-led instructional practices (Evans, 2006; Thornton, 2017). By 1990, Hirsch had developed a need to know curriculum (Gardner, 1999). In an era that linked teacher competence to student test results, educators were eager to acquire what Hirsch deemed the essentials and teach to the test (Gardner, 1999). Gardner (1999) claimed that Hirsch’s curriculum was, at best, superficial and at worst anti-intellectual. Gardner’s (1999) point was that a teacher should focus on depth and understanding and through that practice, a student would achieve useful knowledge. Gardner (1999) describes useful knowledge as “the ability to think of and critique a scientific experiment, that the student can analyze a current event in terms of historical precedents; that the student can confront a work of art and illuminate its power and its modes of operation” (p. 91).

Finding a way to enhance the student learning experience often yields way to the fear of the teacher not being able to cover all the material (Barton & Levstik, 2015). The focus on coverage of content interferes with the key characteristics of history education as advocated by reforms that include investigation, interpretation, and perspective (Barton & Levstik, 2015). Progressives such as Dewey (1938) claimed the major purpose of education is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life. Learning through a method where the student must solve problems helps provide the student with skills that will transcend the classroom (Bruner, 1960).
Progressive vision for education is hands-on, encourages informative experiences that take student interest and choice into account (Uzunboylu & Ozdamli, 2011). The ideas of a Progressive education have resurfaced numerous times in the history of American education. Progressive educational theories have once again captured the interest of educational institutions across the country. Experiential learning such as place-based learning, simulations, and project-based learning applies the beliefs of Dewey (1938), in that education should be based on experiences of educational value. Educators like Hmelo-Silver and Mergendoller have applied Dewey’s ideas to project-based learning, a method that encourages students to investigate, explain, and resolve problems (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Project-based learning has become an increasingly popular method of instruction (Lo, 2018).

Projects

It is important to identify the use of projects within the social studies curriculum history to understand the development of project-based learning. The use of projects has a long history but differ from the instructional design and application of a project-based learning task. A project is something that communicates an idea or solution. According to Kilpatrick (1929), a project is a purposeful act. He claimed that projects must answer two questions prior to being admitted to the curriculum. First, is there a valid notion or concept which promises to render appreciable service in educational thinking? Meaning, the project should equip a student with content knowledge or a skill that is applicable. Second, does the term project fully designate the waiting concept? Kilpatrick claims that adding projects to the curriculum can utilize students inner urge to complete work, increase satisfaction, and inspire continued learning (Kilpatrick, 1929). Projects are an opportunity for students to engage in a topic that incorporates their interests by providing personalization (Weimer, 2002). Project personalization presents a choice to cover
issues, and ways to present the findings that can be conducted individually or in groups. A project is a child-centered approach to education that encourages cooperative working that is democratic (Kilpatrick, 1929).

**Curriculum with Projects and PBL**

In the history of the social studies, projects are found dating back to the beginning of recorded lesson plans. Some examples include projects on the economic systems of small towns and family mapping projects (Troelstrup, 1937). The presence of projects throughout the history of social studies is an indication that the method was an accepted practice by at least some teachers. According to the suggestions of the Social Studies Committee of 10 from 1893, it was recommended that new methods should guide instruction that includes inquiry, comparison, presentations, individual work, field trips, and debates. These elements could easily be covered when assigning a well-constructed project. Education should not be a total dependency on the textbook and lecturing methods (Hertzberg, 1981).

In the 1916 Report on Social Studies, it was proclaimed that there was a need for discussion on the problems of democracy and the ability to allow the students to focus on problems that plagued democracy (Evans, 2006). The 1930 Holyoke report presented claims of a lack of projects within social studies (Barton & Weber, 2009). Instead, teachers were selecting topics, asking questions, and having the students reproduce the text. This evidence suggests that projects were conducted but the method was not practiced by most teachers. The inability of many educators to create a curriculum that engaged students and provided opportunities to make connections to real-world problems became detrimental. Problem-solving was seldom a typical method in history class (Thornton, 2001), resulting in claims that social studies programs were
lethargic because of their domination by teacher-led transmutation of information (Thornton, 2017).

Project-based learning was conducted in 1968 at McMaster University to help improve medical student’s reasoning ability (Evensen, 2000). By 1980, the method had spread beyond the medical field (Evensen, 2000). Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) popularized a classic model of project-based learning that included five items. They suggested project-based learning include a complex real-world situation that has multiple correct answers; students should work in teams; learning should be self-directed; the staff would become facilitators; and problems should lead to the development of critical problem-solving capabilities (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). Boud and others suggested that project-based learning include eight elements (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). The elements included experiences of learners; the responsibility of students for learning; interdisciplinary learning; an intertwining of theory and practice; a focus on process rather than products; the teacher becomes a facilitator; student and peer assessment instead of teacher grading; and a focus on communication skills (Boud, et al., 1985). Despite the minor differences the goal was to create what Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) described experiential learning organized around the investigation, explanation, and resolution of meaningful problems.

Hmelo-Silver (2004) described project-based learning as a process that starts with a problem. The student then identifies facts that will provide information on the issue, which allows the student to form hypothetical solutions to the problem using the knowledge he found. Next, the student identifies knowledge differences, applies new knowledge and generates an abstraction of what he learned from the process. Project-based learning is designed to help learners construct a flexible knowledge-base, develop problem-solving skills, develop lifelong learning skills, become effective collaborators, and become intrinsically motivated to learn
(Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Arantes do Amaral (2019) claims PBL can bring educational benefits to the classroom that include research opportunities, motivation to the participants, and foster continuity of partnerships. Hmelo-Silver’s (2004) research revealed that project-based learning resulted in more accurate results in problem-solving tasks than a control group. The same study revealed that project-based learning students performed better than traditional students on multiple choice tests, despite many students claiming they learn more in traditional lecture format (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

After the foundational work of Hmelo-Silver, educators worked to refine the project-based learning method. Project-based learning, done well, is seen as a method that can help students acquire critical thinking skills and communication skills, and become familiar with the use of technology (Larmer, 2018). Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) developed seven elements required for a gold standard project. A project should start with a need to know that can serve as an entry event that can capture interest. The second element is a driving question something provocative that is open-ended, yet linked to core knowledge. Students should have a voice and a choice in the selection of the topic and how they present their findings. Projects should help students develop 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, and the use of technology. The fifth element is inquiry and innovation. Students should search for answers, generate new questions, test ideas and draw conclusions to answer the problem. Feedback should be provided to students in addition to an opportunity for revision. The final element is public presentation beyond the classroom. An audience beyond the classroom creates care and increases quality (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).

Larmer’s and Mergendoller’s (2010) gold standard inspires well-constructed projects that could require too much from teachers wishing to participate in project-based learning. I know,
from my own practice, that often it becomes a challenge finding community partners to whom to present projects. If an effort to create replicable and sustainable projects for others to implement, it might be necessary to forgo public presentation. Perhaps following Larmer’s and Mergendoller’s standards with the omission of public presentation to members beyond the school could be the silver standard of project-based learning. The silver standard would be a well-constructed purposeful task that would offer most of the benefits that gold standard PBL provides.

The effective utilization of project-based learning in social studies classrooms offers incredible opportunities for students to explore issues of importance. A project should have a goal or problem for the students to solve and that goal or problem should be linked to the curriculum covered in the course (Hallock & Smoot, 2018). Students should have some level of flexibility to investigate a topic within the desired goal. Flexibility increases student motivation because of the intrinsic and self-regulating nature of the activity (Gorski, 2008). Learning opportunities that derive from the inquiry of a problem raised by students, themselves, increase intrinsic motivation (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). According to the research of Arantes do Amaral (2019), “As the students’ motivation increased, they worked harder to accomplish the project activities” (p. 133). For teachers who develop projects it is important to remember these principles and attempt to find a way to allow students an opportunity to have a choice.

Creating educational opportunities that motivate students to complete work is a worthy endeavor especially when the completion of the task results in the acquisition and refinement of valuable skills. Project-based learning provides opportunities to develop higher level thinking skills (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). According to Savin-Baden and Major (2004) “The development of knowledge began to be viewed as a process through which individuals must grapple with
complex questions, conduct original investigations and filter information through their social and cultural contexts” (p. 10). The students must research topics to develop background knowledge of the issue and find factual evidence that will lead the students to a solution to the problem or an answer to a question. To answer a question or fix a problem requires the student to take a stand and support their position with evidence. A solution to the problem is less relevant than the knowledge gained through the process (Grant, 2011). As teachers struggle with ways to encourage students to think like a historian, the utilization of PBL facilitates these skills perfectly. Students interact with primary source documents, decipher facts, and construct a perspective of an issue based on evidence (Barton & Levstik, 2015). Project-based learning offers the potential to help students become reflective and flexible thinkers (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Equipping students with these skills allows students to have success with complex problem solving (Evensen, 2000). The acquisition of these skills helps prepare each student to be an engaged, democratic citizen (Dewey, 1916).

Projects have the capability to be adapted to collaborative work opportunities. Teachers who promote collaborative work in the classroom are encouraging the students to develop valuable communication skills and the opportunity to utilize the strengths of each of the group members to produce the best product possible (Sudjimat, 2019). Collaborative projects provide opportunities for students to do work more like what they will encounter in the workforce. It is even argued that the social pressure of the group project will encourage students to participate and perform well on the task (De La Fuente Arias, 2004).

Despite Evensen’s claims that curricular design of project-based learning is a painstaking activity (2000), project-based learning has become increasingly popular proving that high-quality PBL is both possible and desirable (Lo, 2018). Parker and his team have developed a PBL course
for the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course, which has become a well-publicized reinvention of the AP curriculum.

**PBL in AP GOV**

In 2002, the National Research Council recommended that AP courses be redesigned to reduce coverage and better reflect on how students learn (National Research Council, 2002). The inclusion of too much content could prevent students from the primary goal; a deep conceptual understanding of the content (National Research Council, 2002). The chance to rethink AP courses represented an important opportunity for curriculum study and innovation (Parker et al., 2011). As Parker and his team designed the course, four goals were established. The first, that students in the new course would earn the same or higher test scores on the AP exam (Parker et al., 2011). Second, students would experience deeper conceptual learning than prior classes (Parker et al., 2011). The third goal was a greater appeal for a wide array of students and the fourth goal was to make the course sustainable (Parker et al., 2011). The four goals were necessary to justify changing the curriculum of the course and were altered by new issues such as the open enrollment policies, allowing any student to take an AP class in both rural and suburban areas (Parker et al., 2011).

Parker and his team wanted to utilize project-based learning that would put students in authentic roles, to provide students an opportunity to experience government (Parker et al., 2013). In the construction of the PBL course, the full subject matter would need to be covered (Parker & Lo, 2015). The projects directed and fueled the teaching and learning throughout the course (Parker & Lo, 2015). According to Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) projects are the main course, not dessert. Projects are not used as a change of pace or a time filler but become the dominant method to engage the learner. Parker (2018) claims the curriculum is delivered through
projects as the spine of the course. Engagement first, is an important concept to develop in PBL because it creates a reason for a student to read the text, pay attention to lectures, and find answers to their questions (Grant, 2011; Hallock, 2018; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010; Parker et al., 2011).

The projects were created to provide authentic experiences, thus, providing opportunities to engage in real-world tasks (Parker & Lo, 2015). Parker and Lo (2015) have created a curriculum that allows students to participate in meaningful learning through a deep exploration of the various roles of members of the government through five simulations. Meaningful learning, according to Dewey (1916), is the ability to acquire an understanding of information due to the experiences of a learner. PBL creates an experience that encourages a deep understanding of the content (Lo, 2018). In addition to the tasks Parker and Lo (2015) included in constructing the course, their fourth goal was to create an assessment that would measure the effect on students’ learning.

The AP American Government and Politics course was developed to present students with opportunities to learn the major concepts of the course by reintroducing major concepts. The teachers in Parker’s (2015) study referred to this process as looping, which provided the students the opportunities to revisit questions, ideas, and problems. Some of the major concepts the course were designed for students to frequently revisit through looping, were federalism, separation of powers, elections, interest groups, and civil rights (Parker, 2018). According to Parker and Lo (2015) looping became key to encouraging students to deepen their knowledge in the course.

To ensure that the students in the course would experience government, five simulation projects were chosen to drive the content of the course (Parker et al, 2013). According to Levin
and Kawashima-Ginsberg (2017) simulations of adult civic roles is an effective practice for training young people to sustain democracy. The simulations encourage students to conduct investigations that relate to their lives (Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018).

The first simulation is the

Founders’ Intent (3 weeks). The course opens with an introductory simulation, Founders’ Intent. Students are introduced to role-playing and to the system of limited government and divided powers that the Constitution creates. Students are delegates to the Constitutional Convention. In these roles, they engage in three deliberations on controversial constitutional issues: First, and quickly (it is a review cycle for students who typically had US History a year earlier), they decide whether to approve the Constitution, thereby animating the federalist and antifederalist arguments over the division of power between national and state government. Second, still in these roles, but now in SAC teams, they deliberate a federalism controversy from the past (e.g., the national bank). Third, again in SAC teams, they deliberate a contemporary federalism controversy (e.g., federally mandated health care insurance). This last task loops back on federalism, now in contemporary light, and introduces the role of political parties, which underscores their purpose: winning elections and gaining power. Students loop conceptually through federalism and textually through the Constitution of the United States and Federalist 10.

- Task 1: Ratification – As delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, students debate its ratification
- Task 2: Historical SAC – Students deliberate, in the same roles, an historical Federalist / Anti-Federalist debate (e.g., the National Bank of 1791)
- Task 3: Modern SAC – Students deliberate, in the same roles, a modern-day Federalist / Anti-Federalist debate (e.g., marriage, drug, health, immigration policy) (Parker & Lo, 2015)

The second project delves into

Elections (6 weeks). This is a simulation of a presidential election and the second scenario in which students wrestle with the master course question, What is the proper role of government in a democracy? Students become candidates, voters in swing states, journalists in media organizations, and leaders of interest groups and political parties. Through a series of tasks—from throwing hats in the ring to the general election—students learn about public opinion, political ideology, polls, campaign finance, and the voter characteristics. They also learn the relationships between interest groups, political parties, and the media as they attempt to navigate and influence the campaign. After campaign platforms are presented, students vote to elect the next president of the United States.
- Task 1: Warming Up to the Race – Students play roles in a presidential primary election (includes SAC: Should voting be required?)
- Task 2: Navigating the Campaign Trail – Students begin the process of campaigning for the primary election
- Task 3: Primary Election – Students vote on their primary candidates
- Task 4: Gearing up for the General Election – Students regroup to campaign for the general election (includes SAC: Should the Electoral College be abolished?)
- Task 5: General Election – Students finish the campaign and elect the next President of the United States (Parker & Lo, 2015)

Parker and Lo describe the third project as SCOTUS (4 weeks). Once the president is sworn in, students witness the impact the election on the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), members of which are appointed by the president. In this simulation, students take roles in the judicial branch of government as attorneys and judges, and specifically in appellate courts: circuit courts of appeals and then the Supreme Court. Students learn about and practice judicial argumentation and constitutional reasoning as they experience the way courts define and implement public policy, often dealing with issues of civil rights and liberties. Students also learn how judges and lawyers navigate the pressures of public opinion, media, and interest groups. Throughout the project, students experience the interdependence of the three branches, such as judicial review and the impact of the presidential election on appointments to the Supreme Court.

- Task 1 (optional): Trial Court – As jurors, judge, attorneys, etc., students conduct a mock trial (so as to learn the differences between trial and appellate courts). Task 2 (and optional Task 3): Moot Circuit Court – As lawyers and justices, students conduct one (or two conflicting) moot circuit court on a landmark Supreme Court case
- Task 3 (or 4): Moot Supreme Court: As lawyers and justices, students conduct a moot Supreme Court on a landmark Supreme Court case (Parker & Lo, 2015).

The fourth project is a simulation of the role of Congress (4 weeks). The fourth project cycle is a simulation of Congress. Students are legislators and learn not only how a bill becomes a law but how politics influence public policy. In committee compromises and floor debates, students navigate political pressures—from constituencies, political parties, and interest groups—for and against particular legislation. This project loops back on the party platform promises that presidential candidates made in the Elections project and the bicameral system set up by the Constitution in Founders’ Intent.
The fifth project is titled Government in Action (5 weeks). In this culminating project, students are consultants to interest groups that have strong positions on immigration policy. Applying knowledge from the previous projects, students study their client’s position and what makes the group a serious contender in the political arena. Their job is to draw up a wise political action plan that will help their client advance its agenda through the political system—through the branches of government and the bureaucratic agencies—thereby learning how interest groups work with government to create, implement, and evaluate public policies.

- Task 1: Meeting the Client – As consultants, students meet the interest group they will advise
- Task 2: Prepare for a Press Conference – Students work to answer key questions about their client’s policy agenda (includes SAC: Is the federal bureaucracy a boon or a threat to democracy?)
- Task 3: Litigation Techniques – Students use litigation (and the courts) to help influence public policy
- Task 4: Presidential Influence – Students write a letter to the President that outlines a political action plan that will advance their client’s agenda
- Task 5: Congressional Testimony – Students testify persuasively to a Congressional committee on behalf of their client
- Task 6: Political Action Plan – Students propose a comprehensive political action plan for their client’s public policy agenda (Parker & Lo, 2015)

The five projects infuse best practices for civic education by providing an approach that encourages students to engage in issues that directly affect their community (Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012).

Flanagan and Levine (2010) claim, “today’s young adults are less likely than those in earlier generations to exhibit many important characteristics of citizenship” (p. 159). Compulsory education was instituted in the United States to create citizens capable of governing
themselves and their country (Liu, 2018). Through courses such as AP American Government, teachers can provide students with opportunities for civic engagement. Varying perspectives of this engagement range from scholars who suggest participation in activities such as joining community groups, volunteering to help neighbors, or leading grassroots efforts to gain civil rights are appropriate tasks (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Some teachers attempt to instill civic duty through service projects. According to Levinson (2012), service learning is an inadequate tool for addressing the civic empowerment gap. Levinson (2012) claims, “most service-oriented experiential education is driven by a conception of citizenship that is voluntary, based on individual rather than communal action, and independent of government involvement” (p. 43). This communicates a version of citizenship devoid of politics, which ultimately deprives students the opportunity to confront political issues and deal with the controversy that could result from those discussions.

Hess (2017) claims, “what you want in a political classroom is what we call nonpartisan political education.” Political issues should be examined from multiple perspectives and students should be encouraged to make their own judgments and construct their own political identity. Students should learn how to talk about public policy issues and learn how the political system operates (Hess, 2017). Hess (2011) states, “a democracy without controversial issues is like an ocean without fish” (p. 69). It is essential to discuss controversies about the nature of the public good and how to achieve it if we are to educate democracy; without controversy, there is no democracy (Hess, 2011). “When schools fail to teach students how to engage with controversial political and constitutional issues or worse, suppress, ignore, or exclude such issues from the curriculum they send a host of destructive and misguided messages” (Hess, 2018, p. 306). Students could perceive from the lack of discussion, that it is not important for young people to
examine and analyze contemporary politics (Hess, 2018). Or, students could perceive the lack of attention as controversial issues are too sensitive to talk about in schools and could be harmful (Hess, 2018).

The need for controversial political discussions has a new urgency because adults in the United States continue to interact and socialize with ideologically homogeneous communities at increasing rates (Hess, 2011). Schools are good venues for controversial political issues because they feature ideological, religious, and social class diversity among students. Hess (2011) claims, “students who engage in discussion learn how to make and defend an argument and analyze others’ positions in constructive ways” (p. 69). Through participation in high-quality discussions of controversial issues, students become more interested in and more tolerant of views different from their own (Hess, 2011).

The projects provide structure and frame to interact with government concepts but provide freedom for the students to select issues that interest them. The ability for each of the students to select a topic he is interested in and the requirement to discuss and reach decisions helps students share multiple viewpoints. According to Castro and Knowles (2017), civic education should provide an equal voice for the communication of all views. Students should be able to share thoughts they feel are important, but it should not be a platform to promote false views. The opportunity to ask follow up questions can promote a deeper understanding of views and encourage reflection. Civic learning is the best vehicle to train young people to sustain democracy (Levin & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017). According to Levin and Kawashima-Ginsberg (2017), some of the most effective practices in teaching civics include talking about current controversial issues, providing students with a voice at school, and conducting simulations of adult civic roles. It is important to be cognizant of labeling issues as controversial,
the term has a negative connotation and could be offensive. Through this study I asked how the students would describe the issues and they suggested the term contriversal. The projects developed by Parker and his team adhere to what researchers claim to be effective civics education (Castro & Knowles; Hess, 2011; Levin & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017).

The PBL tasks designed for the AP American Government and Politics course have been shown to help students obtain understanding of the AP key concepts. Parker and Lo (2016) developed the Complex Scenario Test, an authentic assessment of deep political learning. The CST is a classroom-based performance assessment that can be used as a summative assessment. The CST validity was determined by two panels of teachers, the first group of which had spent a week scoring the test from across several schools in the district (Parker & Lo, 2016). The second group was composed of AP Government teachers who knew the content of the course very well but did not know the CST assessment (Parker & Lo, 2016). Both panels concluded the CST was a valid measure of deep and applied knowledge of the course content (Parker & Lo, 2016). PBL students in the high-achieving School A, scored significantly higher on three of the four dimensions of the CST as compared with students in the traditional course (Parker et al., 2011). The findings suggest that these PBL students deeply understood the AP content to the point that they were able to apply it in a situation to solve a complex problem (Parker et al., 2011). Meanwhile, Students in the PBL-AP classes scored significantly higher on the AP test than students in the comparison non-PBL courses (Parker et al., 2011). The results Parker and his team have shown using PBL in the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course have inspired me to adopt the five project-based learning simulations in my classes.
Challenges to PBL

If the benefits of projects have been noted in the social studies for such an extensive period of time, and many well-respected educators recommend the method, why have teachers refused its incorporation? One reason teachers are unwilling to incorporate projects is the desire to control the classroom (Barton & Levstik, 2015). Teachers fear that collaborative groups will become loud and move around the classroom giving the perception to administrators that the class is unorganized and out of the control. Some teachers are fearful that the incorporation of a project will limit the ability to cover the material that the students need to have (Larmer, 2018). Dow (2019) reinforced this belief in his claim, “So often we are driven by our effort to transmit the prescribed curriculum, that student curiosity is left by the wayside (p. 79).

The need to cover material that will be tested is the educational goal of all Advanced Placement teachers. This mentality often overvalues the teacher's lecture and leaves little room for alternative methods to be utilized in the classroom (Matheson, 2008). Anticipating the full attention of every student through the course of a lecture is unrealistic, has proven unsuccessful in helping most students retain knowledge, and alternative methods should be considered (Thornton, 2001). Parker’s recent work on the Advanced Placement Government course proves that teachers who utilize project-based learning are preparing their students to have success on the AP exam. Parker designed the course with five goals in mind,

(1) to improve the authenticity or real-world value of the course, (2) to increase student engagement in the course, and (3) to improve the meaningfulness of student learning (4) while achieving same or better pass rates on the AP test as students in traditional APGOV classrooms. (5) Finally, we wanted the increasing number of students now enrolling in APGOV not only to enter but to succeed in the course—both to learn and enjoy” (Parker & Lo, 2015).
An authentic assessment was developed in conjunction with the new methods employed in the class to determine the level of understanding. The Complex Scenario Test that was developed showed positive results in multiple field tests (Parker & Lo, 2016).

I believe many teachers refrain from using projects in their classrooms because this method requires the teacher to have a deep understanding of the content. A project shifts control from the teacher and allows the student to drive the instruction. I believe this idea scares many educators because many have a superficial knowledge of the material, and some are only a few pages ahead of the students. Teachers struggle to implement PBL due to the need for complex teaching skills, advanced pedagogical knowledge, and vast content knowledge (Adams, Lo, Goodell, & Nachtigala, 2017). Evensen (2000) notes the painstaking task that PBL curriculum development can be is another factor that may discourage teachers from implementing PBL. Sudjimat (2019) claims, some teachers have difficulties in determining the correct implication strategy of PBL.

The inability to determine how to grade students for their work scares many educators away from instituting projects within their curriculum. What should the project require? What should the students produce? How is each group member held accountable for their work? These are all valid questions that can be addressed with adequate teacher planning. The teacher should develop a project based on standards to be covered and a goal for the students to accomplish. The construction of a rubric can provide detailed directions for grading yet be open enough to allow for student creativity. With reflective planning, the teacher will understand the alterations necessary to make the project more successful in the future.

Some teachers refuse change simply because they are set in their pedagogical ways. They are more comfortable using last year’s lesson plans again, this year. This mentality leaves little
opportunity for growth. Many teachers raise the complaint that standardized testing is the factor that shapes the way they teach, especially since they are evaluated, in a large part, based on their students’ performance on standardized testing. According to the State of the States’ Teacher Evaluation and Support Systems report, 49% of surveyed teachers said they were evaluated based on student state test scores (Goe, Wylie, Bosso, & Olson, 2017). Preparing students to memorize factual data and regurgitate that knowledge on a multiple-choice test is not the goal of social studies education, yet many teachers are treating it as such (Dewey, 1938). As much as teachers proclaim that testing dictates what material is covered or how that material is presented, a recent study indicated that teacher instruction changes very little (Grant, 2015). This means that the material may change but the methods are not changing. To find the best pedagogical practices teachers must reflect and theorize about their practice (Ross, 1994).

**Advanced Placement**

The Advanced Placement program currently offers 38 courses that provide students an opportunity to earn college credit (College Board, 2018). According to the College Board, “committees of college faculty members and expert AP teachers design the AP courses and exams” (2018). The courses are designed to cover a large breadth of content that is common to a college level survey class.

The committees define the scope and expectations of the course by describing, through a curriculum framework, the knowledge and thinking skills students should demonstrate for success on the exam. Data collected by the College Board, from a range of colleges, universities, and professional organizations, confirms that AP courses reflect current scholarship and advances in each discipline—and that AP Exams reflect and assess college-level expectations (2018).

The Advanced Placement program provides “motivated high school students with the opportunity to take college-level courses in a high school setting” (Sadler et al., 2010). The high school teacher has flexibility in the way the curriculum is presented but
the AP College board requires an annual course audit to ensure the key concepts of the course are covered.

**AP Exams**

The AP exam is the culminating assessment designed to measure the students understanding of course content.

The exam development is a multiyear process conducted by a committee of college faculty members and expert AP teachers. The committee considers the length of the test, types of questions to include, the type of evidence of student learning that each question elicits, the number of each type of question, how much time should be devoted to each section, and how are course content and skills distributed across each section (College Board, 2018).

Once the committee sets the specifications of the test, they align each question to the course curriculum.

The exam for the American Government and Politics course features two sections. The first section allocates one hour and 20 minutes for students to complete 55 multiple choice questions (College Board, 2018). The multiple-choice section features quantitative based source material, qualitative based source material including primary and secondary sources, visual analysis, concept application, comparison, and identification of terms. The second section of the exam features four free response questions and allocates an hour and 40 minutes for students to complete the section (College Board, 2018). The free response section provides students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of concept application, the ability to analyze quantitative data, compare Supreme Court Cases, and develop an argumentative essay using foundational documents. The multiple choice and free response section each count for 50% of the grade.

According to the self-reported scores the College Board (2018) published for the 2018 American Government and Politics exam 53% of students did not earn a passing grade. The College Board (2018) emphasizes that an AP score of three or higher is a strong predictor of a
student’s ability to succeed in college and earn a bachelor’s degree. The American Council on Education contends that students who earn a grade of three or higher on an AP exam should be given college credit (Ewing, 2006).

The AP exam scores are a weighted combination of the multiple-choice section and free response section. The final score is reported on a five-point scale that associates the score to the students’ ability to do introductory level coursework at college. According to the AP College Board, a five is an extremely well qualified, a four is a well-qualified, a three is qualified, a two is possibly qualified, and a one is no recommendation. The large percentage of students who do not earn credit for the course reflects the growing population of students taking the course.

The Advanced Placement program has experienced sustained growth since its inception in 1955 (College Board, 2017). In 1955, 1,229 students from 130 schools took 2,199 exams (College Board, 2010). In 2015, 2,483,452 students took 4,478,936 AP exams (College Board, 2015). In 2017, 2,741,426 students took 4,957,931 AP Exams (College Board, 2017). In just two years, over 250,000 additional students took an AP exam. One of the reasons for the growth is that the ability to earn college credit has become more appealing as the price of college tuition rises. The College Board asserts that taking AP classes increases student eligibility to earn scholarships and acceptance into colleges (2015).

**Criticism of AP**

Criticism of the AP program has emerged as students have enrolled in courses in hopes of gaining acceptance into prestigious colleges (Smith, 2011). AP coursework is often viewed as a must for college-bound students (Geiser & Santelices, 2006). The pressure of competing with their peers to become an attractive candidate to colleges has influenced students to take AP
classes. Many teachers have voiced their concern about the ability of students to remain engaged in an AP class when taking multiple AP courses at one time (Hansen, 2005).

One of the larger complaints about AP courses is the amount of material covered. Teachers of AP courses must frequently race through a yearlong college syllabus, saving several weeks at the end to coach students for the test (Oxtoby, 2007) I believe this demand to cover large amounts of material at a feverish pace is leading to increased levels of stress on students. While research indicates that students identified as intellectually gifted may be more adept at using problem-solving strategies to cope with stress (Preuss & Dubow, 2004; Tannenbaum, 2003), I believe many students in my class struggle to meet the demands of the rigor in AP classes.

**Teacher Inquiry**

Ayers (1989) captures the complexity of teaching,

> Teaching involves a search for meaning in the world. Teaching is a life project, a calling, a vocation that is an organizing center of all other activities. Teaching is past and future as well as present, it is background as well as foreground, it is depth as well as surface. Teaching is pain and humor, joy and anger, dreariness and epiphany. Teaching is world building, it is architecture and design, it is purpose and moral enterprise. Teaching is a way of being in the world that breaks through the boundaries of the traditional job and in the process redefines all life and teaching itself (p. 130).

As illustrated by Ayers’ quote, the role of a teacher is complex and is often complicated by an expectation to implement endless changes (Dana, Yendol-Hoppey, & Thompson-Grove, 2003). As my district continues to advocate for active student learning methods to increase engagement, I have become interested in enacting project-based learning tasks in my courses. I used teacher inquiry as a method to generate knowledge of the process of enactment of project-based learning and the perceptions and experiences of my students. McGarr, McCormack, and Comerford (2019) argued that, “Reflecting on one’s practice can aid the teacher in gaining deeper insights
into their professional work and enable them to consider alternative perspectives on their practices” (p. 246).

Teacher inquiry focuses on the concerns of teachers, engages teachers in the design, data collection, and interpretation of the data (Dana, et al., 2003). This approach to research has multiple benefits: the first is theories and knowledge are generated from research grounded in the realities of educational practice, the second, is teachers become collaborators in educational research by investigating their own problems, and, third, teachers play a part in the research process, which makes change more possible through the knowledge they create (Dana, et al., 2003).

Through the research paradigm of teacher inquiry, I used narrative inquiry as the method to create an understanding of the process of enacting PBL in an AP American Government and Politics class. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry has been influenced by the work of Dewey. They claim that, “narrative is the study of experience, and experience as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally” (2000, p. 189). Through my story about the factors that have shaped my decisions on the enactment of project-based learning, I believe it will help enhance teachers’ knowledge of the process.

**Student Perspectives**

Students are the most important stakeholders in the school environment. The significance of their role as important partners in any school improvement efforts can no longer be ignored (Giple, 2013). They are an essential part of the educational ecosystem, a collaboration among teachers, students, and parents (Epstein, 2001; Sanders, 2002). The inclusion of students’ views offers a more democratic perspective on education (Quesada, Ruiz, Noche, & Cubero-Ibáñez,
2019). It is valuable for teachers who aim to improve students’ academic performance, to consult in a collaborative effort to determine meaningful curriculum improvement. Mitra (2005) claims students need to be empowered to assume collective responsibility for their school’s academic performance. Student voice can provide students with a stronger sense of ownership in their schools (Fine, 1991; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989). Beattie (2012) claims a “partnership (with students) fosters ownership; ownership sparks motivation; motivation drives learning” (p. 2).

Giple (2013) defines student voice as “the active opportunity for students to express their opinions and make decisions regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning experiences” (p. 27). Much like Giple, Fletcher (2005) defined student voice as “the individual and collective perspective and actions of young people within the context of learning and education” (p. 3). Student voice consists of meaningful student involvement, the process whereby students are engaged as partners with educators in every facet of school reform (Fletcher, 2005). Mitra (2005) argues student voice is a tool that empowers students to seek improvement in key areas of school life such as instruction, curriculum, assessment, teacher-student relationship, and student-centered teachers’ professional development.

Teachers can benefit from the utilization of student voice as important information about the real needs and interests of students are effectively communicated. Doyle and Feldman (2006) bring attention to the necessity to ask students for their voice claiming, how else shall we know “what helps students learn and how to deliver those practices” (p. 394)? Researchers should understand how students discern and respond to their learning environment because this kind of information may be more useful than the opinion of outsiders who observe and assess the quality of teaching behaviors (Waxman, Huang, Anderson, & Weinstein, 1997). The emergent role of
students as partners in school improvement efforts is a substantial transition. Historically, children during the industrial revolution were perceived as victims that were exploited for the economic gain of adults (Kurth-Schai, 1988). During the mid-twentieth century the perceptions of youth changed dramatically, no longer were children perceived as victims. During the 1980s the emergence of student participation as learners and researchers working for change becomes more prevalent.

There has been a paradigmatic shift of the role of students as receptacles of knowledge to students as “creator, disseminators, and implementers of knowledge” (Kurth-Schai, 1988, p.124). The new role of students is supported by the increasing recognition of the interdependence of roles between students and educators in the effort to improve schools (Kushman & Shanessey, 1997; Rubin & Silva, 2003). This conception of the new role of students has also been influenced by constructivism. Some progressivists such as Dewey (1938), have described students as co-creators of knowledge. Students ability to communicate their experience in the construction of knowledge is a vital element in an attempt to understand learning in a classroom. The influence of constructivism in placing the responsibility of learning on the learner is critical in the design of effective school reform for student achievement (Von Glasersfeld, 1989).

The perspectives of students must be the foundation upon which school leaders can plan, develop, implement, and improve schools (Gransden & Clarke, 2001). In the past decade or so, there has been a growing body of research that has examined students’ perspectives on their experiences in classrooms (Alder, 2002; Brown, 1999; Jansen, 2006; Jansen, 2012). These studies provide student perspectives on their experience of the various phenomenon. Student voice has shown it can be an important resource in efforts to determine what methodology works
in classrooms (Cushman, 2003). It has helped communicate what practices best promote student learning and how to deliver those best practices (Doyle & Feldman, 2006).

In addition to exploring students’ perspectives on how best they learn in terms of the learning environment and the communication of knowledge, students also know that a teacher’s personality, knowledge of content, and level of rapport with students directly affect how they learn and what they learn (Cushman, 2003).

The blueprint for the development of student voice that is effective and meaningful certainly has its challenges. One of the challenges to student voice development is the issue of time. Adequate time is needed to create meaningful student voice because the construction of effective student voice or meaningful student involvement requires the development of a solid foundation of trust and openness between students and teachers (Rudduck, 2007). The development of authentic student voice is about building relationships, not systems (Bragg, 2017). It is about building a culture that values the communication of students that has been constructed over a period of time, thus earning the trust of students. Bragg (2007) argues isolation, divisiveness, disconnection and separateness in teacher-student, inter-teacher, school-parent relationships are examples of dysfunctional organizational communication in schools that continue to constrain the development of meaningful student involvement or authentic student voice. Another factor that makes student voice difficult to implement and sustain is the absence of authenticity. Rudduck (2007) defined authenticity as the communication of “a genuine interest in what students have to say” (p. 604). In the psychology of adolescence, young people acquire critical cognitive development and personal identity making it essential that students recognize their ability to think abstractly (Christie & Viner, 2005). Students at this age need their ideas, thoughts, and feelings acknowledged and in a sense ‘respected’ (Giple, 2013). Fielding (2001)
claims it is important to engage students in a genuine dialogue that leads to mutual identification and articulation of important issues by teachers and students.

The role of students in schools has transitioned from the traditional conceptualization of students as passive recipients of teaching to active contributors to school change (Cook-Sather, 2002). As active contributors of school change, students have used their voices to inform researchers, school leaders, and teachers about what works and does not work in terms of classroom instructional practices (Cushman, 2003; Doyle & Feldman, 2006). Poplin and Weeres (1992) noted the importance of students’ experiences as a way to hear “voices from the inside” (p. 4). This study affirms the importance of student voice as a vital resource for informing school leaders and teachers about how students learn and the efficacy of teacher instructional practices (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fletcher, 2005; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Rudduck & Flutter, 2003; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the perspectives of high school students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the literature on experiential learning theory was explored because it guided this study. I provided literature regarding progressive education that informs the reader of the development of experiential learning. What a project is, the history of projects in social studies, and the benefits of using projects as an instructional method were explored. Project-based learning was defined, and the methodology for the present study were communicated. The adaption of project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course was explained. This section concluded with a description of the Advanced Placement program, the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics exam, the
growth of student participation in the Advanced Placement program, and criticisms that have arisen because of the AP program.

The literature review will help provide an understanding of the content examined in an effort to answer the two research questions. The first question deals with how a social studies teacher enacts project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class. The second question explored how students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and perceive enactment of PBL.

I believe this study is beneficial to students and educators because it provides a new voice to communicate the experiences of teachers enacting a new method and students’ response to project-based learning. Through the exploration of my actions as a teacher and student perspectives and experiences in a course that uses project-based learning methods, I intended to learn about the process of experiential learning.

The next section will describe the methods that will be used in this study. I will explain qualitative case study, data collection, data analysis, interviews I will describe the accuracy of the findings, including credibility, transferability, confirmability, and researcher bias.
Chapter Three:

Methods

In this study, I investigated teacher enactment of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course and the perceptions and experiences of students in that class. This is a qualitative case study that provides a teacher’s description of the effect of contextual factors, the planning process, and implementation of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class. The second question I investigated in this study was how students perceive and experience project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class. Chapter three describes the methods employed in the study, the research questions, the participants, the context, data collection procedures, data analysis and validity concerns including triangulation, credibility, transferability, confirmability, and researcher bias.

According to numerous studies the implementation of self and peer assessment tasks are instrumental for gaining reflective skills and giving ownership over an individual's learning (Mortimer, 1998; Orsmond, 2002; Taylor, 1997). My study gave students a voice and provide reflective opportunities to assess instruction, activities, and student engagement in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. This case study research presents my understanding of the planning and implementation process of project-based learning.

The research from this study provided an understanding of the process of conducting a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics
course. Through the investigation of students’ perceptions and experiences the study helped construct an understanding of the effect, PBL has on students.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the enactment of project-based learning in social studies curriculum. This study examined factors that affected teacher enactment of project-based learning tasks and students’ perceptions and experiences in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course using that method. This study provided information that can help explain the planning and implementation process of project-based learning. I investigated what project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course may offer students, as well as the challenges and obstacles they encountered through the process. I provided more evidence of the ability to utilize PBL in Advanced Placement social studies courses. Recent scholarship (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Lambros, 2004; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2004) has identified project-based learning as a successful strategy to motivate students to play a positive role in the classroom and in their learning experience, thereby increasing their engagement in the classroom. It is an approach that may be relevant not only to other AP courses but also similar advanced high school courses in other countries.

Using narrative inquiry, I explained the process of planning and implementation of project-based learning in my classroom. I communicated how my personal beliefs and the context of my school have shaped my educational practice. Through the perspective of high school students immersed in a project-based learning social studies course, I explored the benefits, challenges, and frustrations experienced by the students. The research provides a deeper analysis of the enactment of the method and how it altered or enhanced the student experience.
The ability to reflect on the experiences of students provided a rich narrative that can inform and present an opportunity to refine an increasingly popular method.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of the present study was to answer the following questions:

1) How does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class?
   a) What contextual factors help shape how a social studies teacher enacts PBL into instruction?
      i) How do the social studies teacher's beliefs, skills, and life experiences influence enactment of PBL?
      ii) How do the social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment?
   b) How does a social studies teacher apply PBL principles in planning for instruction?
   c) How does a social studies teacher implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum?

2) How do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and perceive enactment of PBL?

   Stake (1995) proclaims, “Most qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (p. 99). Through the process of document analysis, observations, narrative inquiry, and video-elicitation interviews I constructed an understanding of how project-based learning can be enacted and how it affects students. A constructivist view encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing (Stake, 1995).
The research was presented through the constructivist lens. I approached the ontology of this study with local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The inquiry aim of a constructivist study is understanding (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Through the research in this study, I described how project-based learning is implemented in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class. In addition, I attempted to understand the impact project-based learning has on high school students. Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest providing a voice to a participant as a facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction. Due to my pedological beliefs and role as a classroom teacher who assigns project-based learning tasks I am a participant.

According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), a researcher who embraces narrative inquiry has a widening acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing. For narrative inquirers, both stories and humans are continuously visible in the study (Bochner, 2014; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). I included my experiences in planning and enacting project-based learning as stories for part of the data collection. The epistemology of constructivism values co-created findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). I used semi-structured video elicitation interviews to facilitate opportunities for the co-construction of meaning as I examined student perceptions and experiences.

**Design**

This study was a qualitative case study that relied on articulated, written, and observed data collected from stories, interviews, observations, and documents. I chose to use a qualitative approach and use a descriptive case study strategy. Qualitative advocates, such as Guba and Lincoln (1982) and Eisner and Peshkin (1990), place a high priority on direct interpretation of events and lower priority on the interpretation of measurement data (Stake, 1995). A case study
should include in-depth, multifaceted investigation with great details from multiple data sources (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). According to Creswell (2008) "qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants; asks broad questions; collects data consisting largely of words from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes” (p. 46). According to Schwandt and Gates (2018), a case is an instance, incident, or unit of something and can be anything. Swanborn (2010) explained that cases can be located at the micro, meso, or macro level and involve one participant or many. This case was conducted on the micro level, focusing on the perspective of four persons.

Thomas (2016) states that “definitions of case study stress singularity and in-depth inquiry” (p. 23). The following definitions provided by Stake and Simons reinforce Thomas’ claims.

…By whatever methods, we choose to study case. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods – but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case (Stake, 2005, p. 443).

Simons provides the following description of a case study.

Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action (Simons, 2009).

A case study is bound by a specific purpose (Stake, 1995). According to Stake (1995), the design of all research requires conceptual organization, ideas to express needed understanding and conceptual bridges from what is already known. I applied experiential learning theory within a constructivist paradigm to guide the study (Hatch, 2002).
Schwandt and Gates (2018) state a critical question for researchers to answer is “what is this a case of” (p. 342)? This was a case of a new method applied in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. The goal was to provide an opportunity to learn, which is what Stake (1995) suggests is the primary importance of a case study. I sought to produce a “holistic description and explanation” to the research questions in this case study (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). How does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning into an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class? What contextual factors help shape how a social studies teacher enacts PBL into instruction? How do the social studies teacher’s beliefs, skills, and life experiences influence enactment of PBL? How do the social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment? How does a social studies teacher apply PBL principles in planning for instruction? How does a social studies teacher implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum? How do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class perceive and experience enactment of PBL? Answering these questions provided information on the enactment of PBL in an AP American Government and Politics course and communicated the experiences and perceptions of students.

The selection of the case is instrumental and aimed to explore PBL from the perspectives of a teacher enacting the method and students in the class. Thomas (2016) states “an instrumental study is one that is done with a purpose in mind” (p. 120). The purpose of this study was to understand the process of enacting a project-based learning task and the effect it had on students’ ability to acquire skills that enhance and expand their use of multiple learning styles. In an instrumental case study, the issues are dominant (Stake, 1995). I examined the issues that affected teacher planning and integration of project-based learning in an AP American
Government and Politics class. The second issue I explored was the experiences and perceptions of the students in the class, to provide a better understanding of project-based learning. According to Stake (1995) issues draw us toward observing the complex backgrounds of human concern and help us recognize the problems in human interaction.

**Context**

According to Stake (1995), the context of the study should be “developed to provide vicarious experiences for the reader, to give them a sense of being there, the physical situation should be well described” (p. 63). The context of the study was a large public high school in the southeastern part of the United States; in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. The school had a student population of 2,090 students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). This is an average size in comparison to the other high schools in the district. Like the other schools in the district, the Advanced Placement courses at this school were open to any student wishing to take them. There was no screening process that could potentially restrict access or prohibit students who were reading below grade level from taking the course.

Of the 2,090 students at the school 1,703 of the students identified as White (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). The next largest subgroup was Hispanic, with 184 students, followed by 88 students who identified as Black (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). 33% of the school qualified for free or reduced lunch (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Despite a considerable number of students who received free or reduced lunch a portion of the student population is economically advantaged. On school days the student parking lot was full, and the value of most vehicles exceeded what could be found in the teacher parking lot.
The school had seven academies provided to help engage students in electives to prepare them for their future careers. The academies included a fine arts academy, sports academy, internet commerce academy, engineering academy, digital arts academy, a personalized learning academy, and a center for educational leadership (Pinellas County Schools, 2017). Only the center for educational leadership could offer an opportunity for students outside of the school zone to attend the high school. Attractor programs often help to improve the school grade by bringing in students who normally would attend another high school. With only one attractor program, the primary goal of the academies was to provide structure and a sense of involvement to the students within the school. According to the school brochure on the district website, the school claims to be a personalized and project-based learning school (Pinellas County Schools, 2017). Over the past five years, I have seen project-based learning encouraged as a method to be used by the teachers at this school, but I saw very little evidence of the method being implemented.

According to the school improvement plan this school provides, “a challenging and rigorous curriculum that is at the heart of our school community” (Pinellas County Schools, 2017). I am not sure I believed that statement to be true as reflected by the graduation rate of 96.7% (Pinellas County Schools, 2017). The graduation rate of public schools across the nation is only 84% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Numerous variables must be taken into consideration, however, from my experience, academic standards such as the 26% required to earn a D or 70% to earn an A on the American History end-of-course assessment indicate the education provided was not rigorous (Wright, 2018). Over the past three years, the school has earned a grade of a C issued by the Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education, 2018).
School grades provide an easily understandable way to measure the performance of a school. Schools are graded A, B, C, D, or F. In 2017-18, a school’s grade may include up to eleven components. Each component is worth up to 100 points in the overall calculation. These components include student performance on statewide standardized assessments, including the comprehensive assessments and end-of-course (EOC) assessments. The component measures the percentage of full-year enrolled students who achieved a passing score. The graduation rate is based on an adjusted cohort of ninth grade students and measures whether the students graduate within four years. College and Career Acceleration is based on the percentage of graduates from the graduation rate cohort who earned a score on an acceleration examination (AP, IB, or AICE) or a grade in a dual enrollment course that qualified students for college credit or earned an industry certification. The number of points earned for each component is added together and divided by the total number of available points to determine the percentage of points earned. School Grading Scale: A = 62% of points or greater, B = 54% to 61% of points, C = 41% to 53% of points, D = 32% to 40% of points, F = 31% of points or less (Florida Department of Education, 2018).

The designation of a C grade was the lowest score among the high schools in the district (Florida Department of Education, 2018). Upon review of the score, I was surprised my school was one of the lowest performing schools in the district, but I did not anticipate a grade above a C. More than half of the high schools in the district earned a grade of an A or B (Florida Department of Education, 2018).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that a study of social situations should occur in a natural setting. My study was conducted in a classroom that was similar to the 100 other classrooms at the school. The classroom where the case study took place had 36 student desks and two teacher desks. From the students’ perspective, the teacher’s desk was in the front left corner of the classroom and the additional teacher desk that was used by the teacher’s aide or classroom visitors next to it was positioned closer to the wall. Together, the desks form the shape of an L. The number of desks is typical in the eight of the eleven classrooms in this hallway. In the classroom where the study was conducted the teacher’s desk has been deliberately placed on the side of the room to promote an atmosphere conducive to active student learning (Getzels, 1974).
The student desks were configured in rows of four, with four rows on the side of the classroom with the teacher’s desk and five rows on the opposite side of the room facing the other. The classroom had one entryway which was located directly across from the teacher's desk. The wall near the teacher's desk features a classroom length window but it was hardly noticeable because the blinds stayed shut.

Active student learning was promoted at this school and professional development opportunities were provided twice a month during lunch. Student-led pedagogy had been embraced and actively promoted by the newly appointed principal and her predecessor. Three of the four assistant principals actively promoted the use of project-based learning. At this school, several academies were available to students. One of the academies featured a program of study built on individualized instruction through project-based learning. The culture of utilizing project-based learning as an instructional method had been established at this school.

The social studies course plan at the school referred to in this case study features Geography for freshmen, World History for sophomores, United States History for juniors, and Economics and American Government for senior students. Many of the students in the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course were my students in the Advanced Placement United States History course the year prior. I actively engaged the United States History students in project-based learning tasks aligned to standards; typically six projects per year. Many of the students took Advanced Placement World History and Advanced Placement Human Geography courses that applied project-based learning tasks as part of the pedagogy. Each of the World History and Human Geography courses were led by teachers who had extensive experience in the classroom, but it remains unclear if standards-based project-based learning was conducted in either course.
**Rationale**

Long considered an elite track for the most talented and ambitious students, AP classes are now seen as beneficial for any students willing to challenge themselves — and schools are increasingly viewing access to them as a basic educational right (Watanabe, 2013). My school has enacted the suggested policy of Pope, Brown, and Miles (2015) who encouraged administrators to establish an open enrollment policy and make AP classes available to all students who have an interest in taking them, not just top tier students. However, the other steps Pope, Brown, and Miles (2015) encouraged such as increased support and an opportunity to move students who are struggling into a more appropriate class at the semester mark were not always practiced. Enrollment in Advanced Placement courses increased annually within the United States. In 2018, 326,392 students took the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics exam (College Board, 2018). The number of students taking the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course has increased by at least five percent annually over the last 10 years (College Board, 2018). National pass rates in most Advanced Placement Social Studies courses are below 60% (College Board, 2018).

As educators are integrating new methods into Advanced Placement classes it is important to consider how each method addresses multiple learning styles. “By consciously following a recursive cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, they can increase their learning power” (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 297). The learning cycle should be embraced with the thought that each person can learn. The process continues with the development of sophisticated strategies for intentional learning based on students’ unique talents and the different learning challenges they face. When a concrete experience is enriched by reflection, given meaning by thinking, and transformed by action, the new experience created becomes
richer, broader, and deeper (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Understanding how PBL functions as a transformational process through the perspective of a teacher and students can help educators better understand the method.

A project is a physical construction that conveys an idea or solution. Since it is an opportunity for students to engage in a topic that incorporates their interests, students have the chance to explore a topic to develop deep, meaningful research through inquiry. A project can lead students to a higher level of understanding and has the potential to solve problems or inform others of major issues. Projects allow students to demonstrate knowledge through creative expression that encourages their use of talents and skills (Larmer, 2018). According to Larmer and Mergendoller (2010), every project needs seven essential elements: a need to know, a driving question, student voice and choice, 21st century skills, inquiry and innovation, feedback and revision, and a publicly presented project. The opportunity for a student to explore a significant topic, acquire research, work with other students to accomplish a goal, and create a way to present their knowledge would be a sound pedagogical approach to higher level student learning.

The methods available to teach the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course have expanded, thanks to the contributions of Parker and Lo (2013, 2015, 2016). Parker and Lo (2016) have developed a project-based learning curriculum that drives the content of the course through five simulations. The five projects have been tested and shown promise in preparing students for the AP exam and providing deep learning opportunities (Parker et al., 2011). I replicated these projects in the course I taught for the duration of this study to provide the students with well-constructed simulations. Using project-based learning tasks supported by research helped add validity to the study. Many teachers use projects, but the enactment of
project-based learning and students’ perspectives of project-based learning was what I aimed to capture in this study.

**Participants**

To answer the research questions; How does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning into an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class; What contextual factors help shape how a social studies teacher enacts PBL into instruction; How do the social studies teacher's beliefs, skills, and life experiences influence enactment of PBL; How do the social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment; How does a social studies teacher apply PBL principles in planning for instruction; How does a social studies teacher implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches in the AP American Government and Politics curriculum; I used narrative inquiry as the method to gather data. Narrative inquiry stresses the importance of the researcher as a participant, so I engaged my own story re-visioning experiences in this narrative inquiry as a full participant in the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008).

I enlisted four students in my sixth period AP American Government and Politics course to answer the research question of how students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class perceive and experience enactment of PBL. I chose to use four participants because Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) argue that 12 interviews suffice for most researchers when they aim to discern themes concerning common views and experiences among relatively homogeneous people. The four participants in this study were interviewed three times.

The sixth-period class was chosen because 16 of the 22 students were in my class last year. The sixth-period class contained vocal students able to express themselves clearly and comfortable interacting with me. Each student was exposed to project-based learning in their
social studies courses for at least two years. Purposeful sampling was conducted to establish a representation of the wider population (Thomas, 2016). The participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 18 years old and all were in their senior year of high school.

A criterion strategy (Miles & Huberman, 2014) was used to determine the sample. The criteria used to determine the participants was teacher recommendations of students capable of communicating effectively, and students with signed consent forms from their guardians to participate in the study. This study was conducted at a large public high school in Southwest Florida. Adler and Adler (1987) coined the term, “member researcher”, to describe this occurrence. I was already a member, knew the people, and was most familiar with the scene. Riemer (1974) termed this “opportunistic research.” As a member researcher, I constructed knowledge with the four participants. Through the utilization of my familiarity with the scene, I conducted a purposeful sampling to select the participants (Creswell, 2009).

The participants selected for this study were members of the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course during the students’ senior year of high school. This was preceded by their enrollment in the Advanced Placement American History course that I taught the previous year. These courses require no prerequisites and the school has no gatekeeping measures in place to prevent any student from taking either course. The participants worked with me, as their teacher, for two consecutive years. In both courses, I used project-based learning methods, which helped to reduce the novelty of the experience.

I selected four participants whose grade point averages were ranked in the top 10% of the school. I wanted to conduct research that focused on high achieving students in an effort to improve learning for a group of students I perceived to be neglected by school and county initiatives. The students who fit the criteria included one male student, James, and three female
students, Susan, Cathy, and Maddy. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants in this study. James’ grade point average was a 3.89 unweighted, 4.18 weighted, and ranked 40 out of 406 students in the senior class. James took seven semesters of AP classes during the four years he attended the school. The second participant, Susan, had a 4.00 unweighted grade point average, 4.60 weighted, and was ranked first of the 406 students in the senior class, resulting in Susan being named valedictorian. Susan took 22 semesters of AP classes during the four years she was at the school. Susan was named a National Merit Scholarship finalist. In addition to Susan’s academic achievements, she also was a contributing member of the girls’ soccer team. The third participant, Cathy, had an unweighted grade point average of a 3.95 and weighted grade point average of 4.44, resulting in her being ranked 13th in her class. Cathy took 17 semesters of AP classes over four years. Cathy was also a member of the girls soccer team who achieved recognition as a top player earning a full scholarship to play college soccer. The fourth participant Maddy, held a grade point average of 4.00 unweighted, 4.54 weighted, which resulted in her being ranked third in her class. Maddy took 21 semesters of AP classes. She also participated for two years on the school tennis team and was the yearbook editor. The four participants were academically high achieving, motivated, and contributing members of the school.

Through the use of purposeful sampling, I selected information-rich participants (Patton, 2015), who had an extensive time period to build a positive relationship with me as their teacher. Research suggests it is important to develop relationships of mutual trust with study participants so the research produced can emerge as collaborations between researcher and study participants (Pink, 2001). Pink (2015) and Banks (2001) argue it is only through engaging with participants that a researcher can come to know the phenomenon of study. The partnership with my students
lead to a descriptive dialogue that can enhance understanding of student perceptions of project-based learning.

**Teacher Researcher**

Teacher research directly addresses issues that teachers are concerned with because teachers focus on problems they identify, and it provides a means of enabling teachers to reflect on their own practice (Ellis, 1997). In this study, I reflected on the teacher enactment of project-based learning into an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class; the contextual factors that help shape the way a social studies teacher enacts PBL into instruction; the influence that social studies teacher's beliefs, skills, and life experiences have on the enactment of PBL; the degree to which social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment; methods used by a social studies teacher applying PBL principles in planning for instruction; and how a social studies teacher implements PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum. Through this planning and implementation of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement social studies course I created a rich story that depicts elements a teacher must account for when implementing a new method in the curriculum.

My position as a teacher led to the observation of hundreds of students engaged in PBL, and I became interested in learning the student perspective of the method. Social science researchers too frequently neglect present knowledge. They often know an area of study as opposed to knowing about it (Riemer, 1974). Teacher research encourages teachers to be collaborators in revising curriculum, improving their work environment, professionalizing teaching, and developing policy (Johnson, 1993). Being a teacher-researcher, I fit the setting, and my presence would not be a distraction, nor would it alter student behavior in the way an outside
researcher could (Reimer, 1974). I established a positive rapport between the participants and earned the students’ trust, which led to accurate communication during interviews (Reimer, 1974). I was vigilant to communicate my actions clearly, as a researcher, to increase the ability of replication of the study (Reimer, 1974). I believe, through my research, I can help educators understand the implementation process of PBL and examine the method from a different perspective that can have an impact on a popular instructional method.

**Data Collection**

To collect data on teacher enactment of PBL in an AP American Government and Politics class, I used narrative inquiry which, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is a unique research approach positioned within the sphere of qualitative methodologies. Exclusive to narrative, methods of inquiry use the exploration of personal constructions of meaning through the production of coherent stories of experiences (Riessman, 2008).

According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative is a fundamental scheme for linking individual actions and events into interrelated aspects of understandable composite, meaning individual human experience is the building block of organizational experience, culture, and outcomes. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claim narrative inquiry is a product and a process. Conle (2000) notes that narrative inquiry differs from traditional research methodology in that from the outset it is a quest. The end goal of narrative inquiry is the advancement of meaning (Clandinin & Huber, 2002).

To advance the meaning, I described the process of planning and implementation of project-based learning through stories. Phillion, He, and Connelly (2005) claim, the human experience is a perceived narrative that is best understood through the reconstruction of individual stories. As I told my story of the process of integrating PBL in an Advanced
Placement American Government and Politics class I constructed meaning of an unclear process of integration. Webster and Mertova (2007) communicate the belief, “stories are the substance of generations, history, and culture. They reflect our journey through life” (p.25). As I reflected on my journey through the inclusion of innovative pedagogy I added understanding to the phenomenon and method (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

To answer the question of how students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class perceive and experience enactment of PBL, I conducted interviews, observations, and examined documents. Collecting data from multiple sources helped create a detailed description that strengthened the findings (Patton, 2015; Thomas, 2016). Due to my dual roles as the teacher and researcher of the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course, I had the unique and advantageous opportunity to observe the class every day. Research projects often start with some special knowledge, noticing something interesting or unusual (Thomas, 2016). My role as the teacher provided the opportunity to notice something interesting and to gather a better understanding of students’ perceptions of my pedagogy.

I started the research project with an initial meeting with the participants and their parents to explain the aims of the project, to clarify what was expected of the participant, and for the participants and parents to sign the consent form. Over the first semester of class, the participants were asked to participate in three project-based learning assessments. For this study data collection was focused on the third project, Elections. I video-recorded the class three times; first, when the project was introduced; next, a day the students worked on the project in class; and finally, when the students presented their projects. These three recordings were used in the three video-elicitation interviews I conducted with each participant.
Video Recording

Video recording was conducted on three days in my Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. Two days prior to collecting research all of the students in my sixth-period class were given a consent form. With the increase in ethical regulation, there has been a significant move toward the use of signed consent forms for research participants (ESRC, 2005). The consent forms clearly explained the study and their role as students in the class (Warr, Waycott, Guillemin, & Cox, 2016). See Appendix A, B, and C. Each student and their parent or guardian was required to sign the consent form, granting permission to be video recorded in the class all three times. It is polite and good ethical practice to seek consent when taking identifiable images in public or private spaces (ESRC, 2005). Students with signed consent forms that indicated their willingness to be video recorded sat in a desk in one of the four rows, on the same side of the room as the teacher's desk. The video camera, located in the back corner of the classroom, captured the students with signed consent forms sitting on that side of the room. The camera was directed toward the front of the classroom and only captured students with consent to be recorded. Prosser notes the importance of capturing only participants with consent,

ultimately the reason for not taking photographs of participants if they are hostile to the idea is not a matter of privacy or morality but the likelihood of such action compromising rapport – a necessity for any researcher hoping to remain in the field (2000).

Video recording began at the starting bell of class. The recording ran until five minutes remained in the class, at which time the video camera was turned off. At the request of my school district, the remaining class time was used to answer any questions the students had.

I used my Sony HDR CX230 video camera to record the videos for this study. I have used the camera numerous times for professional projects and have become comfortable working
with this camera. Video cameras are extensions of ourselves as researchers and should be explained to the participants (Warr, Waycott, Guillemin, & Cox, 2016). The camera I chose represents a more professional tone than the video capturing capabilities from a phone. Yet, the camera is obviously not a device a professional film crew would use. Relationships between researcher and subjects can develop differently based on equipment used according to Pink (2009). I believe the camera signaled that events in the class would be recorded but the captured material had a small viewing audience. I think this resulted in the students conducting themselves in an authentic way.

I am familiar with the device and have used it numerous times at my school. I have used this tool to capture practicum students’ lessons in the classroom and the camera produces quality videos. The camera has stabilization, zooming features and has a long battery life. All features suggested as a good research tool according to Guidelines for Conducting Video Research in Education (Derry, 2007). The camera had a wide-angle lens to capture a larger view of the classroom. This type of lens is used in restricted spaces (Derry, 2007; Kilburn, 2014).

A tripod was used to prevent instability that could have occurred if operated as a handheld device. The use of the tripod not only improved the quality of the video but freed my hands to allow me to make jottings during the data collection process. According to Kilburn (2014), “Operating a handheld camera might prevent the researcher from making and recording potentially valuable observations while in the field” (p. 8). I used a tripod and set it up in the back corner of my classroom. The photographer decides where to film and the lighting used in the video produced is from the perspective of the camera, thus producing a new perspective from that of the researcher or participants (Schwartz, 2003). This remote location helped prevent some of the concerns Kilburn communicates such as the tripod being knocked over (2014). Banks
claims that a setup camera left in one place can capture large batches of material and can be collected without the intervention of the filmmaker (2001). This method of data collection was beneficial because it had minimal interference with my teaching responsibilities.

Only one camera was used in this study, therefore according to Derry, it was recommended that the camera be continuously recording and the use of panning or zooming minimized (2007). I continuously recorded the class for the entire period and never used the zooming or panning feature. Jewitt (2012) suggest that there might be a “need to ensure that the video record is sufficiently detailed and fully presented to capture the essence of a particular event and to bring the viewer ‘inside’ it” (p. 5).

**Saving and Indexing Videos**

The Sony video camera had an option to save to internal memory or to save to an SD memory card. Due to a large amount of data I was planning to collect I decided to save the video to an SD card, a preferable option according to Kilburn (2014). After each class recording, I moved the video files from the SD card to an external encrypted hard drive that was dedicated to this study. After the transfer of files, I deleted the video files from the SD card and returned it to the video camera. The files saved to the external hard drive were saved as video1, video2, and video3. This helped ensure that the files did not include identifiers.

The three videotaped lessons that were used in the video-elicitation interviews were not a part of the research data. The videos served as cues to the participants to stimulate reflections of the project-based lesson. I did not use the videos to gather observations of student behavior. According to Prosser and Loxley (2008), images are evocative and can allow access to different parts of human consciousness. Bagnoli (2009) claims, “focusing on the visual level allows people to go beyond a verbal mode of thinking” (p. 565). A graphic elicitation tool may
encourage a holistic narration of self, and also help to overcome silences (Bagnoli, 2009). I believed using the videos helped gather more data that represented the participants’ perspectives. These kinds of interviews were a good way to explore experiences undertaken by the participants and to better understand their perspectives (Patton, 2002). According to Henry and Fetters (2012), “Video elicitation interviews can facilitate more accurate recall of specific events that participants are likely to forget or misremember during standard interviews” (p. 121). Thus, making video-elicitation interviews a method to collect high-quality data provides an opportunity to construct meaning in collaboration with the participants (Theobald, 2012).

**Interviews**

I interviewed four participants three times over the course of the study using video-elicitation. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed. The interviews were conducted in an open classroom area in the media center. This location provided an area that allowed for little interference from students and staff, yet were open to the public and prevented the interviews from being conducted in the teacher’s classroom with no other adults or students present. I interviewed each of the participants after an introductory lesson that presented the project; after a project workday; and after student presentations. The recorded videos were used as a tool to stimulate participants’ perceptions of their experience in a classroom that utilized PBL. Video-elicitation can be used to explore what the participants think about the experience that was recorded (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). Focusing on the visual level allows people to go beyond a verbal mode of thinking (Bagnoli, 2009). Using video recordings of the students’ actions during class provided the participants with images that evoked deeper elements of human consciousness than just words and helped to reduce misunderstandings (Harper, 2002). These thoughts might not have emerged with a normal interview (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). This method
facilitates the investigation of specific events or moments of interaction associated with participants thoughts, beliefs, and emotions (Patton, 2015). This enhanced the data collection by specifying events and encouraging the participants to expand upon their experiences, resulted in longer and more comprehensive interviews (Harper, 2002). The positive affect video-elicitation has on overcoming awkward silences has been noted by Bagnoli (2009) and Banks (2001). It is imperative that the time between the video recording and elicitation interview be minimized to increase the likelihood that participants accurately remember their thoughts and feelings from the recorded event (Henry & Fetters, 2012). To this end, I scheduled the video-elicitation interviews the day after the recording and three consecutive school days following the video recording lesson. This provided time to review the videos, to know the content, and to select a 10-minute segment to use in the video-elicitation interviews.

According to Derry (2007), “video segments represent events. Any video corpus contains many events. Selection determines which events are brought into focus for deeper analysis” (p. 16). I watched each video recording twice to obtain a deep understanding of the captured video. I selected the scenes where an essential part of the activities for that lesson occurred or where an event I believed to be significant occurred (Simpson & Che, 2016). Each video focused on the actions of the study participants providing an opportunity to conduct interviews that reflected upon the experiences of the students. Chavez (2007) suggests, video elicitation activities need to be focused to “ensure that observers become critical, reflective and analytical” (p. 269). The three 10 minute video clips provided a focused examination of the actions of the participants during the project presentation day, a project work day, and the project presentation day.

To conduct video-elicitation interviews that produced abundant and accurate data, I followed the guidelines suggested by Henry and Fetters (2012). Some questions need to be
created prior to the interview, but the interviewer should be capable of asking spontaneous questions (Henry & Fetters, 2012). I constructed a list of topics for each interview from Kolb’s learning style inventory that focused on the experiences of each student. To see the list of interview questions from the project introduction interview, see Appendix D. For a list of the scripted interview questions used after the project workday, see Appendix E. To review the scripted interview questions used in the post debate interview, please review Appendix F. I used semi-structured interviews to ask about specific actions captured on film, and then asked if the participant had any additional thoughts he would like to share. I concluded the interview by asking, “out of all the things we’ve talked about today- or maybe some topics we’ve missed- what should I pay most attention to?”

I provided each participant with the ability to navigate the video recording playback feature during the time allotted for each interview. During the elicitation interview, the interviewer needs to know that it is appropriate to stop the video at any time to ask questions of the participant or wait for the participant to finish their thoughts regarding a specific sequence within the video (Henry & Fetters, 2012). By providing each participant with direct control of the video player it allowed each participant to stop the film when they felt it necessary to explain a response or expand upon what the video displayed.

According to High and Nemes (2007), the definition of participatory video is making films with people for social learning. The participant had the ability to stop the video, rewind and review a section, play the video at regular speed, or fast forward through sections of the film. Kindon (2003) suggests a participatory method must lead to, “the destabilization of power relations between researcher/research subjects” (p. 144). Presenting control of the video during the interview is an element of power returned to the research participants.
The interview is an intersubjective enterprise of two persons talking about common themes of interest (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I used the video recordings of the project presentation, project workdays, and student presentation lessons in three video-elicitation interviews to gather data because they are definitive parts of project-based learning pedagogy. I used semi-structured interviews to collect data because I was interested in the students’ thoughts about project-based learning and wanted to give them a voice in determining what was important. The merit of a semi-structured interview lies in the freedom it provides to ask questions related to topics; not specific questions; and the freedom it provides to ask follow up points as necessary (Thomas, 2016). According to Thomas (2016) in semi-structured interviews, “You will start with an interview schedule, which is a list of issues that you intend to cover” (p. 190). The list of topics for each of the three interviews included the student’s preferred method of learning, learning style of PBL, actions taken in class, experience with PBL, actions captured on film, and additional thoughts the participant would like to share. I used the list as a way to keep track of the questions I intended to ask although I did not cover the topics in any specific order for each interview. As Thomas (2016) suggests, I used follow up questions and probes in hopes of encouraging the participant to say more. I used probing questions such as, “What did you do? What do you feel you learned while doing that? What did you like, if anything, from the experience? What did you dislike, if anything” (Patton, 2015, p. 439)? To conclude the interview, I asked the same question Morgan (2012) frequently asks: “Out of all the things we’ve talked about today- or maybe some topics we’ve missed- what should I pay most attention to? What should I think about when I read your interview” (p.1)?
Observations

“Observation is a key way to collect data” (Thomas, 2016, p. 196). Despite having access to the research participants daily I only conducted observations three times. Because of my role as the teacher, I did not want to allow data recording to become distracting and potentially harmful to the learning outcomes of the students in my class. I used interval recording on three occasions during the first semester of the course. I observed three times because I wanted to get an idea of what the students were doing on three different instructional days. I conducted interval recording observations of targeted individuals.

Writing fieldnote descriptions, then is not a matter of passively copying down facts about what happened. Rather, these descriptive accounts select and emphasize different features and actions while ignoring and marginalizing others (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Structured observation enables the researcher to break down a social activity into quantifiable elements (Thomas, 2016). Thomas (2016) then suggests the next thing a structured observer should do is devise some way to count these elements.

Interval recording of the four participants allowed me to count the occurrences and express the results as a percentage of total possible observations conducted. The Occurrences that I recorded are four types of learning style actions as identified in Kolb’s learning style inventory. The four categories of actions I observed are diverging learners, assimilative learners, converging learners, and accommodating learners.

I collected observations in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course during three class periods totaling 141 minutes. I kept a research journal and collected jottings and commentary notes every day for the entire length of the elections project unit. I estimated that this was a total of over 25 hours. During the Elections unit, I conducted jottings during each class period and, later that day, I added commentary.
I read the transcription of the three interviews from each participant and practiced line by line coding. The observations were conducted on the project introduction day, the student work day, and the student presentation day. Patton (2015) suggests that fieldnotes should record basic information such as when and where the observation took place. Each observation was a full 47-minute class period in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics classroom at a large school in Southwest Florida. I recorded the number of students in attendance, provided a description of the classroom, the learning activities that took place, and the social interaction. My fieldnotes included direct quotations of what students said. I also included my own feelings, reactions, and reflections about what I observed as suggested by Patton (2015). Due to my role as the teacher of the class, I established trust and actively took notes during the class. Patton (2015) explains open taking of notes is deferred until the fieldworker’s role has been firmly established within the group.

During the observations, I used jottings to collect data. I used a spiral notebook to record the data and used shorthand notes to allow me to quickly record information. The notebook remained on my desk to prevent it from becoming a distraction to the students (Patton, 2015). In keeping with my role as the teacher of the course where the research was being collected, I was still responsible for conducting the class. If I noticed an event I felt should be written down to improve accuracy I returned to my desk to begin jottings, which are a brief written record of events and impressions captured in keywords and phrases (Emerson, et al, 2011). The brief descriptions helped refresh my memory to reconstruct what I observed. I was intentional in the way I used jottings by being specific and avoiding generalizations or summaries (Patton, 2015). I used jottings to capture direct quotes that added a rich description to the field notes when I transcribed them. After the class was over I expanded my notes by adding commentary. I used
the jottings to assist in writing field notes after the school day. As the classroom teacher, I was not able to write up a full description of my observations until the end of the school day, so having jottings to reference was valuable.

After school on each of the three selected observational days, I added commentaries to my research journal. The study was conducted in my sixth period class, so I was able to add commentaries 47 minutes after the class. A commentary was a more elaborate reflection on the day's experiences and fieldnotes (Emerson, et al, 2011). I used time directly following the school day to create a more elaborate account than the jottings collected during the observation. According to Emerson and colleagues (2011) a commentary should reflect on issues and raise questions about the day's events. This process helped provide an opportunity to think deeply about the occurrences of that day once my classroom responsibilities had been fulfilled, allowing me to dedicate time and thought specifically to that purpose. I used the commentaries to link prior fieldnotes to observations I had during recent experiences. This practice helped create insight into what to look for in the next scheduled observation.

Documents

I used documents to show the lesson plans used in the class and to describe what was occurring in the lesson during observation periods. These kinds of documents provide information about many things that cannot be observed including events that occurred prior to the study (Patton, 2015). I used the project descriptions and rubrics to help add clarity to the assignment the students were engaged in. The documents were used to provide a rich context for the study and evaluate information provided by the interview participants (Patton, 2002). Thomas suggests that using documents in research requires “a knack to find the right documents, read them and think about them” (2016, p. 193). My intention was to show that the project-based
learning tasks the students were engaged in were aligned to standards and were rigorous. My goal was to ascertain the perspectives of students who are participating in rigorous project-based learning experiences.

**Data Analysis**

The data pertaining to, teacher enactment of project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class; the contextual factors that help shape how a social studies teacher implements PBL in instruction; how a teacher's beliefs, skills, and life experiences influence enactment of PBL; how social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment; the way in which a teacher applies PBL principles in planning for instruction; and how a teacher implements PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum were analyzed through description and examples. Webster and Mertova (2007) claim, “results should be described in a way that will allow a reader to revisit extracts of collected stories, to facilitate their own conclusions and understanding of the research data” (p. 109). Stories were supported with examples that were contextually situated to help bring understanding to events. Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) claim, researchers interrogate their teaching practices to construct the meaning and interpretation of some puzzling aspect of teaching through the construction of narratives that lead to understanding. That narrative was coded and arranged in common themes. According to Creswell (2007), “Analyzing qualitative data involves reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p. 148).

I constructed meaning through the inquiry task by reconstructing the meaning of my journal entries. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest "Our inquiry task is to discover and construct meaning in those texts. Field texts need to be reconstructed as research texts” (p. 130).
I reconstructed my field texts through a process of reading and rereading my notes to discover common themes through a coding process. In the initial stage of analysis, I worked to construct a summarized account of the contents of my researcher journal after each new entry. Patton (2015) suggests to begin analysis during fieldwork to deepen analysis and to test thematic ideas while still in the field. My method of coding consisted of writing in the margins of my journal and highlighting reoccurring words. Through the use of a constant comparison method, themes emerged with the data (Thomas, 2016).

In the transformative process of creating a research text from the field texts, I focused on the themes that emerged (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe field text to be "close to experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around particular events" (p. 132). Research texts grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim, “an inquirer composing a research text looks for the patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes either within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting” (p. 132). As I found patterns that emerged I communicated that understanding from my perspective of the teacher enacting PBL in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class.

The data collected to evaluate the question, of how students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class perceive and experience enactment of PBL were analyzed. During the analysis, I kept the research questions, purpose, and theoretical framework at hand to guide my focus and decision making (Saldana, 2009). What are the perspectives of high school students in an AP American Government and Politics course on project-based learning and its effects on Kolb’s four learning styles? What are the experiences of high school students in an AP American Government and Politics course using project-based learning
methods? This section will examine the methods that were used to analyze the data collected in this study.

I employed constant comparative analysis as I analyzed the data collected.

In the constant comparative method the researcher simultaneously codes and analyses data in order to develop concepts; by continually comparing specific incidents in the data, the researcher refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationship to one another, and integrates them into a coherent explanatory model (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 126).

According to Thomas (2016), the basic principle of constant comparison is that the research emerges with themes to capture the data.

Students’ perceptions of PBL were gathered through semi-structured interviews and then transcribed. The transcriptions were used as a tool for the interpretation of what was said in the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I alone transcribed the data to familiarize myself with the data. According to Patton (2015), this process usually generates important insights. As themes developed I condensed, interpreted, and sent the meaning back to the participants to check for clarity (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). All four of the participants read the findings section to determine if the themes that emerged were an accurate reflection of what they communicated in the interviews. All four students confirmed that the themes captured and communicated the ideas they shared in the interviews.

My case study involved four participants. First, I analyzed each case separately using within-case analysis utilizing descriptive coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2009). I employed the method of open coding to analyze the transcription from each of the interviews, observations, and documents. According to Thomas (2016), “Open coding is the first stage, going through the data, examining it, comparing one part with another and begin to make categorizations” (p. 210). As I reviewed the transcriptions I looked for common themes occurring in each of the
participant’s interviews. I used axial coding to determine how ideas are connected. According to Thomas (2016), “axial coding is when the researcher begins to make sense of open coding” (p. 211). Axial coding is used to determine what themes have been developed and how they relate to other themes (Thomas, 2016).

As I used axial coding, I use memos to help organize my thoughts. I used selective coding to determine a core category to validate the construction of themes. Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

As I conducted analysis I considered each source of data individually (Merriam, 1998). I reviewed all the data to become familiar with the experience of each of the participants. I described and explained their experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Once I completed my analysis using open, axial, and selective coding, I constructed the themes for each participant. Saldaña (2009) wrote, “A theme is a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 139). I then compiled my findings for each participant.

Documents such as lesson plans, project rubrics, homework assignments, and required readings were examined and analyzed to gain a better understanding of the experience of a student in the class. Saldaña (2009) noted descriptive coding is appropriate for documents and artifacts as a detailed inventory of their contents. Through content analysis, I looked for patterns in the data (Patton, 2002). The analysis involved noting key words and topics related to my research questions. After coding the interviews, I used the same codes to analyze the documents.
Quality Criteria

Stake (2005) claims all researchers recognize the need for being accurate in measuring things and in interpreting the meaning of those measurements. From a constructivist approach, I built meaning of the data as I analyzed personal stories, field observations, interviews, and documents. According to Polkinghorne (1988) validity of narrative is produced through meaningful analysis rather than outcomes. He believed that trustworthiness of research data replaces stability measurement of reliability (Polkinghorne, 1988). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) referred to validity in terms of trustworthiness, meaning it is the researcher’s obligation to prove the research process is trustworthy through three criteria. The criteria include credibility, transferability, and confirmability according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994).

Credibility

The credibility of narrative inquiry was established through the creation of descriptive experiences that were strengthened by the inclusion of similar experiences. According to Webster and Mertova (2007),

the concepts of verisimilitude and authenticity are often intertwined when used as a means to provide accounts that sound true because: They remind the reader about something that has happened to him/her or it opens a new window to the reader. Sometimes this may generate new understandings by the reader, whereby, upon reading a story, they gain a new understanding of an experience (p. 99).

To achieve verisimilitude and authenticity narratives should be realistic (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I communicated accounts as I remembered them to be true being conscious of preventing the use of exaggeration or embellishment. Webster and Mertova (2007) claim verisimilitude may be strengthened by the inclusion of events or experiences that are reported by different participants in a similar context. I included examples from other research studies that provided an opportunity to examine similar occurrences. Authenticity may be enhanced by providing
sufficient information, so the reader can clearly perceive a holistic and cohesive picture of events within the narrative (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The inclusion of well-articulated truthful accounts enhanced by examples added authenticity to the use of narrative inquiry in this study.

The credibility of research that was gathered to answer, how students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class perceive and experience enactment of PBL, was enhanced through the process of triangulation, member checks, and researcher checks. Since multiple sources of evidence make an argument stronger, this was accomplished through the use of observations, interviews, and data analysis in a process called triangulation. Member checks were conducted to validate the researcher’s perception of participants’ actions and communications. Researcher checks were also conducted to minimize my influence on the behaviors of others.

**Triangulation**

According to Stake (1995), “to describe the case, we try to present a substantial body of uncontestable description” (p. 110). Methodological triangulation described by Thomas (2016) is a process of viewing from several points, attempts to increase confidence in our interpretation. Multiple approaches to a single study are likely to illuminate or nullify some extraneous influences (Stake, 1995). The three methods that Stake (1995) identifies as the most common are observation, interview, and document review (1995). In this study, I examined observations, interviews, and documents to triangulate the data.

**Member Checks**

Stake (1995) describes member checking as a process, in which the researcher asks participants to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the participant are featured. Creswell (2009) suggested that this form of member checking improves accuracy and
the fairness of the interpretations. The participant is asked to review the material for accuracy (Stake, 1995). I provided each of my participants with an opportunity to review my interpretation of their experience in the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. Each of the four participants communicated that I accurately communicated their perspectives. This process helped add validity to my study by accurately presenting the views of the participants.

One limitation of the inquiry focuses on hermeneutic considerations. It is likely others will have a different perception of the data. Other limitations are the participants’ willingness and abilities to explain their thoughts and to communicate their truths. My role as a classroom teacher and researcher might also encourage the students to falsely report perspectives for fear of disappointing me.

**Researcher Effects**

One barrier to credible qualitative findings stems from the suspicion that the researcher has shaped findings according to their predispositions and biases (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) suggests one method to counter this before it takes root is “to discuss your predispositions and make biases explicit” (p. 700). Thomas (2016) suggests the “researchers biography – including class, gender, ethnicity, ideas, and commitments – needs to be made explicit. In an effort to address the concerns raised by Patton (2015) and Thomas (2016) to discuss my predisposition and make biases explicit I am including a brief biography. I consider myself to be a member of the middle class but, as I continue to work through graduate school and my wife is home raising our children, I often question this status. I am a Caucasian male who teaches predominantly Caucasian students. My ideas of PBL have been cultivated since I was a child.

As a middle school student, I was exposed to project-based learning and instantly gravitated toward it. I became interested in investigating topics that allowed me the freedom to
differ from the traditional narrative and utilize my creative ability to communicate thoughts. As an educator, I reflected on the educational experiences I had as a student and applied those ideas in my classroom. Currently, I am a social science educator, with 11 years of experience, pursuing a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction, and my research interest is in PBL. Over the course of my career, I have utilized a variety of methods and have constructed lessons directed to multiple learning styles. PBL has become a frequently used method in the classes I teach because I believe PBL forces students to take an active role in learning content. The process encourages the development of 21st-century skills through an educational journey that helps students learn the material in a memorable way.

As I acknowledge reflexivity of the educational methods I used in my class I believe PBL accommodates many learning styles and builds skills in multiple learning areas to help create a more well-rounded learner. According to Patton (2015) reflexivity is “a way of emphasizing the importance of deep introspection, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (p. 70). As I examined my own perspectives I acknowledged that the courses for which I have introduced PBL, are Honors and Advanced Placement courses that traditionally are composed of moderately to highly motivated students.

I conducted this study at the high school where I have been employed over the entire course of my educational career. Patton (2015) suggests the researcher clarify what personal connections he has with the people at the sight. I have the support of the assistant principal who directly oversees my work and the principal. Both value PBL and like to see active student learning incorporated in all classes. My principal is very supportive of PBL as a teaching method and supports the pedagogy across all content areas. Five years ago, my former principal created an academic academy within the school that focused on individual learning using problem-based
and project-based methods. I was encouraged to take pedological risks to increase student engagement and due to the environment, I felt comfortable in accepting that challenge.

I established a positive relationship with many of the students in my AP American Government and Politics course, because many of the students had taken the AP United States History course the previous year. In a few circumstances, I have had some of the students for a third year because I taught world history several years ago. My role as the teacher impacted my efforts to gather data. Having many of the same students for multiple years has led to an improved relationship with the students. Even though my classes range in size from 25 to 36, I felt I had a positive relationship with each student and that I was aware of their or her preferences. The relationships that were built with my students worked as an advantage in collecting research because the students were able to communicate their thoughts and feelings without fear. Miles and Huberman (1984) stated, “You are likely at the outset to influence social behavior in others that wouldn’t have normally occurred” (p. 267). I believe my role as the teacher minimized the effect Miles and Huberman (1984) described.

Transferability

I do not believe it is appropriate to generalize my perspective or the students’ perspectives of project-based learning in this context. According to Stake (1995), “Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves” (p. 85). This indicates through descriptive analysis it is possible that others can utilize this research with respect to their individual circumstances. Schwandt (2007) wrote how one might communicate their experience through story and can check the credibility based on another’s interpretation of the same knowledge. I employed the theory of Schwandt (2007) by conducting
an external check of my coding process. I submitted the transcriptions for each of the four participants to a colleague. The transcriptions were separated by participants and placed in order of the occurrence of each conducted interview. My colleague from the English department at the school where I teach was familiar with reading interviews and claimed she had coded data numerous times.

The external check on the coding of the data resulted in the identification of six of the same themes I deduced. The two themes that were not identified in the exact way were motivation and multiple perspectives. The theme motivation was identified as a code in regard to feelings communicated from the students. She had concerns about actions taken through motivation because she felt several subthemes emerged such as student project completion, social actions, and students’ speech. I decided to use motivation as a theme and include the nuances my colleague identified. The other discrepancy my colleague identified was a theme she identified as community. I felt that terminology was conveyed by what I described as multiple perspectives. After discussing her perspective on what community learning meant we decided the themes had the same meaning and I retained the term multiple perspectives. Through this process the identification of themes was validated.

**Conformability**

I kept a research journal to serve as an audit trail during the data collection and data analysis process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest keeping a journal that includes information about interpretations, memos, personal reflections, and details of the collection and analysis process. I did this to provide a way to check and recheck the data throughout the process.
Bias

I brought a bias to this study because I used project-based learning in my social studies classes. Hatch (2002) suggested being aware of personal beliefs that might affect an objective investigation. It is important the researcher approach the data in an objective manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Krefting (1991) calls this process “reflexivity,” and she defines it as the “assessment of the influence of the investigator's own background, perceptions, and interests in the qualitative research process” (p. 218). I believe PBL is an instructional method that helps students learn a variety of skills to help them become successful in other areas while providing an opportunity for acquiring depth of content knowledge. Despite my faith in the value of the method, I was interested to discover student perceptions of PBL. The investigation of student perspectives of project-based learning using video-elicitation helped reduce the bias within the study. Being the researcher-teacher, I worked with the four student participants to construct what students’ experiences were like in an experiential learning class.

Ethical Considerations

The Economic and Social Research Council has identified six key principles it expects to be addressed when possible (ESRC, 2005). (1) Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality, and transparency. (2) Staff and participants must be informed fully of the purpose, methods, and intended possible uses of the research, what participation in the research entails and what risks, are involved. (3) Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents must be respected. (4) Participants must be voluntary. (5) Harm to participants should be avoided at all costs. (6) Conflicts of interest should be explicit (ESRC, 2005). I explained these six key principles in this section to bring clarity to the ethical concerns of this study.
To maintain my integrity, quality, and transparency, I have discussed my predisposition and made my biases explicit (Patton, 2015). It is probable that others will interpret my potential findings differently than I did due to my predisposition. I stated the intentions of my research clearly, so the participants understood what would be investigated and the methods that would be used to conduct the research. This practice helped me adhere to Thomas’ (2016) advice to be honest and open in all dealings with participants.

My position as a teacher was like that of a researcher in the sense that both have goals to inform, to sophisticate, to assist the increase of competence and maturity, to socialize, and to liberate (Stake, 1995). Performing the role of teacher and researcher by following the methods outlined above helped me focus on the needs of all my students as I conducted the study. The quality of the study was justified by the methods employed in this case study. I was transparent in addressing all elements of the case study and conducted the study upon approval of two internal review boards. The first review was through the college where I attend, and the second review was conducted by the school district where the study took place.

The use of narrative inquiry presents ethical issues such as the power of adult storytellers (Simmons, 2001). Simmons (2001) writes about how people use stories to influence other people. I was cautious to present a narrative that communicates my experience without the intention of pushing a reader to a specific outcome. My intention was to add knowledge of the process of implementing a project-based learning task and allow others to make meaning of that experience. My goal fit with Polkinghorne's (1988) claim that the value of narrative in the construction of knowledge in human disciplines is, “a theory of human existence that can inform the practice of human sciences will need to make explicit the centrality of narrative in human experience and existence” (p. 125). To adhere to this principle I placed the focus of my narrative
inquiry on my experience of enacting a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class.

I considered numerous ethical considerations that must be accounted for in answering the question, what are students’ perceptions and experiences in an AP American Government and Politics class enacting PBL. I informed the participants of the purpose of the research, the methods that would be used, the potential uses of the research, and the potential risks they faced (Wiles, Charles, Crow, & Heath, 2006). Opt-in methods of participation were used in this study to make sure each participant knew the implications. Each student was asked to return a form that clearly stated they voluntarily chose to participate in the study and had parental consent to do so. Even if a child has the capacity to understand the commitment, parent consent is recommended (Wiles et al., 2006). I started the research project with an initial meeting that included the participants and their parents to explain the aims of the project, what was expected of the participant, and an opportunity for the participants to sign the consent form. The form clearly explained what was required of participants in the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time (ESRC, 2005; Wiles et al., 2006). If a student chose to withdraw, I would have removed the student from the study and disregarded the data collected from that participant.

I addressed the questions that Lewis and Porter (2004) urge researchers to ask when researching vulnerable groups. One of those questions asks if the participant has been granted informed consent from a caregiver. I required each participant to get informed consent from a caregiver to participate in this study. The consent form included the items suggested by Thomas (2016) that include the nature and purpose of the study, including its methods, expected benefits of the study, possible harm that may come from the study, information about confidentiality,
anonymity, how data will be kept and for how long, with details of when the data will be destroyed, ethics procedures being followed and appeals, and my full name and contact details.

The participants of the study were four 17 or 18-year-old high school seniors. Thomas (2016) states, “In working with our research participants, we have to recognize that these participants have rights and they should have a stake in the process of research” (p. 79). Mitra (2008) makes an argument that student voice can be used to improve classroom teachers’ practice. The results of the study will be used to provide an understanding of the curriculum and instruction used in my class and I will share the findings with other educators.

Thomas (2016) suggests that the researcher considers the effect a question could have on the participant. To protect the participants from harm used my best judgment when asking questions and I was ready to take proper action if a participant had communicated an issue of concern. My study did not ask the participants to perform any acts involved in illegal activity. Thomas (2016) warns against the possibility of causing mental harm to participants through the performance of any acts that could be cause for the embarrassment or loss of self-esteem. Interview discussions were conducted individually so the participants’ thoughts remained confidential.

To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used in place of names. Researchers typically assign pseudonyms to participants (Warr, Waycott, Guillemin, & Cox, 2016). Any information presented to the researcher should always be treated as confidential and protecting participants’ identity is part of this process (Thomas, 2016). I was proactive by asking the participants if they were comfortable with the possibility that the information they provided could be published as Thomas (2016) suggests. I made sure the possibility of publication was communicated prior to the selection of volunteer participants. This
study was conducted as a dissertation and is likely the research will be made available for public access. Student participants who could have been uncomfortable with this would have been removed from the selection process.

I did not use a pseudonym for the name of the school because I have identified myself as the teacher and my school can easily be discovered through a simple internet search. According to Walford (2006) giving anonymity through pseudonyms to sites often does not work. Walford (2006) suggests offering anonymity takes some immediate pressure off schools from being scrutinized. To adhere to these practices I only identified the region of the country where the school is located.

Television cameras often are allowed in schools and content is broadcast to millions of people, providing schools little say in the finished product (Walford, 2006). This past year alone, my school’s administration invited two local news broadcasting companies and a cable television company to film at the school. I believed using a pseudonym for the high school where this study was conducted would have been unethical because I would have been promising anonymity when I could not maintain it.

My students were presented with an opportunity to participate in this research study. I communicated through a written document that participation was voluntary and required their approval in addition to their parents’ approval. I reminded my participants of their right to withdraw from the study prior to each of the scheduled interviews. The relationship with the researcher and participants did not come to a close once the research was conducted or if a participant had withdrawn because I remained the teacher for the AP Government course. Lewis and Porter (2004) suggest not terminating relationships with participants abruptly.
I avoided causing the participants harm at all cost (Warr, Waycott, Guillemin, & Cox, 2016). I have read ethical guidelines as widely as possible as suggested by Farrell (2005). This process helped me think through specific situations that occur in research and prepared me to handle each situation (Wiles et al., 2008).

Data security procedures were ensured through the collection of documents and saving them on an encrypted document that was saved on an external hard drive locked inside a file cabinet that was locked inside a classroom. Thomas (2016) suggests saving research documents to a file and then encrypting the document. The data were not passed, transported, or given to anyone else because it would not have been secure as Thomas (2016) states.

During the interview process, the participants controlled the media player to allow them to play, rewind, or fast-forward through the film captured in class. This provided each student with the ability to skip a segment of the film that could have captured an embarrassing act or comment. Interview questioning remained directed to themes that developed within the study and the open-ended semi-structured questions allowed the participants to lead the conversation towards topics they were comfortable with.

It was important to consider the benefits the study had for the participants in this study. Children’s engagement in research about their lives is both crucial and morally appropriate (Warr, Waycott, Guillemin, & Cox, 2016). Shamrova and Cummings (2017) claim the benefits of youth participation in research include heightened awareness, increased knowledge, improved decision-making skills, improved relationships with adults and the community. Through this study, students had the ability to become more aware of curriculum decisions teachers make, and their own learning styles. This also improved their ability to reflect on experiences. Pink (2001) claims that children’s engagement in research about their lives is both crucial and morally
appropriate. According to Checkoway (2011) youth participation is protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the First Declaration of Rights that was adopted by the International Save the Children Union in Geneva in 1923. The document claims that children are people who have the right to express their views (Checkoway, 2011). By exercising their rights, they can become agents of change and viewed as an asset by the educational community (Flicker et al., 2008).

Farrell (2005) suggests answering two questions when determining if conducting research is ethical. First, he asks if the research worth doing. I believed understanding students’ perspectives on how an increasingly popular method of instruction impacts their ability to learn was valuable. Second, Farrell (2005) proposes that the research be explained clearly enough so that anyone asked to take part can make an informed decision about whether they want to consent or refuse. I believe I provided the information necessary to allow an informed decision to be made.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the process of the research methodology of the study. I used a qualitative approach that provided a description of my experiences and those of four of my students, in a natural setting. This is a descriptive case study that provides detailed insight into the human experience.

The section presented the rationale for a single case, descriptive case study and nationalistic inquiry within a constructivist paradigm. Kolb’s experiential learning theory was consulted to support methodological decisions for data gathering and analysis. The case study included stories, observations, interviews, and document analysis to construct an information-
rich perspective of the experiences of a teacher and students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course.

The validation of the research was presented through the explanation of triangulation, member checks, researcher effects, transferability, conformability, bias, and ethical considerations. Through the mindful consideration of these topics, I believe I can contribute new knowledge to the field that will be valid and valuable.
Chapter 4: 
Teacher Enactment of Project-based Learning Introduction to Data Collection

I utilized narrative inquiry to answer the research questions: How does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class? What contextual factors help shape how a social studies teacher enacts PBL into instruction? How do the social studies teacher's beliefs, skills, and life experiences influence enactment of PBL? How do the social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment? How does a social studies teacher apply PBL principles in planning for instruction? How does a social studies teacher implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum? Through the use of story, I examined the experiences that shaped my educational beliefs. I explained the development of skills that were beneficial to enactment. I examined the social experiences, environmental factors, and planning procedures that influenced the enactment of the project.

I triangulated the data through the examination of documents to add validity to my account. I examined lesson plans, graphic organizers, and student work to help add a rich description of the events that occurred. I referenced the notes I took in my research journal since I was able to keep jottings from each class period throughout the unit the Elections period covered. At the end of each school day, I enhanced my jottings with commentary. By using stories, documents, and notes I was able to communicate my understanding of the enactment of project-based learning in the class I teach.
Situating the Findings

It is important to consider the context of Parker’s study of the enactment of PBL simulations in an AP American Government class. The Elections simulation was one of five developed and implemented by Parker (2011). The simulations were implemented in a suburban school district in the Pacific Northwest with adequate resources and enough funding to support a social studies curriculum coordinator (Parker, et al., 2013). My study was conducted in the southeastern part of the country, in a school district with adequate resources and a budget that supported a social studies curriculum coordinator.

Both schools promoted equity and access by encouraging all students to enroll in AP classes. The district had received national attention for encouraging AP participation for nearly all students (Parker, et al., 2013). In 2015, the district where I conducted this study achieved the Advanced Placement District Honor Roll for high rates of student participation in the program (Vigue, 2019). In subsequent years the district has been invited to speak at national conferences on how to increase enrollment (Vigue, 2019).

In the study conducted by Parker and his colleagues (2013) two schools were selected to study the effects of implementing five PBL simulations: school A was high achieving and school B was a moderately achieving school. According to the state grading system the school where I conducted my study was a moderately achieving school that earned a C for the school grade. (Pinellas County Schools, 2017).

The economic status of the students in each of the schools is similar. In School B 32.7% of the students received free or reduced lunch (Parker, et al., 2013). In the school where I conducted this study 33% of the students received free or reduced lunch (Pinellas County Schools, 2017).
Both studies were conducted in a class that provided instruction over the full school year. In the study conducted by Parker and his colleagues (2013) school B outperformed comparison schools. The results of the students on the AP exam was compared to other moderate achieving schools that did not use the PBL simulations (Parker et al., 2013). In my study I did not investigate the effectiveness of the method.

Understanding the context of both studies provides insight. Despite some similarities between the studies, the process of enactment by the teachers may have been different. The experiences of the students were distinctive and numerous variables existed that have a profound effect on students’ experience with PBL.

Life Experiences

My experience with project-based learning began during my middle school education. I was fortunate to attend a private Montessori school where the teachers were encouraged to use innovative teaching methods. The instruction was often creative, purposeful, and engaging. I can vividly recall the box jellyfish, global domination, and craftsmen’s guild projects almost twenty years later.

When I decided that I wanted to become a teacher I knew that I wanted to create opportunities for students to have fun while learning to create meaningful and interesting educational moments that would transcend the classroom, like my experiences in middle school. My thoughts were supported by the research of Altan and Lane (2018) who found teachers’ beliefs were influenced by two categories learning environments and personal attributes. Their study examined the effects of events in lives of five teachers and how those experiences changed their instructional methods. Like their findings my experience as a middle school student cultivated my understanding of what education should be.
Entering the Profession

Initially in my career, I was able to enact project-based learning strategies. Often this came in the form of mock trials and simulations in the elective law studies course, I was hired to teach. There was no end-of-course assessment, no pacing guide, no prescribed curriculum. Rather, it was a class with endless possibilities where I facilitated what was taught and how. I was able to find great resources from colleagues to enact active learning strategies in my classroom. However, three years later when I began teaching Advanced Placement courses, enactment of project-based learning became more challenging.

I was thirsty for knowledge. I attended several Advanced Placement Summer Institutes, reviewed multiple textbooks, and asked countless teachers if they used any projects in the course. I was continuously disappointed to find that few teachers were using projects in their classrooms. Those who assigned projects considered them to be tools to review or something to add when there were instructional days after the AP exams.

As my career continued and my opportunities to teach Advanced Placement courses expanded, I began to enact project-based learning in my United States History and American Government and Politics courses. I started with the goal of teaching key concepts in ways students would find fun and unforgettable.

Enactment of PBL

My journey to enact project-based learning in AP American Government and Politics intensified in January of 2016. I settled into a chair near the back of a conference room and awaited the start of my first doctoral class. As we reviewed the syllabus, Dr. Thornton explained the culminating assignment would be to investigate a topic in social studies, we were most interested in. We would conduct research to help prepare to construct the first chapter of our
dissertation. I was confident I wanted to investigate project-based learning and work to advance inclusion of the method in AP classes.

As I began to investigate project-based learning in AP classes Dr. Thornton suggested I contact Dr. Parker from the University of Washington and review his work. Dr. Parker responded to my inquiry and provided four of his articles that explained his work that infused five project-based learning simulations in the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course.

**Environmental Factors**

While working on my doctoral degree, my colleague asked me if I would like to teach the AP American Government course at our school the following school year. The opportunity to teach the course that would provide an opportunity to enact the projects that Parker crafted, excited me, and I anxiously agreed to teach the course. Through the spring of 2016, I inquired how other teachers taught the AP American Government course. I reviewed materials from AP Central and attended the AP Summer Institute to prepare to teach the course. I learned a great deal and was provided with numerous resources, but I was unable to find any information on projects.

I found that many of my colleagues used traditional teacher led methods to cover the content of the course. Several studies confirmed my findings and reported that teachers were commonly drilling the students with questions directly related to the test (Bruce, 2010), and most commonly used lecture at the method of instruction (Chu, 2000). Determined to construct a student centered class I relied on the research of Parker.

Project-based learning had become the paramount instructional method at the school where I taught. My principal had worked to create an academy within the school that provided
students with opportunities to show mastery of standards through personalized learning. This academy focused on project-based learning as the preferred instructional method. The teacher who was appointed to run the academy won the favor of the principal instantly. In every faculty meeting, he showered praise on the academy and spoke of the power the educational method had on the lives of the students. Soon it seemed the educational world of the high school revolved around the personalized learning academy. Funding, schedules, additional planning periods, higher evaluations and praises were all connected to using project-based learning within the academy. To say the method would be encouraged by my administration would be an understatement.

**Administrative Support**

The assistant principal responsible for the evaluation and professional growth of the social studies department echoed the thoughts of the principal. I was eager to share the project-based learning tasks I enacted in my AP United States History class all of which were well received by the assistant principal. I found encouragement, positive feedback, and support when I enacted new projects that actively involved students in the curriculum. According to Henson (2002), teachers with a high level of confidence tend to “experiment with methods of instruction, seek improved teaching methods, and experiment with instructional materials” (p. 128). Because I believed the administration team supported me and the methods I was using, I was encouraged to become more engaged in enacting project-based learning tasks for my students. In my mind, the enactment of project-based learning in my practice was validated and admired.

**Planning for PBL**

I knew I wanted to use the five projects that Parker developed but all I had was a paragraph description of the required tasks. I didn’t know how to implement the projects, what
steps were required, what tasks the students would be required to take, or any materials I would
need to help the students be successful. I started to plan the course during the month of July only
three short weeks prior to the first day of school. I examined the key concepts from the AP
American Government and Politics course guide, the textbook, and my planning calendar. I
worked backward, penciling in the date of the AP exams, then providing a week for review.
Next, I entered all the holidays and in-service days. I calculated the remaining days to find that I
had 158 instructional days.

Textbook

My school adopted *American Government and Politics Today* by Schmidt to be used as
the textbook for the course. The book was written in 2012, so as I prepared to teach a class in the
fall of 2017, I knew I would need to bring in contemporary sources and issues to engage the
students. According to Brush and Saye (2017), “relevance is the most important thing” (p. 97) in
creating authentic tasks. My previous experience teaching government included just one
semester of the traditional course and that took place several years prior. I spoke with the teacher
who was previously teaching the AP course and asked for her opinions on how to teach the class.
The recommendation was to follow the book because it covered the material the students would
be tested over on the exam, and it presented material in a logical sequence. I was not surprised to
hear the suggestion to utilize the book. High stakes testing increases social studies teacher’s
dependency on teacher-centered practices with emphasis on the textbook as the curriculum
(Ross, 2000; Segall, 2006; van Hover & Heinecke, 2005). I paged through the textbook and
noted the book was divided into six units. Part One: The American System included chapters on
the Democratic Republic, The Constitution, and Federalism (Schmidt, Shelley, Bardes, & Ford,
2012). Part Two: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties included chapters on each of the issues that
appeared in the title (Schmidt et al., 2012). Part Three: People and Politics was composed of six chapters that included Public Opinion and Political Socialization, Interest Groups, Political Parties, Voting, and Elections, Campaigning for Office, and The Media and Cyberpolitics (Schmidt et al., 2012). I thought six chapters would be too much material to absorb for one unit test so I divided the chapter in half. The chapters on Voting and Elections, Campaigning for Office, and The Media and Cyberpolitics became the logical place to initiate the Elections project. The additional units in the textbook included Part Four: Political Institutions, Part Five: Public Policy, and Part Six: State and Local Politics. Being unfamiliar with the course I decided to follow the advice of my colleague and construct my course to match the flow of the textbook. Gathorn suggests the supported curriculum exerts a strong influence on presentation, often resulting in the textbook becoming a major source of content knowledge (Glathorn, 1999). I decided that part three and part four included much material, and it would be beneficial to divide those units, thus, creating eight units for the course.

The use of the textbook as an instructional planning crutch is a common occurrence amongst teachers (Peng, 2007; Sun, Kulm, & Capraro, 2009). As I prepared to teach the course, I used the textbook to get an understanding of the content of the American Government class and to develop ideas for lesson plans. Some ideas like the development of notetaking guides and the use of the iCivics games came to mind as I paged through the text. According to Sun et al. (2009), the textbook is one of the major curriculum resources for lesson planning and implementing classroom instruction. I was not inspired as I read through some sections like political institutions. To fill-in the instructional gaps I utilized a wide variety of resources available online to develop content for my class.
Allocation of Time

I searched the AP College Board webpage for materials to determine if a prescribed number of instructional days was allocated for specific topics. I never found a document that offered suggestions on what areas to stress, so I returned to the textbook to determine what chapters covered more material, and what chapters presented material I thought students might need additional support to grasp. Peng (2007) claims, “lesson plan development commonly contains a teacher’s analysis of textbook content, instructional objectives, consideration and design of teaching methods and procedure, and the teacher’s consideration about students and their learning” (p. 290).

The time I allocated to each of the eight units was influenced by my testing procedures. I wanted to test students in a way that would help them to prepare for the AP Exam, so I decided to have tests cover multiple chapters. One day of testing would be dedicated to a multiple-choice test that included 55 items. The day following the multiple-choice test would be dedicated to answering free response questions in essay form. The day following the essay questions was devoted to test corrections. Students would review mistakes to revise their answers and to resubmit for partial credit. According to Rogers,

If the correctives are well-designed, they not only improve students’ learning and increase scores, they discourage students from ignoring or “blowing off” assessments and just retesting forever hoping to eventually show mastery – a strategy that seldom works and horribly burdens the teacher (Rogers S., 2013).

This practice would eliminate 24 instructional days, but I thought it would be beneficial to make the test a valuable learning experience that was modeled after the AP exam. As I divided the remaining instructional days, I determined that I would use 19 days, that included three days dedicated to testing, to cover the fourth unit in a course that included chapters on Voting and Elections, Campaigning for Office, and the Media and Cyberpolitics (Schmidt et al., 2012).
The Election Project

As I began to construct my lesson plan, I planned to present the project on the first day of the unit at the start of class. I wanted to engage the students in the project early to inspire them to find information in each activity and assignment that would assist them with their project. I believed this engagement first strategy would encourage my students to read more, actively take notes, and be more focused on activities in class. Parker (2018) explains, “the best time is when students are already engaged in a task for which the information from the text or lecture will be useful” (p. 48).

I reviewed the description Parker and Lo provided for the Elections project to generate a rubric for the project.

Elections (6 weeks). This is a simulation of a presidential election and the second scenario in which students wrestle with the master course question, What is the proper role of government in a democracy? Students become candidates, voters in swing states, journalists in media organizations, and leaders of interest groups and political parties. Through a series of tasks—from throwing hats in the ring to the general election—students learn about public opinion, political ideology, polls, campaign finance, and the voter characteristics. They also learn the relationships between interest groups, political parties, and the media as they attempt to navigate and influence the campaign. After campaign platforms are presented, students vote to elect the next president of the United States.

- Task 1: Warming Up to the Race – Students play roles in a presidential primary election (includes SAC: Should voting be required?)
- Task 2: Navigating the Campaign Trail – Students begin the process of campaigning for the primary election
- Task 3: Primary Election – Students vote on their primary candidates
- Task 4: Gearing up for the General Election – Students regroup to campaign for the general election (includes SAC: Should the Electoral College be abolished?)
- Task 5: General Election – Students finish the campaign and elect the next President of the United States (Parker & Lo, 2015)

I worked to include the elements Parker and Lo described but made adjustments along the way.
The first item on my rubric is the creation of a campaign advertisement. To earn full points the students are required to create one advertisement in any form of media and present it prior to the debate. Hjalmarson and Diefes-Dux (2017) explain “because the students’ solutions to a problem-based task are unknown to a degree, the teacher needs to design tools that are responsive to multiple solutions and ways of thinking” (p. 138). Eisner (1974) communicated the need to loosen the constraints on student responses by providing more possible options for expression. The students could create digital ads, design a social media campaign, develop a video, or compose an audio soundbite for the school announcements. I was open to any school-appropriate method the students selected to communicate their perspectives. The campaign ad should appeal to voters and have a clear message that communicates the candidates’ perspective or goal. According to Roberson (2018) “when students make media in social studies class, they access primary sources, make connections among people, events and eras, and craft arguments” (p. 241).

The message should address one of the topics selected by the class that would be featured in the primary debate. I wanted this task to encourage students to investigate how politicians’ campaign and what strategies they use, and to establish a position on topics that would be debated. My decision is supported by the work of Segall (2018) and his associates who claim, “prior to discussions, students should have opportunities to practice skills beforehand, multiple times, in order to gain facility with using various forms of evidence to support their statements” (p. 338).

The second item on the rubric requires the students to participate in the primary debate. The students communicate their perspectives for each of the five preselected topics and supports each with factual evidence. Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) claim people who lack
experience “engaging with people whom they disagree—a growing number of Americans are less likely to participate in the political realm” (p. 324). The Elections project would require each student to communicate with their peers, with whom they might disagree, on five controversial issues. I believed it was essential to have each of the students participate to share their views and experience the debate. According to Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018)

the ability to embrace productive disagreements based on serious consideration of fact patterns, and on the opinions that emerge from these facts, is a key civic competency that often results in compromises or changes in opinion. One effective remedy to unproductive political discourse and ideological shifts toward the poles is for youth to engage in cross-cutting communication about political issues (p. 324).

Student debate was an engaging activity that helped students learn content and skills. PBL can be an effective strategy for enhancing both student engagement with challenging content and students’ academic achievement with that content in K-12 settings (Brush, et al., 2013). Participation in the debate would help students situate evidence gathering within authentic tasks to answer meaningful questions, which would improve student performance in narrative construction (Barton & Levstik, 2004). I decided to allow the students to select the topics to cover as a class to excite interest.

The third item on the rubric required the students to deliver a response for each of the five topics. The response should show evidence of student research, the ability to make an assessment, their ability to hypothesize and predict events. Parker and Hess (2001) argue that classroom discussions and deliberations on public issues stand at the core of civic education. I wanted to make sure each of the students was doing something with the knowledge they had to research. I wanted them to form an opinion and make a claim. Segall and his colleagues (2018) claim, “students benefit by learning about argumentation and evidence use, examining their own
thinking about an issue, listening to others, and developing experience in speaking to those with whom they disagree” (p. 336).

The next steps on the rubric depended on the student’s success in the primary debate. If the student received the most votes they would begin to prepare for the presidential election where they would face the candidate from the other class period. That student was required to continue to campaign by creating additional advertisements that showed evidence of research, assessment, the ability to hypothesize and to predict. Creating sharable media helps students increase motivation and interest (Roberson, 2018). Through this task, the students would communicate their political ideologies. The student’s concluding task for the project would be to participate in the presidential election. The student prepared to speak on eight topics that were selected by both class periods. The student was required to communicate their perspective for each topic and support their statements with factual evidence. Hodgin and Kahne (2018) claim, “ongoing opportunities for students to practice use of these skills and metacognitive thinking is necessary to instill habits that can be applied across settings and contexts” (p. 209).

The students who did not win the nomination of the class to participate in the presidential election were provided two different tasks. The first task required each student to become a journalist. Each student was required to communicate the political ideology of one of the two presidential nominees. This process was crafted to help students use evidence from an interaction with the candidate to support their argument. Journell and his colleagues (2018) claim, “too often, the inquiries simply ask students to acquire more knowledge about a topic rather than use evidence to make an argument” (p. 203). The research required the student to interact with the presidential nominee to gather information that could be crafted into an article that made a claim about the candidates’ political platform. The students were required to turn in the article prior to
the presidential debate so it could be posted and shared with the class. I wanted the students to understand the role of the media through this task. Some students presented the candidate favorably while other students engaged in yellow journalism and, through the process, each student became aware of the influence of the media. This collaborative process provided an opportunity for students to draw on each other’s perspectives and talents to more effectively consider the candidacy of the two presidential candidates (Ertmer & Glazewski, 2015).

I was conflicted on requiring the presidential nominee to write an article to post in the class. Ultimately, I decided not to make the article a requirement but welcomed the student to share their views through increased campaigning. I wanted the student to make their own decisions on how to invest their time preparing for the presidential election and how to effectively campaign for office. Eisner (1974) noted the importance of student time management claiming “one of the most significant aspects of the pupil’s behavior is their ability to use time, space, and materials productively without overt supervision or verbal reminders to get busy by the teacher” (p. 35). During the past two years of conducting this project, the presidential nominees have all commented on the power the other students had as members of the media. Because of the comments, I have decided to continue to make the article an optional task for the presidential nominees.

The second task the students who did not win the nomination were required to complete was to become a lobbyist. Each student had to address an advocacy issue that he supported. The student created a poster to publicize an issue and wrote a five-hundred-word position paper to describe the issue, the need for change, request the allocation of one million dollars to help enact change and describe how the money would be spent to support the issue. The student’s proposal required evidence of research, the ability to make assessments, the ability to hypothesize and
predict and to appeal to the newly elected president. I believe this task helped the students develop problem-solving skills. High-quality teaching should emphasize instructional strategies to support students’ acquisition of a more flexible knowledge base as they engage in complex problem solving (Saye & the Social Studies Inquiry Research Collaborative, 2013).

The presidential nominees reviewed each of the proposals and determined the one they would support. The students in the class created a proposal and shared it with the class and the president asked questions to clarify the proposal. Through this activity, I believed the students would become familiar with the idea of lobbying and did not require the presidential nominees to draft a lobbyist proposal. I believe the lobbyist proposal task was authentic and thus, increased engagement (Land, 2000).

The qualitative findings of Parker et al. (2011; 2013) suggested the project was not well received by some students. One student claimed, “I found myself doing a lot of work that was not preparing me directly for the test” (Parker et al., 2011, p. 554). Another student said, “There was a lot of times when none of us felt like we were doing anything, like, extremely significant” (Parker et al., 2013, p. 1446). The negative perceptions of the students made me question the ability of the Elections project to provide an enjoyable learning experience. I believed the tasks were aligned to key concepts and would provide the students with the information required to be successful on the AP exam. I also thought the project sounded engaging and more interesting than traditional methods commonly used in many AP classes.

Student Engagement

In my experience of enacting projects after the introduction and explanation of the required tasks, I have found that the students are often anxious to get started. This can be attributed to the development of authentic tasks. Research has shown authentic tasks that pose
problems similar to the work done by people in the world beyond school may promote deeper levels of student engagement (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). I scheduled 35 minutes to introduce the project and communicate each of the goals from the rubric. Hiebert and colleagues (2007, as cited in NCTM, 2014) claim, “formulating clear, explicit learning goals sets the stage for everything else” (National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics and TODOS: Mathematics for All, 2014). Each element from the rubric was enhanced by a two to a three-minute video clip from C-SPAN that helped add clarity to the task by explaining vocabulary terms. Technology plays a key role in PBL tasks for both teachers and students (Park & Ertmer, 2007). Kim and colleagues (2011) claim teachers can use technology as an authentic means to introduce and engage students in the problem. Once the students have engaged in the tasks, the next step I took was to get the students to draft a list of topics to cover then narrow the field to five issues. The topic of project-based learning activity needs to be appealing to learners to keep them motivated (Hung, 2006). By allowing the students to select the topics for investigation and debate I believed they would be more engaged in the tasks and more likely to maintain their interests. The remaining twelve minutes of class I allocated to student research and answered individual questions.

I believed the students were engaged in the project due to the nature of the tasks. Dow (2019) claims, “Direct engagement with real phenomena is enormously motivating for learners at all levels, including teachers” (p. 78). Dow developed inquiry based instructional methods in his experience in higher education and at public museums. He claimed authentic tasks generated the interests of museum visitors because they were learning by doing (Dow, 2019). The Elections project required students to learn by doing. The students immediately began working on their campaigns after receiving instruction.
Scaffolding

I planned the remaining 18 instructional days to scaffold learning to help provide students with the information they would need to be successful on the project and master the concepts from the AP curriculum. Brush and Saye (2017) explain, “hard scaffolds are static supports that can be anticipated and planned in advance based on typical student difficulties with a task” (p. 3). Lottero-Perdue (2017) identifies “scaffolds to support instruction” (p. 105) as a key feature to support teachers of PBL.

As I continued to draft my plans for the unit, the second instructional day fell on a Monday. On Mondays, I start the class with what I call Mental Health Monday. It is a five-minute activity where I ask the students to compliment a person next to them, talk about plans they have, a stressful moment, or any topic I believe will help the students get to know each other and help with social bonding. In Tavares’ (2018) article on Global Insights for U.S. Civic Education, she identified the importance of relationship building. Tavares (2018) argues “to pay attention to the quality of democracy we want to have, we need to attend to the quality of relationships in our community” (p. 262).

After the five minutes for the mental health Monday activity, I planned a guided reading activity from the textbook. I selected to read “What if… voting by mail became universal” (Schmidt et al., 2012)? I planned a guided discussion to analyze the issues of voting by mail and then expanded the discussion by talking about mandatory voting. I selected the task to help improve the students’ critical thinking skills. Sperry (2018) claims “our curriculum and methodologies should aim to develop our students’ habits of critical thinking about all mediated messages including about their own assessment of what to believe” (p. 206). With the remaining time in class that day I scheduled an opportunity for the students to make campaign
advertisements on poster paper. Capon and Kuhn (2004) claim that learning by doing leads to better retention of knowledge and skills. Through the experience of creating their own campaign advertisements, the students would need to process information on campaign tactics, select a method, and create an authentic object to communicate their thoughts. I thought the variety of tasks would work well to keep the students engaged. The discussion was directly related to the chapter and helped students think about why people vote. The opportunity to develop campaign advertisements in class provided an opportunity for the students to share ideas and get peer feedback.

I planned for the students to play *Win the White House* during the next instructional day. *Win the White House* is a game developed by the iCivics network to help students master the concepts of American government. I played the game before and valued such features as campaign fundraising, polling, making appearances, and advertising for the campaign. The game helped reinforce concepts from chapter 10, Campaigning for Office, and showed the importance of effective campaigning. According to Chow, Woodford, and Maes (2010) multiple studies have concluded that games are effective activities that provide students with experiences that are fun and educational.

The next instructional day I scheduled a project work day providing student opportunities to make decisions. Eisner wrote about the ability of students and time management is his book, *English Primary Schools*, where Eisner (1974) claims “children learn how to choose, that is, to make decisions about how they will use their time” (p. 38). When planning the lesson my goal was to provide students with time to research the issues that would be selected on the first day of the project. I knew my classroom would have a computer cart that would provide 16 students with access to the internet, and most of my students would have access to the internet via their
cell phones. I also knew I had markers and computer paper for students who wished to work on campaign advertisements. This instructional day provided the students with a self-directed learning opportunity. Barrows (1986) communicated the development of self-directed learning as one of four “educational objectives possible with PBL” (p. 482). In my lesson plans, I included the use of a project self-assessment worksheet that I used to check students’ progress and keep them focused during the class period. I selected a similar resource from the Buck Institute for Education and modified it to fit my needs.

The following day I set aside for the evaluation of Presidential election campaign advertisements. I found a lesson titled Evaluating Historical Presidential Campaign Ads on C-SPAN Classroom and thought the activity would help my students craft their campaigns (C-SPAN, 2017). The lesson plan incorporated video clips of historical campaign advertisements. Stoddard and Marcus (2017) suggest video has a potentially engaging and moving effect on students. The lesson included an evaluation graphic organizer to hold the students accountable for evaluating each of the 14 presidential campaign advertisements presented.

On the sixth instructional day, I planned to have the students identify key terms from the textbook and complete a Cornell note graphic organizer. The graphic organizer has a section for students to list key terms from the chapter on the left side of the paper, write the definition on the right side of the paper, and summarize the chapter in a box on the bottom. In addition to identifying the key terms, the students were required to answer 10 multiple choice questions developed from standards that related to the chapter about voting and elections. I struggled to develop this lesson because I felt torn. I did not think the activity was going to be memorable or exciting, but the method would expose the students to terms they needed to know. Parker (2018) stated that text-task alignment occurs when “information from the text is used subsequently in a
project task. Literacy researchers have demonstrated that text-task alignment helps get students both to do assigned reading and to comprehend it” (p. 48). I thought these activities would help the students review the chapter and improve their understanding of the terms essential to the project.

The instructional planning of the unit required a clear and consistent vision of key activities, resources, and structures (America Achieves Educator Networks, 2018). I planned the lessons to include key concepts that supported the students as they developed their projects. According to Good and Brophy (2004), effective teaching requires that teachers plan sequences of lessons rather than planning in isolation. I used multiple methods when I constructed the lesson plan for the unit, a practice supported by the research of Panasuk and Todd (2005). Panasuk and Todd (2005) examined 261 lesson plans from 39 teachers in urban low performing schools and found that teachers show their “skillfulness in planning when they use varied approaches and lesson components focus on lesson coherency” (p. 230). Through the lessons the students gained knowledge that they would utilize in the class debate.

Debate

The next class period was dedicated to the primary debate and to provide each student with an opportunity to share their campaign advertisement. This event fell on a Monday in my instructional planning calendar, so I included a mental health Monday activity. The activity required students to state something they were thankful for. I scheduled five minutes for the mental health Monday activity. Following the mental health activity, I planned for the students to explain the political advertisement they created and debate two of the five topics as a class.
I believed providing the students an opportunity to debate would help promote civic engagement through authentic discussions that included multiple perspectives. According to Hauver (2017)

formal civic education that seeks to develop young people’s appreciation and competence for active participation in their communities is critically important, and we should continue to advocate for its inclusion. But learning to live together in a community with diverse others has always required far more than formal civic education curriculum has offered.

Through the Elections simulation, students were exposed to the viewpoints of their classmates and each had an opportunity to discuss controversial political issues.

The next day I planned time to allow the students to address the three remaining topics and finish the debate. Each student had the opportunity to communicate their thoughts on the remaining three topics the class identified to debate. By requiring each student to share their perspectives it helped increase participation and prevent what Sibbett refers to as dominant voices. Sibbett (2018) noted some dominant voices become easily empowered during discussions of controversial issues, while non-dominant voices often remain unheard (p. 308). I included time at the end of class to allow students to cast their ballots, so a presidential nominee would emerge from the class as we proceeded through the curriculum in the unit. Journell et al. (2018) suggest that inquiry elements should be built towards a task that requires students to take informed action based on their newfound understanding (p. 202). Allowing students to vote provided an opportunity for the students to make a decision based on the knowledge learned from the debate.

Post-Debate Lessons

I thought it would be best to follow the election with a project work day. Turk and Berman (2018) communicate that PBL opportunities “are usually sustained, and they are teacher-
shaped, but student driven” (p. 35). I thought the project work day would allow the students to regroup and refocus their efforts on the remaining tasks required to complete the project. The presidential nominee would use the time to develop more campaign ads and to expand their research on the topics that would be covered in the final debate. The students who did not win the nomination would use the time to develop an issue advocacy poster, conduct research on an advocacy issue, or begin to craft an article for the required journalism element of the project. This lesson was planned with the knowledge that students in active learning environments must be self-directed learners. Hmelo-Silver (2004) explained that four essential features of PBL curriculum and instruction are common, the third feature is the students’ roles as self-directed learners, who are supported by the facilitative role of the teacher. Eisner (1974) identifies this element as a way that children learn how to choose, that is, to make decisions about how they will use their time…Sharing of educational responsibility with the children relieves the teacher of a heavy emotional burden, that of containing a class and maintaining its interest and attention for an extended period of time (p. 38).

The students were free to use their time to investigate and complete any task they preferred to work on, while I helped provide assistance and answer questions.

The next instructional day I planned to cover the electoral college. I scheduled time in the lesson to show a clip from Saturday Night Live to capture the students’ attention and then provide a graphic organizer to help students analyze how the electoral college works, what are the benefits, and what are reasons people do not like it. To conclude class, I planned to play a Kahoot trivia quiz games to assess student understanding of the electoral college. According to Punyanunt-Carter (2018), “Kahoot is a tool that motivates and activates students’ learning
because it can test their knowledge, reiterate important concepts, and help them retain important information” (p. 37).

The lesson on the electoral college was followed by a guided reading activity, I planned, to cover spending limits on campaigns. After the reading activity, I planned to encourage a discussion framed around questions related to spending in elections and how that can influence a campaign. Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) argue, “it is important to help young people to develop the habit of engaging in productive, crosscutting discussions about contentious social issues during their high school years” (p. 324). I made a note to reference the money the students invested in their campaigns for the project and what role those choices played. The next activity for the lesson was a lecture over nine of the key terms from the chapter, which was followed by a student-led activity to research historical campaign events. Each student was provided with a specific year to review then present a summary to the class on the campaign events. The purpose of this activity was to show students issues that people debate today have been controversial over the course of American history. Newmann and Oliver (1970) organized social studies around an inquiry into persistent societal issues in an effort to help students make sound decisions about contemporary problems.

I planned the 12th day of instruction as a time that students would work in small groups to review the chapters on voting and elections and campaigning for office. Prince (2004) claims, one of the most beneficial methods of active learning is collaborative learning. Through discussion, the students would communicate their knowledge on the topic and work to create more informed group members. I wrote in my lesson plan book to start the class with a mental health Monday activity. I then decided to have the students work with a partner to create a poster to display a summary, three key vocabulary words, a picture, and a test question from the section.
of the book they were assigned. The students would then visit the posters in the room and collect facts and answer the test question.

The 13th day of instruction I reserved for issue advocacy. I scheduled the first six minutes of the class for a video clip from C-SPAN that explained lobbying. The next activity included notes over four key terms and six examples of issue advocacy posters. The remainder of the class I set aside for the students to develop a poster for the issue advocacy element for their project. Cohen and Benton (1988) claim that implementing collaborative tasks in classrooms encourages broader engagement and may help students develop more complex models of reality. I thought providing time in class would allow me to help individual students who were struggling to identify an issue and conceptualize how to make it clearer. Eisner (1974) claims teachers use their position as “stimulators, as facilitators, and as counselors and guides, not as lecturers or as people concerned with large group instruction” (p. 24).

With only three days remaining in my planning calendar for the unit, I had to address the final chapter of the unit, the Media and Cyberpolitics. I decided that I would start the chapter with a guided reading activity that focused on the media and its sources. I would assign a Cornell notes graphic organizer to help the students identify key terms from the chapter. Remaining time would be spent reading the textbook as a class with a popcorn reading strategy. I started this activity by reading the first paragraph, connected the reading to the students’ lives, then called on a student to read the next paragraph. The student who was called on read the next paragraph, reflected on it, then called on a student to read next. We repeated this process for the section of text in the book. The lesson plan for this day was designed to provide students with the knowledge they would need to successfully understand the importance of campaigning.
VanSledright (2002) communicated the need for a teacher to develop strategic knowledge that provides guidance for students to proceed in their investigation.

On the 15th instructional day, I planned to start the class with *Daisy*, the Lyndon Johnson campaign advertisement. After viewing the campaign advertisement, the students were directed to research 10 television campaign advertisements and identify the advertisement they found to be the most effective and least effective. Each student was required to create a comic strip that depicted the most effective advertisement and then below the comic explain the role that television has played on campaigns. Through the process of examining historical knowledge, the students would be able to identify effective campaign strategies. I wrote a note to remind students about attending the after-school debate between the presidential nominees.

On the last instructional day prior to the test, I planned to show the video recording of the after-school debate between both presidential candidates. By providing an opportunity for the students to watch the debate I believed the students would examine the candidates’ viewpoints and their ability to answer questions and explain their viewpoints logically. The social studies classroom should be the place where students scrutinize data, critique statements, and examine beliefs. (McCorkle, Cole, & Spearman, 2018). The students would address the eight political issues the classes voted on and each nominee would have the opportunity to present a video campaign advertisement during the class period. At the end of the class, I allocated time to allow the students to cast their ballots for president.

As I planned lessons after the debate, I continued to develop a variety of tasks for the students to complete. According to Tomlinson and McTighe (2006), when a teacher correctly and adeptly uses a variety of instructional strategies, lessons and tasks become more engaging. I
utilized individual assignments and group work to vary the experience for the students and allow them to develop ideas then exchange those ideas with their peers.

**Entry Events**

The Great American Teach-In was one week prior to my beginning the fourth unit. The Great American Teach-In welcomes adults from the community to come to schools around the country and present information on what they do as part of their career and share information and advice with the students. Prior to enacting the elections project, my class listened to Kathleen Peters describe her career as a member of the Florida House of Representatives. Mrs. Peters spoke to the class for an entire class period and covered topics that included campaigning, running negative advertisements in a campaign, and some of the things she accomplished as a member of the House. Mrs. Peter’s message was powerful and turned my students focus on campaigns.

Three days after Mrs. Peters spoke with my class, our school was visited by the C-SPAN bus. The bus welcomes students on board, in groups of 15, to sit in a mobile studio and participate in a discussion about the effects of media on elections. The representative from C-SPAN asked the students questions about bias in the media like, “how do most news stations generate revenue” (Heath, 2018)? “How could the need to generate revenue from marketing alter what is broadcast” (Heath, 2018)? My students grappled with the questions for several moments and were enlightened when they learned how the news industry generates revenue. The students then utilized the touchscreens in the bus to play a short trivia game on the media’s role in campaigns. All my students took turns learning new information on the bus and then gathered for a photo along the side of the bus near the large C-SPAN logo.
I did not plan for the visitation of the C-SPAN bus when I initially did my lesson planning. However, I was contacted three weeks prior to the arrival of the bus when the member of the marketing staff told me the date they would be on campus. I arranged my calendar to take advantage of the C-SPAN bus and would have utilized the experience regardless of the time of year or what part of the project the students were working on. The visitation worked out to be at an advantageous time. It helped bring attention to the role of the media in elections prior to my students knowing about the project.

Boss (2011) claims, “By planning entry events that fire up their curiosity, you’ll engage students right from the start” (p. 2). The students at King Middle School experienced the power a guest speaker can have on the launch of a PBL task.

About one year ago, a determined woman walked through the doors of King Middle School with her head held high. Claudette Colvin, a woman who refused to give up her seat to a white woman when she was young, visited our school to share her memories with us and her biographer (Boss, 2011). During the launch event students heard personal testimony about sit-ins and what it felt like to be segregated. According to Boss (2011), “Guest speakers can help get a project started by sharing their experience or expertise with students” (p. 4). The students in my class benefited from having multiple entry events. My students communicated with experts in their fields and were asked questions on topics most had not previously thought about.

**Directions**

The next school day I introduced the Elections project to my class. The opportunities Mrs. Peters and the C-SPAN bus provided, just days prior, I believed were effective in
generating the interest of the students about the unit the class started that day. According to Lo and Tierney (2017) “Engagement first occurs when students begin project work and role-play before they are presented with lectures and readings” (p. 65). The students were engaged in the topics the project would cover but had not yet started learning content from readings or activities. I began class by asking the students to tell me about the things they learned the previous week from Mrs. Peters and the C-SPAN visit and created what Lo and Tierney referred to as a time for telling (Lo & Tierney, 2017). The students communicated they understood how media works and some of the jobs representatives of the House do. I told the students each of them would have an opportunity to investigate campaigns and the media in more detail as part of a project we were starting.

I explained to the class that each person would be running for the Presidential office and would each participate in a political debate. The debate would cover five issues the class selected, and each student would have to address each issue. Halvorsen and colleagues (2018) suggest that PBL is not easy to design and it “involves letting go and putting more decision making in the hands of the students” (p. 62). The students took ownership of the project because they were able to select the topics. According to Hodgin and Kahne (2018), “few students have staked out a position on elections prior to learning about them. The same cannot be said of questions revolving around abortion policy, or gun laws” (p. 208). This process allowed the students to learn more about elections and communicate their beliefs on topics they are concerned with. I distributed the rubric (see Appendix G) and explained each item. In the research of Hjalmarson and Diefes-Dux (2017), they note the importance of giving clear directions to the students. After explaining each item required to complete the project, I showed a video clip that helped define government terminology that students would need to know. I used
the Project-based Learning: Elections Simulation webpage that I created a month prior as part of my role as a C-SPAN senior fellow (Swift, 2018). I designed the lesson to help other teachers enact the Elections project in a way that would be easy to understand and enhance learning, using 10 video clips that explained key terms.

The video clips that I showed my students included a description of primaries and caucuses, two sample presidential campaign ads that included a 1984 Ronald Regan and 1992 Bill Clinton television commercial, a segment from the 2016 Democratic primary debate, how to select a vice president, freedom of the press, interest group endorsements, and crafting of debate questions. The clips ranged in time from 31 seconds to three minutes and 41 seconds, which helped maintain student focus on each clip. According to Mayer (2005), research has demonstrated that students learn from a combination of words and pictures. The video clips from C-SPAN incorporate visual images and use narration to explain concepts. This helped provide concise descriptions using primary sources and prominent political leaders.

The students were engaged in the task and watched the seven clips that each lasted two minutes or less. The longer video clip, on the vice-presidential nomination process that ran for over three minutes, did not hold the attention of three of the students beyond the two minute and 30-second mark and they began a side conversation. As the class progressed through the rubric and concluded watching the C-SPAN videos, I asked the students to generate a list of topics that would be addressed in the debate. Journell and his colleagues (2018) recommend the inquiry should “be of interest to students and provide them with an opportunity to make evidence-based arguments. Simply put, the compelling questions should be open-ended or subjective and have more than one plausible answer based on available evidence” (p. 202). The students asked if what they suggested would be the final topics and I responded by saying we would draft a list
first and then vote for the five topics that interested the most students. This procedure provided the students with an opportunity to select topics that were relevant to their lives.

Providing clear directions to students is an important part of enacting PBL. Danielson (2007) states, clear learning objectives are needed for effective lessons, they help create a clear road map for students to follow. In Rogers (2014) study on overcoming implementation challenges of enacting PBL in community colleges, providing clear directions was one of the themes that was identified as an essential element in the enactment of the method. I believed that spending time reading over each item on the rubric and providing video clips that explained elements added clarity to the project.

**Topic Selection**

All 18 students were looking at the board as a student typed the suggestions into a word document displayed on the Smartboard screen. There was more noise and talking that erupted in the class than during a typical classroom activity. As two students blurted out suggestions, another student connected the topic of global warming to the recent tweets of President Trump. Seven of the students sitting near the person who made the comment that President Trump tweeted, chuckled saying, we could use that global warming now, while in a blizzard. Side conversations about President Trump and global warming occurred in two locations across the room but the students were refocused as another student offered a suggestion to investigate. 10 of the 18 students present in class helped draft a list of 13 topics to investigate for the presidential election. I then directed the students to vote for a topic if they were interested in debating that issue. Providing the students choice was done to encourage the students to take a more active role in the project (Eisner, 1974). There was no limit set for how many times each student could vote. As I read off the topics the students listed, abortion received 17 votes, gun control received
18 votes, immigration received 18 votes, environmental conservation received 15 votes and terrorism prevention received 14 votes. These topics were selected by the class for the debate. Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) argue that “the need to integrate controversial-issue discussions across disciplines and grades has become even more pressing as opportunities for this foundational means of democratic engagement become increasingly rare in society at large” (p. 323). Due to the selection of controversial issues by the students, the Elections project was able to answer Kawashima-Ginsberg’s and Junco’s call to action. With the remaining six minutes in class, I directed the students to begin researching the topics they selected so they could make a claim and have research to validate their positions. According to the research of Strutchens and Martin (2017) after clarifying the problem or tasks the teacher should provide the students with an opportunity to work to solve the problem.

Student choice is an important component of project-based learning (Larmer, 2018). According to Grossman, Dean, Kavanagh, and Herrmann, “Accomplished PBL teachers cultivate student choice and ownership within a collaborative setting. In a traditional classroom, students might choose their own topic, audience, questions to pursue, or product to create” (2019, p. 45). In a similar study by Bullock (2013) the teacher Ms. Jordan enacted a PBL task on the Civil War and Reconstruction. Ms. Jordan provided the students with an opportunity to select an issue that led to the Civil War or complicated Reconstruction (Bullock, 2013). The student population of Ms. Jordan’s class was predominantly African American and the opportunity to examine an issue from any perspective allowed the students to expand their knowledge beyond the traditional narrative of American history (Bullock, 2013). Like Ms. Jordan’s class my students selected topics that were important to them and were provided an opportunity to discuss those issues with their peers.
Game-Based Learning

The next day in class the students worked individually to play the game, *Win the White House*. According to the research of Smith and Simon (1984), game-based learning can help enhance student creativity and problem-solving. *Win the White House*, from the iCivics Network, provided an opportunity for the students to navigate a campaign for a fictitious character. The students were interested in the game. Learning in social studies must reflect 21st-century technologies, or many students will be left behind (Shifflet & MacPhee, 2014). After the initial seven minutes of class that the students used to login to the computers, start the game, and carry on side conversations, the classroom was quiet and focused. Occasionally, I overheard a student vent frustration with the game. “Come to California” and “why are more Republicans voting than ever before?” were two asides I heard. As the class period progressed, I noticed students started to share lessons they learned. You have to go to states with larger populations in order to have a more substantial effect on the race. As I walked around the classroom five times over 47 minutes, I did not have to redirect a student to play the game. With three minutes left in class, I asked the students to put away the computers and asked what they learned. I was not planning to lead an in-depth discussion but wanted to get a sense for the students’ initial take-away from the game. I planned to reference their experience in the game in the discussion later and thought it would help provide an understanding of campaigning. As the students left the classroom, they told me the game was cool yet inaccurate, because historically Democratic states were easily turned to Republican states. Students felt and they had a better understanding why candidates focus on a few larger states.

I thought the game, *Win the White House*, had accomplished the instructional goal I set for it to achieve but wanted to debrief the experience with the students the next time class met. I
knew the students enjoyed playing *Win the White House* because three of the students who
entered the classroom at different times asked if we would be playing the game again. Once class
started, I asked the students what they thought of the game. One student claimed that the flip-flop
states are where a person would need to concentrate on and they weren’t sure the game
accurately depicted that. Another student commented that you had to match the strengths of your
political character with the population that supported their ideas. Other students agreed that
focusing on the big states were important and the way to win. I asked the class to describe the
process of the game. A class spokesperson described the need to address your political ideology,
raise campaign funds, visit locations, debate, run campaign advertisements, and repeat the
process until the election occurred. Four students nodded their heads in agreement and another
two said, “Yeah that’s pretty much it.”

Game-based learning today is an emerging field with a wide variety of formats that can
create intrinsic motivation for learners (Voiskounsky, Mitina, & Avetisova, 2004). In my course
I had the students play *Win the White House*, the game is one of 19 created by the iCivics
network. Recent scholarship has examined the educational benefits and shortcomings of the
games produced by the iCivics network. “The Challenges of Gaming for Democratic Education:
The Case of iCivics,” Stoddard, Banks, Nemacheck, and Wenska (2016) examined four of the
games from iCivics. The study identified the need for the teacher to expand upon the games
through meaningful discussion to provide students with an opportunity to discuss their
perspectives (Stoddard et al., 2016). Blevins and LeCompte (2016) claim, “the results from their
study suggested that iCivics games may have affordances for democratic education because of
the specific design of the games for classroom-based use, clear scaffolding for players, and ties
to state and national curriculum standards” (p. 1). I Believe both studies supported the lesson
plans I developed, and I was able to address the concerns of Stoddard and colleagues through the inclusion of discussion in the class at a later date.

**Graphic Organizers**

I thought the game-based learning experience was valuable because the students saw the steps involved in the process and obtained an understanding of how candidates earn support. The students then applied that knowledge to the project. I directed the class to use their political ideologies to connect with students in this class as part of their campaign strategy and recommended they act to promote themselves as soon as possible. The remaining time in class was used to identify key terms by completing a Cornell note graphic organizer. I created the Cornell note graphic organizer to help students identify terms from chapter nine, ten, and eleven that would help them master the concepts of campaigning and focus groups. This activity provided more knowledge to help the students complete their project. This activity was an example of guiding the students as they work towards a solution, a task Hmelo-Silver (2014) claims is essential in PBL. Some of the terms included on the Cornell notes graphic organizer included: random sampling, the margin of error, exit poll, political ideology, liberal, public interest groups, Sierra Club, NAACP, and the AARP. Many of the terms were used by the students in their debates, journal articles, and in lobbyist proposals.

On the fourth instructional day, I conducted the C-SPAN lesson plan: Evaluating Historical Presidential Campaign Ads.

This lesson looks at what factors make good campaign advertisements. It has students view televised presidential campaign advertisements starting with Dwight Eisenhower's "I like Ike" ad and continues through the 2016 presidential election. Students will view these campaign ads, analyze them and evaluate their effectiveness (C-SPAN, 2017).
I distributed a graphic organizer to each student that asked the students to summarize the message the ad had for voters, strategies being used, topics and issues being referenced, symbols and images being used, and effectiveness. This graphic organizer was a great tool to keep the students engaged and pull relevant information from each campaign ad. According to Scanlon, Deshler and Schumaker (1997), graphic organizers help students understand concepts, and relationships among concepts; they enable students to more effectively compare and contrast, link causes and effects, and differentiate between main ideas and details. The students in my class were able to make connections from the historical campaign ads to ideas they could use for their projects. All 22 students watched each ad attentively. One student made the comment, “Eisenhower is responsible for overthrowing the Guatemalan government.” Another student asked, “Why we don’t see ads like this anymore?” after viewing Reagan’s 1984 campaign that highlighted the positive elements of American society. Other comments the students made were less political but more entertaining like the student who claimed, “As soon as you learn to play the saxophone you become the coolest guy in the room.” Another student couldn’t believe Al Gore didn’t win the election after they viewed his 2000 campaign ad that highlighted the decisions he made. The comments the students made signaled that they were paying attention to the lesson, synthesizing the information, and making connections to what they viewed. I thought the lesson effectively showed different campaign strategies, which would help the students on the next test to take what they learned and apply it to meet the requirements of the project.

According to Record (2015), “Graphic organizers have become a pedagogical tool as commonly used in the K–12 classroom as staplers and pencils” (p. 73). I infused two graphic organizers in my lesson plans. Graphic organizers help students transfer knowledge from working memory into long-term memory (Gieselmann, 2008). In Gieselmann’s (2008) study she
found that the use of graphic organizers engaged students in the learning process, contributed to vocabulary development, and created higher level thinking opportunities for students during instruction. I believe the utilization of graphic organizers in my lesson plans increased student vocabulary and contributed to increased student participation in discussions.

**Project Work Day**

After viewing campaign ads, the previous day, I believed my students were ready to create something that showcased what they learned. I originally scheduled the project workday to occur prior to the lesson plan on Historical Presidential Ads but, as I began the week, I felt compelled to provide more opportunities for the students to learn content they could incorporate in their project and use on the in-class work day. Danielson (2008) claims, that reflection is an essential teaching practice. Because I took the time to review my lesson plans and consider the knowledge of the students, adjusting the lesson made sense.

The students began class working independently on their projects. 15 of the 22 students approached my desk and took sheets of printer paper and markers to aid them in the construction of their ad. I noticed the students started asking their peers about their campaign ad ideas. At first, I noticed four students in the corner opposite of my desk communicating their ideas. Then as I scanned the room, I noticed partnerships had formed across the class. During this activity, I noticed many students consulted friends or classmates with whom they felt safe communicating. Hodgin and Kahne (2018) speak about students attempts to “seek out evidence that aligns with their preexisting views, to attempt to dismiss perspectives that contradict their beliefs” (p. 208). Despite the homogeneous groupings on political ideology, the students offered advice on how to communicate their messages.
The students were communicating their campaign slogans and trying to determine if their attempt of humor was effective. The student who suggested using the campaign slogan, Joey is a big toey, was met with disapproval. After listening to campaign slogans that aimed more for humor than the communication of political ideologies, I read the students the rubric requirement for the campaign advertisement. Eisner (1974) wrote that part of the teachers’ role in managing a student-centered, active learning school is to determine the allocation of time and to be responsible to determine if events are educationally worthwhile. By redirecting the students and helping them focus on required tasks I fulfilled my role as the teacher. As the students continued to work with a renewed focus, I reminded them to complete their project work evaluation sheets and that the project rubric was displayed with the five topics on the Smartboard. The project work evaluation sheet required the student to write the steps they took during the period to complete the project, to report any research findings, to plan for the next steps, to identify potential problems, and to decide how they could act to overcome those issues. Eisner (1974) claims the burden on teachers is more stressful in traditional classrooms than those in which the responsibility of learning is shared with the students. Because my students were tasked with finding information, planning tasks, and taking action, my role was reduced to monitoring and assisting the students. I spent the remainder of the class period reviewing the students’ project work evaluation sheets as 14 of the 22 students posted at least one campaign poster on my classroom walls.

I found that providing time in class for the project was essential. Gorski (2008) conducted a study of the enactment of PBL in high school social studies classes and teachers’ perceptions. The four participants of the study claimed they used one instructional day in class for the project-based learning each month (Gorski, 2008). The instructional time provided opportunities for
clarification of directions, small group instruction, and assistance with research (Gorski, 2008). During the project work days in my class I clarified directions and communicated with each group.

**Reading**

On the sixth instructional day, I assigned my students a list of terms that were found in chapter nine. The words were easy to identify in the text because they were bolded and separated from the main text. Each term was accompanied by a one to three sentence definition. In addition to defining the terms, I assigned the students to answer 10 multiple choice questions from the text. The students worked in class to define the terms using a Cornell note graphic organizer and answered the multiple-choice questions on the back of the paper. The room was quiet as the students worked to complete the assignment.

My students are reluctant to read the text outside of class, so this assignment encouraged the students to investigate terms they would need to be familiar with to have success on the AP exam. According to the textbook, “an understanding of vocabulary terms was needed to answer the free-response questions correctly” (Schmidt, et al., 2012, p. xxxviii). The terms identified in the margins are what the textbook identified as important (Schmidt, et al., 2012). As the students completed defining the terms and answering the multiple choice questions I noticed the three students closest to my desk continuously flipping pages through the chapter, reading the question, then flipping through pages to locate a section they thought held the answer. I collected the students’ work as they left class and noticed 20 of the 22 students finished the assignment accurately; the other two students did not correctly answer the multiple choice questions.

I was hesitant to assign the lesson because I viewed it as too traditional and was worried the students would not be engaged in the assignment. As I reflected on the lesson, I believed it
helped most of the students interact with the text in a way that would provide them with a basic understanding of terminology needed to master the key concepts in the chapter. For example, one of the terms the students were required to define was voter turnout. I believed the students would put the basic knowledge into action and prove they understood the terms and concepts tested in the multiple-choice questions through the items they would create and their participation in the debate. I came to believe using methods that depended on textbook reading or teacher lecture occasionally could be beneficial to the students. According to the Buck Institute for Education (2015) “the heart of a project… is a problem to investigate and solve, or a question to explore and answer” (p. 2). This assignment provided the students with information that would be valuable as they constructed their understanding of the political topics for debate.

My students were reluctant to read material to increase their content knowledge throughout the class. The Elections project provided the students with an opportunity to investigate topics they selected. This motivation led many of the students to conduct their own research and read information on the five topics selected by the class to provide for the exam. Farkas and Jang (2019), conducted a study designed to implement a literacy program for adolescent learners. In the study one of the themes that emerged that supported increased ability to read, understand, and remember text was attributed to the ability to choose their own books (Farkas & Jang, 2019). Providing my students with the choice of the topics to investigate increased the amount of reading most of the students engaged in throughout the course of the project.

**Debate**

On the seventh instructional day, my students were required to participate in the primary debate. Each student was provided with a chance to share their campaign advertisement and then
address their stance on the first topic of debate, abortion. As each student presented their political ads the other students listen inventively. Six of the advertisements resulted in student laughter in relationship to a slogan or smear campaign tactic.

As each student shared their views on abortion the room became silent. As the students paused to make a point, I could hear the clock ticking. All the students shared their views voluntarily. One student who speaks rarely in class made a passionate speech about his perspective on abortion. Over the three minutes, he spoke his voice quivered and his eyes began to water. The students listened and made eye contact; no one harassed the student or commented on his emotional state. On the other side of the room a student shared their perspective and after two minutes he paused to gather himself, to prevent crying.

As other students shared their opinions rebuttals occurred, but the students always showed respect. Responses started three times with, “I understand some people have different views, but I believe.” After 31 minutes every student shared his or her view and eleven students provided additional commentary and rebuttals. The remaining 15 minutes in class the students transitioned to address the topic of gun control. Of the 22 members in class three students spoke about the importance of protecting their second amendment rights. The 19 other members of the class communicated their belief that guns should be restricted in some way. One student commented that three hundred mass shootings have occurred in the United States, and other students started providing numbers and statistics to support their points. The bell rang as the last student remaining concluded her statement on banning assault rifles.

As the students left class, two things entered my mind. The first was that every student participated today and appeared to be engaged in listening to their peers. The actions of the class validated the claims of Hmelo-Silver (2004) that state the collaborative nature of PBL pushes
students to learn how to work together and develop collaborative skills. The second thought I had was that the students conducted themselves in a more respectful way than what they would observe in the actual Presidential debate. I wondered what factors led to the students communicating so effectively while maintaining the respect of everyone in the classroom. If all of the students had the same views, I could understand a reduced need for argument or the dispute of quotes, but abortion had divided the class and evoked passionate responses from 14 of the 22 students.

On the second day of the debates, my focus was to provide more time to each of the topics and provide an opportunity for the students to vote. I decided that covering three topics would rush students through their responses and detract from an authentic dialogue that encouraged the students to work through challenges and disagreements. I decided to eliminate the topic of terrorism. Maher (1988) claimed, “that modification is a cyclical process of design, testing, and revision as teachers learn more about what works and what does not work according to their perceptions of classroom needs” (p. 297). I made the decision to eliminate the fifth topic because I believed the topic to be less controversial among my students. I overheard students talking in class the previous days about the topics, and I did not notice much differentiation in how they planned to address terrorism.

With the elimination of the fifth topic, I allocated 22 minutes for the class to discuss immigration and the same amount of time to discuss environmental conservation. The students continued to display good manners and respect for others as they raised hands and took turns speaking. I was pleased that they were conscious of others’ feelings but slightly disappointed a heated exchange between two students did not erupt to create a more authentic feel. The class was most passionate about issues surrounding environmentalism. One student spoke out against
single-use plastics and how detrimental they are. “Global warming is real!” one student shouted. The room fell silent in what I perceived to be an agreement with the statement. The strongest form of protest came from the same student who participated frequently in the discussion to defend the pro-life position. He stated climate change is a problem but it’s not as urgent as people think, because the U.S. has made good progress in carbon emissions. As the students voluntarily spoke on the topics I listened and recorded when a student participated. When I noticed that the conversation was stalling, I informed three students that I had not heard from them. This hint inspired those students to share their viewpoints. I believed this action aligned to the direction of Barrows (1986) that, “Teachers should neither be overly directive nor fail to offer guidance” (p. 485). With two minutes remaining in class, every student had shared their perspectives on immigration and the environment. I instructed the students to vote for a person in the class that they would like to represent the class in the Presidential election. I forbid the students from voting for themselves. The students wrote the name of the person they voted for on a card and brought it to me, so I could determine if they were voting for themselves. The bell rang as I organized the notecards into piles. Eight students remained in class to determine the winner. Five students received one vote and two students received eight votes. One student was absent, so I knew I had received all the ballots.

The students who remained in my classroom were concerned about the tie vote. Both students receiving eight votes anxiously stared at the notecards and awaited my response. I told the students that we would have a primary debate the next day and allow the two candidates to voice their opinions on all five topics. On the spot adjustments of plans and curriculum has been identified by Saye (1998) as an element that affects the willingness and ability to tolerate the practice of inquiry learning. I didn’t mind adjusting my plans to help the students have a more
authentic experience that would hopefully create a memorable learning activity. Adjusting my plans to create an opportunity to continue the debate the next day I thought would be a fair process. It segued into my instructional plans because the next day I had planned to use as a project work day. The students were excited about the opportunity and hurried out the door.

I was slightly irritated that a student missed the debate. She could have cast the deciding ballot and she missed an opportunity to discuss controversial issues with her peers. Student absences are common occurrences at the school. I believe this to be partially because the majority of students and their parents are apathetic in their approach to education. The other problem is the district has not developed an enforceable discipline plan that would require students to attend school in order to pass classes. In just over four months of school, the 144 students I had in all of my classes accumulated 728 absences. I began to think about how the student would communicate her perspectives to earn points for the project. I was irritated that she would not experience the project as it was designed and decided to have the student write a position paper that addressed all five topics the students voted to discuss. This experience would allow her to communicate her views but I know that I will need to find a more efficient way to address absences during the debate in the future.

For the third consecutive day of debates, I decided to change the configuration of the room slightly. The candidates would stand in the front of the room side by side and address the questions of their peers who remained in their desks. Segall and colleagues (2018) claim that “some kinds of formats will encourage typically quieter voices” (p.338). I wanted to feature the two candidates in a dominant role and adjusting the room helped. The class began with each student introducing themselves and announcing their platform. The students in the audience began asking questions like, “What is your plan for eliminating single-use plastics?” The
candidates brought deeper knowledge and more citations to the debate than during the previous debates and discussions. Questions were answered with the integration of numbers or statistics and a citation to reinforce credibility. The class continued to ask the candidates questions like, “What are your views on why gun-related death did not decrease despite gun bans being imposed?” Or, “How do we reduce the emissions of greenhouse gasses?”

I scanned the classroom as the candidates answered the questions and noted that 15 of the students were looking at the candidates, 2 were looking at their phones, and 1 student was reading what appeared to be a list of questions. The students continued to ask questions and the candidates began to echo each other in their responses to questions like, “What is the best way to enforce border control or, do you support Trump’s wall?” Dabach and colleagues (2018) warn “if the terms of the debate are set up in narrow ways or ways that merely repeat common ideas, students miss learning opportunities that shape their understanding” (p.308). I should have had the foresight to require the candidates to think of specific ways they would address problems or had some rules about parroting to enhance the learning opportunity. As the debate continued the room was quiet and only the candidates were talking as they offered their perspectives to 19 questions from 8 different students. The candidates were provided with one minute to deliver a concluding statement where they reviewed their positions and reasons why students should vote for them. I distributed a note card to each student and instructed them to cast their or her ballot in a copy paper box on my bookshelf. Once all the students cast their ballots, I counted the votes and announced to the class the candidate who would represent the class in the presidential debate. The sixth-period nominee would square off against the nominee from the fifth-period class in an afterschool debate. I reminded the class of the date of the afterschool debate and offered the students extra credit for attending and asking a question.
By the time I finished my announcement, the bell rang, and the students left class. Many continued to speculate on who would win the presidential debate as they proceeded down the hall to their next class. I reviewed the notes I jotted down during class as I began to think that three consecutive days of debating was too much. Lottero-Perdue (2017) suggested it is important that educators learning to enact PBL have a chance to consider what went well in a lesson and what they would change about a lesson. As I reflected on my practice, I began to realize the balance between flexibility and organized planning is very important. I believe the more frequently I use the same PBL tasks, the better I get at identifying problems and constructing solutions. I felt better about the three consecutive days of debate when I reviewed some of the questions the students asked and noticed my note that only two of the students were on their phones when I scanned the room. This led me to believe the students were interested in what their peers had to say. I wrote in my lesson plan book to debrief the election process and explain that candidates drop out along the way and eventually one person wins the party’s nomination. This process was accurately reflected through the events over the past three class periods.

Modification of Plans

I prepared for the next instructional day by modifying my lesson plans. I was a day behind my original schedule, so I decided to eliminate the in-class project work day. I combined the lesson plan I developed to teach the electoral college with the introduction to chapter 10. I started class with a bell ringer activity from C-SPAN Classroom on the electoral college. I developed the bell ringer earlier that year for C-SPAN, so I knew the content covered key concept PRD-2. A. 1. which stated, “The process and outcomes in U.S. presidential elections are impacted by Incumbency advantage phenomenon, Open and closed primaries, Caucuses, Party
conventions, Congressional and State elections, The Electoral College” (College Board, 2018, p. 16). The bell ringer contains seven video clips that run for a total of 10 minutes and the students are required to answer nine questions that ask the students to communicate their understanding of the electoral college (Swift, 2018).

After the bell ringer activity, the class participated in a guided reading activity from chapter 10. The focus of the guided reading was the possible results if spending limits were placed on campaigns (Schmidt, et al., 2012). The class then discussed why it would be difficult to limit campaign spending; how it would affect elections; and how spending affected the campaign of each in the class project. I used the discussion as a formative assessment by asking each student to communicate their views. Strutchens and Martin (2017) note “formative assessment is particularly important in the inquiry-based classroom” (p. 10). Formative assessment aids in the learning process when it provides feedback that teachers can use to modify teaching and learning activities (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004). After the discussion, each student was assigned a historical event related to elections. The students used the webpage, Money-in-Politics Timeline, to investigate historical events like Andrew Jackson’s 1829 campaign or the first federal campaign finance law in 1867 (Open Secrets, n.d.). The students summarized the event they selected then the class discussed recurring problems and potential solutions.

I thought the lesson effectively covered multiple key concepts through a variety of tasks. The students were interested in learning about the electoral college because of the 2016 election. The bell ringer addressed key concept PRD-2.B.1: that states, “the winner-take-all allocation of votes per state (except Maine and Nebraska) under the setup of the Electoral College compared with the national popular vote for president raises questions about whether the Electoral College
facilitates or impedes democracy” (College Board, 2018, p. 16). Reviewing historical campaign events helped students make a connection to challenges the country has faced since its inception.

Flexibility is an essential component in the enactment of PBL. According to Gorski (2008), who conducted a study on the enactment of PBL in a high school found,

The data described how the students and the teachers viewed their respective roles in the learning process. One emerging theme was that students and teachers agreed that their respective roles in the learning process are team oriented. The teachers and the students described that they rely on the other in their respective roles in the learning process. Each believed that the other has a stake in a successful classroom and that flexibility is essential in the role of students and teachers in the learning process (p. 94).

The dependency on the teacher-student relationship as a team was evident in my study. I took student concerns and abilities into account and modified my lessons to help the student achieve learning goals. This resulted in the modification of tasks, deadlines, and lesson plans.

**Advocacy**

During the next class meeting, I was able to follow the instructional plan I established in July. When class began, I reviewed the rubric of the project with the class. Eisner (1974) identified this task as necessary claiming “there are occasions when the teacher brings the entire class together to identify the tasks and options available” (p. 38). I thought this was a necessary task because the first major segment of the project, the debate, had been completed. The students needed to direct their attention to developing an article that communicated a political viewpoint of one of the two remaining presidential candidates and create a lobbyist proposal.

After reviewing the project rubric, I lectured to the class for 10 minutes and identified five terms the chapter highlighted. In the lecture, I introduced issue advocacy and provided the students with a task that asked them to create an advertisement for an advocacy issue they cared
about. On the back of the advertisement, the students were required to explain why the issue was important to them and what the country could do to address the issue. Eisner claims traditional classes are “all too often devoid of significant emotional involvement” (p. 52). By asking each student to select a topic of their choice I was hoping to create an attachment between personal conviction and the assigned task.

This task helped students communicate the issues they were most passionate about and provided the presidential nominees the opportunity to identify the values of the voters. The activity helped enhance the authenticity of the project while teaching an AP key concept. Larmer (2018) claims “the project features real-world context, tasks, and tools, quality standards, or impact-or speaks to students personal concerns, interests, and issues in their lives” (p. 22).

Through the task, the students developed an understanding of key concept PMI-4 that states, “widely held political ideologies shape policy debates and choices in American politics” (College Board, 2018). The activity provided information the presidential candidates could use to strategize how they would answer questions in the presidential debate and what topics they would talk most frequently about.

**Scaffolds**

The next instructional day was on a Monday, so I started class with the mental health Monday activity. I asked each of the students to share what their biggest fear was. Dabach and her colleagues (2018) suggest “teachers establish norms and practices around the importance of safe space” (p. 311). Through an activity that encourages the students to be open, share ideas, and compliment each other, I attempted to establish an environment conducive to collaborative learning. After each student participated, we began a guided reading activity for chapter 11. Chapter 11 covers the media and cyberpolitics. I read the section to the class directing the
students to consider the effects of the media revealing all their sources. After a short discussion focused on whether identifying or protecting sources leads to more reliable news, I assigned the students 12 terms to define. The terms addressed elements of AP key concepts and would need to be applied in the journalism task required by the project. One example is the term, bias. The term relates to key concept PRD-3.B.2 that states, “the rapidly increasing demand for media and political communications outlets from an ideologically diverse audience have led to debates over media bias and the impact of media ownership and partisan news sites” (College Board, 2018). The term would be utilized during the project when the students read articles produced by members of the class on the political perspectives of the presidential candidates. This task was an appropriate scaffold that helped students acquire the knowledge necessary to complete the project. Saye and Brush (2017) claim “with appropriate scaffolding, novices may perform at a level that more closely approximates that of an expert” (p. 210). Defining the term and providing a task that required the student to work with the concept helped build knowledge required to effectively complete the journalism task.

After defining the terms, I played the Daisy, Lyndon Johnson’s presidential campaign advertisement. After we viewed the clip I asked the students how the media could affect an election. The students were directed to view at least five presidential campaign ads and draw a comic strip of the ad they believed to be most successful. The activity showed the students the power of visual media and how some ads stuck with the viewer. The activity modeled effective advertising strategies to the presidential candidates who were required to submit their commercial advertisements that night. I announced to the class the presidential debate would occur after school and if they wanted to earn extra credit they would need to come to the debate and ask a question. I thought this was an effective scaffold for the presidential candidates but
would have been more valuable to do earlier so all the students could have enacted the ideas they learned in their own campaigns. Glazewski and Ertmer (2010) claim one of the essential tasks in implementing PBL effectively is to “identify the ability of the teacher to transition students into more active, accountable roles” (p. 270). As I reflect on the lesson I believe it would have been more effective to structure this lesson earlier to create a more effective use of the material to complete the assigned tasks.

Scaffolding tasks appropriately was an important part of the enactment of the Elections PBL simulation. According to Baghoussi and El Ouchdi (2019) in their study on the implementation of PBL they found, “The teacher’s role has shifted from a spoon feeder of knowledge to a mentor, a guide and a facilitator, thus placing learners at the core of the learning process” (p. 272). In order to guide the students through the acquisition of knowledge appropriate amounts of new material should be introduced in a proper sequence. Scaffolding is associated with sociocultural learning theory; in brief, an expert learner (teacher) provides temporary support until a student masters “new skills, concepts, or . . . understanding[s]” needed to complete a task independently (Schall-Leckrone, 2018). Introducing concepts and providing opportunities for the students to practice what they learned was a key element in the development of my lesson plans.

**Presidential Debate**

As the last bell rang at 1:50 I began to set up my video camera to capture the debate. By 1:57 11 students entered the room and sat at a desk. A few moments later the presidential nominee from the sixth-period class entered the room. I directed the students to ask their questions loudly once the debate began. The fifth-period presidential nominee entered the room at 2:04 just as I was becoming concerned about his arrival.
The nominees opened the event with a statement on who they were and what their focus in office would be. The students from the fifth and sixth period who arrived to ask questions had their opportunity after the initial statements from the candidates. 11 questions were asked by nine students and each nominee had an opportunity to respond. The students asked questions that signaled they understood recent political actions. One student asked, “Do you think Trump’s travel ban is effective?” Another student asked for the candidates’ views on using tear gas at the border both recently and under the Obama administration. I thought the students asked some thought-provoking questions that challenged the nominee’s contemporary political knowledge. Muettterties (2018) claims “as students progress through an inquiry, they are grappling with a complicated matter, one that requires they make sense of a complex issue by asking questions, examining sources, and developing evidence-based conclusions” (p. 288). The presidential candidates tried hard to weave in a statistic or citation when possible and were able to do so in all but five responses. The students showed respect by not verbally attacking each other. Neither candidate directly attacked the other for a policy issue or ideology, which I felt lacked some of the authenticity of a real debate. Each candidate espoused liberal views so often their responses became echoes. The candidates concluded the debate with a closing statement on their ideology and why they would make an excellent president.

The following day in class students taped their articles on the political views of one of the candidates to the classroom wall. I instructed the students to participate in a gallery walk to read at least five of the articles displayed around the room. I wanted the students to be exposed to a variety of information about each of the candidates. Tavares (2018) claims

The United States also has high levels of school-based and residential segregation and many of us exist inside invisible bubbles created by our media choices and reinforced by the homogenous communities where we live. Often, our schools are
inside those bubbles too. Teachers can intentionally create bridges across communities… by thinking about how they integrate different voices (p. 262).

I believed this task would help expose the students to multiple perspectives of each of the candidates. The students were instructed to produce accurate information or write yellow journalism of a candidate’s political perspectives. The opportunity provided the students with a way to determine the bias some articles contained and question the reliability of the articles. I felt that this task effectively helped my students develop the skills necessary to become an informed democratic citizen.

After the gallery walk, I distributed a notecard to each student and asked them to watch the debate to determine whom they would vote for. On one side of the card they would write the name of the presidential candidate and on the back, they would write three reasons why they voted for that person. I thought this task would keep the students more engaged in watching the debate. Initially, all the students were focused on the debate but after 15 minutes, I noticed two students being entertained by their phones. After I redirected the students I returned to my desk and scanned the room. I noticed 20 of the 21 students were looking at the screen. After 30 minutes, three students were no longer engaged in viewing the debate and began a side conversation. I paused the debate and asked the students to focus on the remaining argument. Three minutes later the debate concluded. Watching the debate in class would have been more effective if I had included a task to keep the students engaged in the film or paused the debate and led the class in a discussion about the responses of the candidates. Stoddard (2015) claims, thoughtful practice takes advantage of the medium of film and combines it with pedagogy that asks students to examine concepts or issues.

I thought the presidential debate was a good way to model the political process. If the presidential nominees had produced a commercial advertisement to show prior to the debate the
activity would have been more effective. I understood why several students lost focus during the debate. I thought the presidential nominees could have been more passionate and entertaining, but I should have developed a graphic organizer that would have encouraged students to be more involved in the political exchange. The next time I enact this project I will develop a document that helps the students take notes to clarify the political candidates position on issues throughout the debate. This document would allow the students to analyze the positions of the candidates after the debate and reflect on their political stances. As class ended, the students dropped their ballots in the printer paper box near the door as the bell rang. Six students waited for me to count the ballots and announce the winner. I had already counted the ballots from the fifth-period class so within a few moments I was able to announce that the presidential nominee from the fifth-period class won the election.

I believe the presidential debate provided and valuable opportunity for my students to develop a position and support their thoughts with evidence. Duhaylongsod (2017) conducted research on students in a middle school social studies class during a lesson that utilized debate. Duhaylongsod (2017) coded students’ comments in two themes, argumentative and quality of grounds. The students in the study displayed higher than anticipated abilities to support their comments using textual evidence 37.6% of the time and connected evidence to their claims 20.3% of the time (Duhaylongsod, 2017). Duhaylongsod’s (2017) research provided evidence that students can participate in a debate in a way that would allow students to communicate perspectives and support their claims with evidence. My students who participated in the presidential election were able to support their claims and respond to questions from the class throughout the debate.
Project Completion

I noticed early in the unit I was going to need more instructional days for the students to work on the project in class and present material. I modified my lesson plans to combine the activities originally planned for multiple days to be covered in one class period. After the students listened to the presidential debate and voted there were three instructional days remaining in the unit. On the first of the three remaining days, I had the students work in groups of three to read a section of the text. After reading the students created a poster with 10 bullet points to summarize the section, defined any bolded vocabulary words from the section, and they created a picture that enhanced others’ understanding of the content. As the students completed their posters, they taped them on the classroom walls. Each student then recorded five points from each group’s poster. As the class worked, the fifth-period student who won the election entered the room dressed in a suit accompanied by another student dressed in a suit and wearing sunglasses. The President addressed the class by thanking them for their votes and told them he was eager to start working for them. I had no knowledge the student was planning on making an appearance, but it reconfirmed my belief that PBL can motive students and create lasting learning experiences. With the remaining time in class, the students finished gathering five facts from each poster and turned in their notes.

The lesson helped engage the students reading the textbook, which seven of the students admitted they don’t do at home. The lesson helped the students cover all three chapters from the unit. Each group synthesized five pages of the text and communicated what they believed were the most essential items. As the students collected notes from each poster they were exposed to important concepts from the unit. I thought the lesson was valuable in helping the students
review the material and provided information the students would need to craft their lobbyist proposal.

With two days remaining prior to the test over the unit, I provided the students with an in-class project work day. I began by reviewing the lobbyist proposal task from the project rubric, then I provided the students with time to work. Hmelo-Silver and Barrows (2006) claim self-directed learning, critical thinking, and self-reflection are essential parts of PBL. As the students began to work I recorded all 22 students present, so I announced that each student who was absent on a day of the debate would need to write a position paper to communicate their political ideology on the five topics the class selected. I provided a rubric for the position paper and listed the five topics to cover.

The class then utilized the computers or their phones to investigate advocacy issues to help craft their proposals. As the students were working, I read two pages from the textbook to the students about strategies interest groups take. I decided to do this because my students knew they would be submitting their proposal to the class president to review and he would select the proposal of his choice. I did not see or hear of any students meeting privately with the president to discuss their proposal, inviting the president to a social function to communicate their goal, providing either presidential candidate with information about the perspectives of the voters, or suppling nominations for the vice president.

I wanted to inform the students on the actions lobbyists took to be effective and encourage the students to take some of these steps prior to the conclusion of the project. My efforts were an example of what Saye and Brush (2002) refer to as soft scaffolding, an element essential in the enactment of PBL. “Teachers provide soft scaffolding when they engage learners in supportive dialogue based on their diagnoses of immediate learner difficulties (Saye & Brush,
Unfortunately, I did not notice any student take advantage of the information I shared and none of the students utilized the knowledge in a way that was advantageous for their project.

On the final instructional day, the students presented their lobbyist proposals and advertisements to the class. Each student was provided with five minutes to communicate an issue that was important to them and how the allocation of one million dollars would help their cause. The first student to present, quoted the class president’s own words from the debate to reconfirm the importance of the issue and reminded the president he had already spoken on the importance of the topic. This proposal did a great job using the information from the debate to encourage the president to favor that proposal. As each student presented their work, the president asked follow-up questions. The president asked questions about the feasibility of project proposals and potential plans, and whether the lobbyist considered the impact of the project. Student responses often indicated they had a limited understanding of what could be done with one million dollars. As each member of the class communicated their proposal, I noticed 18 of the students engaged in the presentation, three students on a phone, and one student on a computer. After the presentations, the president announced the lobbyist proposal he selected to fund. Because each student did not use the full five minutes of time provided to them the class was able to finish in one period.

I was impressed by the questions the president asked and thought it added an element that brought more authenticity to the task. I was not planning to have the president in class participate in the proposal process, but I think it enhanced the project. Eisner (1974) claimed the demands on the teacher who is promoting active inquiry tasks is “considerably more complex since they require an ability to improvise” (p. 32). In this case, I was able to adapt to the ability
of the president to join the class and allow him to guide the discussion. All the students presented material, but I noticed four students who appeared to be off task during the presentations. I noted in my lesson plans to require the class to take notes and to describe a proposal they would support and explain why. By adding this task, it would help keep the students more engaged in listening to multiple proposals. Despite recognizing there were things I would do differently the next time I enacted the project I believed the students participated in a simulation that helped them learn the AP key concepts in a way that was fun and eventful.

Themes

Three themes emerged as I reflected on my experience of enacting project-based learning. The first was the need to cross-reference project tasks with AP key concepts. The second theme that emerged was the need to remain flexible. The third theme was the ability to communicate effectively with my administration and students.

Larmer (2018) claims project-based learning should be designed around a challenging problem or question. “Today’s standards call for more than teaching factual knowledge and discreet skills” (Larmer, 2018, p. 20). Halvorsen and colleagues (2018) discuss the importance of developing “the content and skills and the tasks that would support the creation of the final project and align with standards” (p. 25). Due to time constriction in the AP course, I felt I had to align tasks to content that would be on the AP exam. I attempted to develop tasks for the project that addressed a concept.

After reading the description of the five tasks identified by Parker and Lo in the Elections project, I had an idea of the major elements of the project. I searched for a key concept related to the project and identified PRD-2.A to be relevant. PRD-2.A states, “Explain how the different processes work in a U.S. presidential election” (College Board, 2018, p. 16). I developed a more
detailed description of what I required my students to do. Each student would participate in the primary campaign by presenting their perspective on five political issues the students selected. I wanted my students to understand the presidential election occurs in several stages. I wanted every student to participate in the primary election because it would require them to campaign and prepare for a debate. I wanted to narrow the field by reducing the student participants to two nominees from each class to symbolize the candidate who drops out of a race. The participation of two candidates in a class debate simulated the process of a candidate winning the party nomination. The final debate between the nominee of fifth and sixth-period classes symbolized the presidential debate.

To address key concept PRD-2.D that states, “explain how campaign organizations and strategies affect the election process” (College Board, 2018, p. 37) I required each student to create a campaign advertisement. Most students created several posters to hang in my classroom, but students were encouraged to use any form of media they chose. As students conducted their campaigns it allowed a discussion to develop in class that related to key concept PRD-2.D.1, the benefits, and drawbacks of modern campaigns are represented by: dependence on professional consultants; rising campaign costs and intensive fundraising efforts; duration of election cycles; impact of and reliance on social media for campaign communication; and fundraising (College Board, 2018, p. 37). The project exposed the students to the difficulty of campaigning and why a candidate would hire a professional consultant. The students were required to buy any items for the project, they wished which helped the students understand the need to fundraise.

Because I required the students to vote in the primary election and allowed them to select any candidate they chose it helped the students cover a part of key concept PRD-2.A.1 that focuses on open and closed primaries. Key concept PRD-2.A.1 states, “the process and outcomes
in U.S. presidential elections are impacted by: incumbency advantage phenomenon, open and closed primaries, caucuses, party conventions, Congressional and State elections, and The Electoral College” (College Board, 2018, p. 37). After the students voted I was able to provide them an example of how a closed primary would have changed the process of the election in our class.

Students who did not advance as nominees to the presidential election were assigned an additional task to create an article on a political viewpoint of a nominee still in the race. This task addressed key concept PRD-3: “the various forms of media provide citizens with political information and influence the ways in which they participate politically” (College Board, 2018, p. 38). The student completed a gallery walk to read the articles other students produced on the actions and benefits of the presidential nominees which activity helped address the key concept PRD-3.B: “explain how increasingly diverse choices of media and communication outlets influence political institutions and behavior” (College Board, 2018, p. 38).

After I announced the presidential nominee to the few students who remained in class after the bell, I noticed they texted and sent Instagram messages to other members of the class with the results. When the students arrived in class the next day the class already knew who the presidential nominee was, and their actions provided an opportunity to explain key concept PRD-3.A.1. PRD-3.A.1 states, “traditional news media, new communication technologies, and advances in social media have profoundly influenced how citizens routinely acquire political information, including new events, investigative journalism, election coverage, and political commentary” (College Board, 2018, p. 38).

I exposed students to key concept PMI-5.F: “explain how variation in types and resources of interest groups affects their ability to influence elections and policy making” (College Board,
2018, p. 37). Through the creation of a lobbyist proposal, I created the task to provide students with an opportunity to influence the election and understand the importance of issue advocacy. The implementation of this task needs to be reordered because of the way the project flowed. It did not allow students to influence elections.

The second theme that emerged was the need to be flexible. It is important to realize no project will ever be perfect and adjustments will need to be made in advance of enactment, during, and after. The research of Halvorsen and colleagues (2018) “found that teachers made their own modifications to unit plans that appeared to help them effectively teach” (p. 61). The lesson plans I completed in July helped me develop project tasks related to key concepts. During the enactment of the Elections project, it became necessary to modify those lesson plans. My students were able to participate in two great opportunities that directly related to the project the week before introduction because I adjusted my lesson plans. My students were able to learn from the campaign experiences of Kathleen Peters and then board the C-SPAN bus to learn about the role of the media in campaigns.

After introducing the project, I decided to move a scheduled project work day back a day to allow the students to complete a lesson on presidential campaign ads. This was necessary because after three days my students had not developed campaign ads and I believed they needed information that would help them develop their advertisements. Viewing the video clips of historical presidential campaigns exposed students to strategies they could apply to their campaigns.

In order to provide more flexibility later in the unit, I combined the lesson plans I had for the 10th and 11th instructional day. I believed the reinforcement activities could be shortened allowing the concepts from each day to be introduced in one lesson. I took the same action to
combine the lessons I had planned for the fourteenth and fifteenth instructional days. Combining lessons allowed me to create two instructional days; one that would compensate for a day previously used for an additional debate day and the other that would provide a project work day later in the unit. I was able to foresee the need for students to work in class to complete the final tasks of the project. I identified the need by reviewing the amount of work my students completed for the first tasks of the project independently.

Combining lessons created flexibility through the establishment of additional instructional days and changing the order of tasks was equally important. After I introduced the project, I believed my students needed an immersive experience to identify the concepts associated with an election and campaigns. I decided to move the lesson plan I had constructed for the third day of the unit to the second day to provide the students an opportunity to play the game, *Win the White House*. This experience helped the students understand the multiple elements of campaigning and simulated the process they would simulate as part of the project. I moved the presidential debate and election day earlier in the unit than what I had scheduled in July. The presidential debate was conducted after school of the 12th instructional day. Moving this task up four instructional days allowed the president to play a role in the lobbyist proposal task.

The third theme that emerged was the ability to communicate effectively with my administration and students. On the project introduction day, I provided my students with an opportunity to select the topics they would like to discuss. This opportunity increased their motivation to complete the project. “With respect to authenticity, problems in PBL must be designed with an awareness of students’ background knowledge, interests, or future interests” (Lottero-Perdue, 2017, p. 109). The students identified topics they were passionate about and as
a result participation was high and the debate took more time than what I initially planned. I wanted each student to present their perspectives and communicate effectively in the class debate which required flexibility in adding an additional day for debate. The students wanted to use the in-class project work day on the fifth instructional day to talk with their peers about campaign slogans. Initially, I wanted the students to work independently but as I saw the students communicating, I noticed their conversations were focused on the project and provided valuable feedback to their peers.

Flexibility with lesson plans, tasks, and students’ requests was an important part of enacting the Elections project. It was important to access the curriculum covered, student mastery, and remaining instructional time. The three elements had to be reflected upon during each class period and appropriate action taken to help the students participate in an authentic learning task.

The first step in enacting the project was to create an authentic experience by matching project tasks with AP key concepts. This was necessary to ensure the students’ learning experience would help prepare them to master the material covered on the AP exam. As I reviewed the project description, I highlighted the key concepts that related to a project task. I linked key concepts and project tasks to help create an experience that had authenticity for the students.

I identified ten AP key concepts related to project tasks the students were required to complete. The standards addressed in the project include,

- **PRD-2.A.1** The process and outcomes in U.S. presidential elections are impacted by: Incumbency advantage phenomenon, Open and closed primaries, Caucuses, Party conventions, Congressional and State elections, and The Electoral College.
- **PRD-2.B.1**: the winner-take-all allocation of votes per state (except Maine and Nebraska) under the setup of the Electoral College compared with the national popular vote for president raises questions about whether the Electoral College
facilitates or impedes democracy. PRD-2.D Explain how campaign organizations and strategies affect the election process. PRD-2.D.1 The benefits and drawbacks of modern campaigns are represented by: Dependence on professional consultants, Rising campaign costs and intensive fundraising efforts, Duration of election cycles, Impact of and reliance on social media for campaign communication and fundraising. PRD-3: The various forms of media provide citizens with political information and influence the ways in which they participate politically. PRD-3.A.1 Traditional news media, new communication technologies, and advances in social media have profoundly influenced how citizens routinely acquire political information, including new events, investigative journalism, election coverage, and political commentary. PRD-3.B: Explain how increasingly diverse choices of media and communication outlets influence political institutions and behavior. MPA- 3.C. The roles that individual choice and state laws play in voter turnout in elections. PMI-4 Widely held political ideologies shape policy debates and choices in American politics. PMI-5.F: Explain how variation in types and resources of interest groups affects their ability to influence elections and policy making (College Board, 2018, p. 37 + 38).

Aligning project tasks and key concepts was an essential part of enacting the Elections project in class. Time is a scarce resource in my class and having a purposeful pedagogy justified the time required for the project. Swan and colleagues (2018) claim “inquiry necessarily takes longer than direct instruction and this can be problematic for teachers struggling at find time to cover the breadth of content outlined in most social studies courses” (p. 133).

The alignment of project tasks and AP key concepts enhanced communication with administrators and students. Effective communication emerged as the third theme of the enactment of project-based learning. I was fortunate to have an opportunity to meet with two assistant principals in the spring prior to planning my course. In the meeting, we discussed our thoughts on effective instructional methods and active student learning and I was able to communicate how project-based learning tasks could address standards within the prescribed curriculum in a way I believed was more memorable. Both administrators promoted project-based learning and were supportive of my ideas of enacting project-based learning in my AP courses. Their positive reinforcement and encouragement inspired me to enact more PBL tasks in
my courses. According to the research of Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) “teachers who perceived more support from their district were more likely to promote student voice and to have more positive feelings about classroom deliberations” (p. 325). The summer following my discussion with the two assistant principals, one of them was promoted to the principal position. In July, I was able to review my students’ results on the AP exam. The students’ scores on the AP exam were lower than in years prior, so I emailed my principal to share the results and ask her perspective of the continuation of project-based learning. I asked if she would prefer that I devote more instructional time to teacher-led work and reduced the number of projects. Her response was to keep using innovative methods in my classroom that help all students master difficult material. Eisner (1974) communicated the importance of the attitude and educational values of the leader of the school and how their attitude serves as a role for teachers to emulate. My principal communicated her belief in the effectiveness of project-based learning and thanked me for working to support the students at the school. As a result, I felt supported and motivated to continue to use PBL in my AP classes.

After I received the principal’s email, I emailed the assistant principal who evaluates me. I communicated my desire to continue to use project-based learning in my classroom and that I would hold students more accountable for their work to raise their AP scores. Once I returned to school in the fall I met with the assistant principal and spoke to her about the projects I had planned for the school year and how each project related to AP key concepts. She was receptive to the ideas I communicated and confirmed her belief in student-centered work. I started the school year with the support and understanding of the administration. This reduced my worries about justifying project workdays if an administrator would happen to enter my classroom during the year. Eisner (1974) wrote about what a person might observe in an inquiry-based classroom
claiming one might have “a difficult time locating the teacher” and they might hear “a hum of activity, noisier than the more traditional classroom” (p. 24). Because I knew the methods, I chose to use in my class would be supported I was less worried about portraying my class as well organized or teacher-led.

Effective communication was helpful in improving the enactment of the Elections project with administrators but even more essential in the communication with the students in the class. I wanted the students to have a clear understanding of the tasks required for the project. To communicate the project goals, I printed each student a descriptive rubric and projected it on the Smartboard. As each student reviewed the rubric, I read each item to the class, provided examples, and answered any questions. Strutchens and Martin (2017) write about the importance of setting clear learning goals and communicating them effectively. I referenced the rubric two other times during the course of the project. As the students focused on different project tasks, I reviewed each element and checked for understanding. During project work days I projected the rubric on the front board.

I believe I was effective in communicating the required tasks of the project to the students and my communication with the students expanded beyond the required tasks. I took time twice a week to ask the students how the project was going, what they needed, and what I could do to help. Eisner (1974) claims that teaching is “an educational venture; it had to do with motivation” (p. 26). I had frequent opportunities to motivate students and to answer questions, and many students took advantage of these opportunities. Some of the students would ask for clarification of the task. For example, one student asked, whether he needed one poster or two. Several students communicated the need to work on the project in class because they wanted to see if their ideas for campaign ads were funny. Rarely, a student would directly ask for help; so,
engaging in a conversation about the project with each student helped me identify ways I could help each one.

Through open communication with the students, I was able to identify their needs and act accordingly. The open communication in the class between the students and the teacher was enhanced through intentional activities to encourage dialogue. I used an activity I called Mental health Monday to encourage the students to communicate their thoughts or ideas to the class. I proposed a question to the class and each student responded. This opportunity allowed me to learn more about each student and the students learned more about each other. Dabach and colleagues (2018) communicate the importance of cultivating personal relationships to create an open dialogue in the classroom. Fostering relationship building through communication was essential for this project because the students were required to communicate with the class in the debates.

The ability to maintain flexibility, cross reference project tasks and key concepts, and effectively communicate were essential steps of enactment of project-based learning in my AP American Government and Politics course. I had to be willing to adjust my lesson plans to suit the needs of my students, and to take advantage of educational opportunities like C-SPAN. Aligning project tasks with key concepts helped identify important elements to teach the students and justify spending instructional time on the project. Through clear communication with the administration and students, I was able to receive the support I needed and provide my students with the support they required to enact project-based learning.

Conclusion

The selection of a qualitative descriptive case study was an appropriate choice for this research project. Using Kolb’s experiential learning theory for this study, I revisited the
framework and concentrated on each of the stages: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. The theoretical framework helped guide me through the process of enacting the Elections project in my classroom. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I was able to explain the steps I took as a teacher to enact PBL in my AP American Government and Politics class. The purpose of the study was to identify the challenges and obstacles a teacher faces to enact a new teaching method into the classroom. I believe this research will add to the existing knowledge of PBL and has the potential to help educators take steps to enact PBL tasks into their curriculum.
Chapter 5:
Student Perceptions

Data Collection

The design of data collection included three semi-structured video elicitation interviews with each of the four participants. The interview questions were designed to generate data that would help answer the second research question: How do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and perceive enactment of PBL? As I analyzed the data, I referenced the research questions, purpose, and theoretical framework to guide me through the decision-making process (Saldana, 2009). I used constant comparative analysis as I reviewed the data collected. The students’ perceptions of PBL was gathered through semi-structured interviews and then transcribed. I used open coding to analyze the transcription from each of the interviews. Thomas said, “Open coding is the first stage, going through the data, examining it, comparing one part with another and begin to make categorizations” (2016, p. 210). I used axial coding to determine how ideas were connected. I then used selective coding to determine a core category to validate the construction of themes.

Within-Case Analysis

I completed a within-case analysis for each of the four participants. In each within-case analysis, the participants’ data were treated as a comprehensive case. Each of the participants’ responses to the three sets of interview questions is provided, including examples of direct quotes from each student. The within-case analyses were written using strategies proposed by
Creswell (2007) for narrative research. The four within-case analyses identified are examined through themes that emerged from the analysis of all interviews. Two themes emerged from the data, the first was a level of interest in the project due to students’ ability to make choices, and the second theme that emerged was that students wanted to know the perspectives of their peers.

**Within-Case Analysis for James**

In the initial interview after the project introduction, James Dean communicated that he liked projects.

I like projects, it gives people a chance to do something different than every day learning something out of a book, or just a lecture and here is a test. It fills a void it is kind of nice to have a project (Dean, Project introduction interview, 2018).

James explained the Elections project as a process where, “we’re electing a president, so people have to run, or campaign; people are campaigning against each other. You can run ad campaigns. So, it’s pretty interesting” (Dean, 2018). Part of what made the project interesting was the opportunity for students to choose the topics to debate. Crowley and King (2018) claim “inquiry-based practices position students as creators of knowledge and, when appropriate, allow students to pursue questions that are important to their lives and that touch upon important disciplinary knowledge” (p. 15). As the students were developing a list of topics to consider for the debate, James suggested taxes. “I just think it would be interesting and something different” (Dean, 2018). James was one of 11 students to suggest a topic for debate.

Everybody was pretty interested especially since it was going to be topics of the debate. You don’t want to choose topics that as a class nobody is interested in. So, I think as a class the students were interested in chiming in to be able to hear topics, they wanted to be debated (Dean, 2018).

Allowing the students to vote helped give everyone a voice.

I like how we got to vote because if a teacher just said you are going to work on this, this, and this it might get a little boring because there might not be interest in it but this way there was interest generated because we chose…” (Dean, 2018).
James’ suggested topic of taxes was not selected by the class, but he approved of the topics the class selected.

I think they are interesting, but I think they are ones that are talked about a lot, that are kind of controversial because I think our class likes controversial issues. I think it should be pretty interesting (Dean, 2018).

The ability of students to make decisions throughout the project continued once the topics for the debate were selected. Students had to decide what type of campaign they would run, how they would market themselves, and what advertisements they would develop. According to Larmer (2018), student choice is an essential competent of PBL. James decided to run a slander campaign using memes. “You see a meme and you want to talk about it because sometimes it can be funny. I think that will attract a lot of people’s attention” (Dean, 2018). Other students responded to James’ slander campaign in several ways. “They liked it or they tried to slander me so it was like a commercial like an ad campaign” (Dean, 2018). James was conflicted on how to balance his campaign strategy to incorporate his political ideology and get laughs from the class. “I tried to make my campaign ads like funny, but it was harder to incorporate more substance” (Dean, 2018). Students determined what to put in their ads and how many to make although, only one campaign ad was required for full credit on the project. PBL has been proven to increase student motivation (Hmelo-Silver, 2014). “I made quite a few” (Dean, 2018). When I asked James why he decided to make multiple ads his response was, “if I made multiple it would look better, like more involved” (Dean, 2018).

Beyond the decisions that faced each student on how they would conduct their campaign, they had to decide how to conduct the research required to help them become informed of the issues the class decided to use in debate. The research tasks a vital part of the Elections project and a goal of project-based learning. Brush and Saye (2017) claim, “the term project-based
emphasizes activities in which students engage in deep, disciplined inquiry” (p. ix). “Most of the information I gather is from the internet but not just unreliable sources like Wikipedia. I read the rulings and stuff on Roe v. Wade” (Dean, 2018). I asked what website he used to review the Supreme Court Case, James responded by stating, “it was a government website but I don’t remember where” (Dean, 2018). His response alerted me to the importance of requiring the students to include references the next time I enact the Elections project. The student admitted he gathered information to learn more about each topic prior to debating each issue. “I want more facts and stuff and I wrote down the history of each subject, so I could have a better background and understanding of it” (Dean, 2018). James claimed that he gathered research from multiple sources. “I actually went to multiple news networks” (Dean, 2018). James learned skills through the task to identify sources, analyze content, and organize data to help him make a claim.

Barrows (1986) identified that the development of “self-directed learning skills as one of the educational objectives possible with PBL” (p. 482). Through the research the student conducted, he was introduced to information that shaped his perspectives.

I am looking at things and other issues around me and I am not looking to anyone of looking at the same issues at any time, I am just doing my own research and findings out what I think about the issues myself (Dean, 2018).

James specifically spoke of how the Paris climate agreement changed his perspectives on environmentalism. “I didn’t know we had to pledge 100 million dollars until I researched it and I said wow! That is a substantial amount of money” (Dean, 2018).

Through the research process, the student examined the five issues the class selected to investigate. The students had to determine what information they would share at the debate and how they would communicate their thoughts. James communicated his thoughts on preparing for the debate “excited, a little bit nervous, not too nervous but for the debate part making sure I
have my stuff together” (Dean, 2018). James also noted how the message was presented was equally important to what was presented.

You have to be careful if you're trying to get votes you don’t say anything that is necessarily going to come back to haunt you. You definitely have to be careful what you say and how you say it because people really pay attention to that (Dean, 2018).

Each student had to choose what message he would communicate and how he would communicate that message.

Perhaps, the most important choice that the students had to make was how they managed their time. Time management is an essential skill learned through the course of completing PBL tasks (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). The students had two project workdays in class that allowed them to work on any aspect of the project. Work outside of the classroom was required and student planning and decision making were vital to completing the tasks required to complete the Elections project. During the project workdays, I tried to help the students utilize their time effectively by requiring each student to complete an individual project work analysis document. The graphic organizer asked the students to identify the AP key concept related to their project, two research objectives, the topic of investigation, an action step, and the data source. The graphic organizer has space for the students to communicate their research findings and provide a summary of the project development task they completed. When asked about the individual project work analysis document James claimed, “I thought it was good and helped you figure out what to do” (Dean, 2018). The students had the ability to use the time provided in class on two occasions. James used the time on the first project work day to make campaign ads. “I was working to make a campaign ad so I was looking at the pictures I had of the people I wanted to slander to see if I could align them with my ads” (Dean, 2018). James reflected on the project work days as effective use of time. “It was definitely helpful, I definitely got campaign ads done,
I got a lot done and hung a lot up. Basically, I worked on the campaign ads the whole day, I didn’t do my research until yesterday” (Dean, 2018). Providing opportunities for investigation helped students take responsibility for their own learning (Yadav, Subedi, Lundeberg, & Bunting, 2011). James’ decision to work on the campaign ads in class was effective from his perspective because he was able to get peer feedback on his ideas and he intentionally conducted research at home to increase his ability to focus. “I did more work on the campaign ads during class but the actual research itself outside of class independently. I just looked through the sources and formulated my own opinion” (Dean, 2018).

James claimed that the project increased the amount of time he was required to spend preparing for the class.

Yeah, I would say definitely an increased workload because there are so many things to think about. Between the campaign ads and the actual research, itself, you need to gather a lot of research, so you are actually presenting more factual information than just an opinion (Dean, 2018).

Despite the increased amount of work, he thought the completion of the tasks would be possible. “I never really became overwhelmed, but I became aware I would have to do more work than just say I support this or I support that” (Dean, 2018). Hmelo-Silver (2004) claims project-based learning should be “moderately challenging without being overwhelming” (p. 241). James’ comment affirmed the project tasks were within the student’s zone of proximal development. Part of James’s positive attitude toward the unit happened because he found the project to be interesting.

I never really had a project like this, like an election where you are running, and I would say think it was exciting, I said that before but I think it was an exciting task to complete because it was different it wasn’t a normal project (Dean, 2018).
Because the task was able to capture the interests of the students it allowed the students to complete more work and allowed them to have fun in the process. James stated you could have fun within this project.

It wasn’t just research this and write a paper. There was so much more that went into it like the campaign, the journalism, looking at what goes on in an election, campaign spending, and certain issues that are controversial or issues that candidates talk about a lot (Dean, 2018).

The project featured real world tasks that created a sense of authenticity, an element essential to the construction of project-based learning (Larmer, 2018). Those tasks helped motivate James to complete the project.

James found the opportunity to learn more about his peers’ perspectives to be interesting and fun. The second theme that emerged from the interviews with James was his desire to learn about the political perspectives of his peers. According to Segall and colleagues (2018) “students benefit by learning about argumentation and evidence use, examining their own thinking about an issue, listening to others, and developing experience in speaking to those with whom they disagree- all essential skills for citizenship education” (336). After the project introduction, James’ initial thoughts of the project were that it was “pretty interesting and then, ah, being a little scary, debating lots of people [who] have different ideas but I thought it was going to be fun” (Dean, 2018). When asked what was scary about the opportunity to debate his peers James stated,

You don’t want to offend anyone, but I think everyone’s views are a little different. Not so much scary maybe a little challenging because you don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings just because your opinions are different (Dean, 2018).

Awareness of the feelings of the other students was demonstrated throughout the project. “I want to respect their opinion[s]. I think we get along as a class, so everyone is excited to debate against each other” (Dean, 2018). Building trust and cultivating relationships between the
members is an essential part of teaching controversial topics in the classroom (Dabach, Merchant, & Fones, 2018). I was able to do this by having the students participate in weekly activities to build relationships. The activity exposed students to the thoughts and perspectives their peers had on numerous issues and helped cultivate a more informed and caring classroom culture.

James was excited to hear different opinions from his classmates. “We all have our different opinions and we’re going to be sharing them. Really I think it’s going to make everyone look at each other’s opinions and not shut them down but look at them with open ears and listen” (Dean, 2018). Developing a classroom community that values listening is the first step to enacting the discussion of controversial issues (Segall, Crocco, Halvorsen, & Jacobsen, 2018). I promote this behavior starting on the first day of school. I require the students to be respectful of others when they are talking, and I enforce that rule through the year with positive reinforcement and disciplinary action when students do not adhere to the rule. The students had opportunities to learn about the views of their peers throughout the project. During the project workday, James used the time to develop campaign advertisements and to get feedback from his peers. Cohen and Benton (1988) claim the implementation of collaborative tasks encourages broader engagement. When I asked James if he received feedback from his peers he claimed, “yeah to see what they thought of it and if they laughed at it maybe it might peak some peoples’ interest” (Dean, 2018). Five of the six campaign ads that James made were memes that slandered the competition. “I showed people them before so I could see what they thought. Like I might think something is funny, and someone else might think it’s funny. Most of the ones I showed people they laughed at so I thought those might be good” (Dean, 2018).

After the students displayed their campaign ads they prepared for the debate.
I think it’s going to be interesting to hear what different people say based on each of the topics and obviously, people who are running will have to do their research. I think it’s going to motivate people to look more deeply into different things and maybe look to issues from different angles (Dean, 2018).

The task required each student to investigate five topics, form an opinion, and justify their perspectives. This process became a way to “transition students into a more active, accountable role” (Ertmer, Schlosser, Clase, & Adedokun, 2017, p. 165) James communicated that he planned to be open to examining topics from a different perspective.

… people who might have different viewpoints than mine may see and how they view the issue because I don’t want to look at it just one way. Obviously, I know where I am on certain issues, but I think you need to look at both sides of every issue before you make a final conclusion (Dean, 2018).

When watching a clip from the debate James communicated how different this project was from a traditional assignment in the way it incorporated all the students.

It’s a lot different but a good different because you’re not just doing a worksheet out of a book but you’re getting to interact with your classmates you’re getting to campaign and make opinions and a lot of people are talking. Even quiet people have their opinions, so you get to hear more from people rather than just sitting at a desk doing book work (Dean, 2018).

Lander (2018) supported the perspective of James, claiming learning “facts about civics is not enough. Our students can only truly learn civics by doing civics” (p. 264). As each student participated in the debate many perspectives were communicated. James commented on the number of perspectives, “there is so many people and so many viewpoints” (Dean, 2018). James realized how complicated some issues are and described the project as

Really interesting and engaging because there is so many things that go into each issue. I mean there is more than two sides there is a bunch of gray areas… it’s really hard to find a reasonable middle because the issues are so multifaceted like abortion, for example, is not just [that] I believe abortion should take place or not it’s what if someone [is] raped, if you don’t believe in abortion would you get rid of planned parenthood and stuff like that, it so it’s not just yes or no (Dean, 2018).
The debate helped provide an understanding of how complicated issues can be. As each student participated in the discussion a variety of ideas were discussed. This task helped address what Lander (2018) identified as the third step in teaching civics, “active citizenship works to support and teach others” (265). As each student communicated his perspectives and goals he was working to inform others.

The first topic the students debated was whether women should maintain the right to have an abortion or if abortion rights should be altered. Each student presented his perspective and a discussion developed between students named, Steve and James. I asked James to explain the comments of the student that were captured in the video clip. “He is citing his views on abortions, specifically and in that statement, he made it clear he was pro-choice” (Dean, 2018). James described how he felt as the student communicated his view, “I mean personally I didn’t agree with his viewpoints at all… I am pro-life and with certain circumstances obviously, like rape or if harm would come to the mother” (Dean, 2018). The students continued to exchange remarks on the subject. I asked James how he felt during this debate and if he thought it would escalate to an argument.

I didn’t necessarily think there was going to be an argument, but I mean I definitely knew there was going to be opposing viewpoints on the subject. I never really thought it was going to get really heated at all I am just really curious what the people around me were going to say too (Dean, 2018).

The interaction between Steve and James on abortion had the highest frequency of verbal exchanges throughout the debate project. I tracked frequency of verbal exchanges as I observed the debate and recorded my findings in my research journal. Lodge and Taber (2005) found that emotions often surface when students engage in discussing socio-political concepts and could trigger positive and negative feelings. James described the experience as a passionate exchange,
it was, well, I didn’t sound very passionate I guess but I am definitely passionate about the issue I guess, so I think it is pretty important. I think I communicated what I wanted to say… I think it was assertive (Dean, 2018).

Another student added her perspective of abortion after the exchange. James described her commentary as “she sees both sides. She said she leans more pro-choice, but she sees the pro-life viewpoint so maybe she is showing she is open to multiple viewpoints” (Dean, 2018). Examining new viewpoints was a common occurrence throughout the project. “Everyone has so many different viewpoints” (Dean, 2018). Those viewpoints exposed the students to aspects of controversial issues they had not previously considered. James confirmed that by stating,

somethings I think I never really thought about before that was really like made me a little more lenient on my views for pro-life, but I understand you can’t just get rid of all abortion centers because that would cause problems (Dean, 2018).

I found James’s statement surprising because Redlawsk (2002) found that people who encountered new information that contradicted their prior perspective often become more committed to their prior beliefs. The debate encouraged the students to consider multiple perspectives but, in some cases, it resulted in changed perspectives, directly contradicting the research of Redlawsk (2002). James claimed he changed his perspective “climate change, I think it [is] pretty important, and I always understood that it’s been bad, but I never thought about what could be done to help it…I think it’s more important now after the debates and stuff” (Dean, 2018).

The debate captured the interest of students in the American Government and Politics class. James commented, “I think they are definitely engaged, you can see them perk up when you said we are going to talk about the next topic, gun control, and you kind of hear everyone get excited for it” (Dean, 2018). Piper and Neufeld-Kaiser (2018) claim they see PBL as a great way to help increase student engagement using content relevant to their lives. Student discussion on
the topics presented continued on after class. “Even after class, our close group of friends were talking about it until we had to get to our next class” (Dean, 2018). The discussions in class and those continued after class allowed the students to learn more about their classmates. “I definitely learned a lot about different peoples’ viewpoints and the things they shared” (Dean, 2018).

Through the Elections project, James experienced an interesting educational opportunity that helped him learn more about the views of his peers as they discussed controversial issues.

It’s really fun and interesting, I definitely would keep doing the project cause I think it’s interesting to get a sense of how elections actually work… We were talking about issues that were more important to us and we had a say in those issues… So that made us more engaged in the project (Dean, 2018).

He communicated that the project was interesting several times and acknowledged he enjoyed communicating with his peers.

**Within-Case Analysis for Cathy**

The two themes that emerged, as I coded Cathy Barron’s three interview transcriptions, were collaborative learning and social learning. What I mean by using the term collaborative learning is the students worked together to develop ideas and construct a product. The Elections project was not designed to be a collaborative experience, but it developed naturally. The term social learning I use to describe the concepts, perspectives, and ideas that were shared in class influenced Cathy’s experience. Cathy communicated, throughout each interview, the effect working with her peers had on her ability to complete the project and that she enjoyed learning about the different perspectives of her classmates. Even though the Elections project was an individual assignment that required the students to compete against each other, some students worked together.
During the project introduction, Cathy and another student looked at each other and made hand gestures. Cathy described the communication as, “Me and Missy kind of agree on some issues so when she said prominent issues we always talk about them so I was like already there, ready to argue with someone about those issues” (Barron, 2018). Appealing to students’ interests that “elicit varied and diverse opinions” is a key element in enacting classroom discussions (Segall, Crocco, Halvorsen, & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 338). Through the observation of student behavior, it appeared that the class did not agree on the issues. The students were interacting with their peers with whom they communicated frequently, to exchange glances or commentary that indicated their interest in communicating their perspectives.

After I explained the project, the students were given the remaining time in class to start on the assignment. Cathy utilized the time to start working on creating campaign posters. “I started with a positive stance, things that I can say positive about myself and then as people start putting up their ads I started thinking about slander of other people” (Barron, 2018). Even though Cathy was working independently, the campaign posters of the other students encouraged her to reflect on her strategy. Puntambekar (2006) claims interaction between individuals, divergent perspectives, and shared knowledge building are important elements of collaborative learning. I asked Cathy if the work of her peers altered her campaign strategy. She stated she would use both positive and slander ads, “I don’t want to seem mean, but I don’t want to focus on just myself” (Barron, 2018). By reading the ads of the other candidates, Cathy was able to respond to her opponents and issues. The project provided an indirect collaborative learning opportunity.

Cathy communicated that listening to other students would be a major component in the Elections project. “I have to think about what other people will argue so I have to think about other people’s viewpoints in order to be able to make an argument” (Barron, 2018). As Cathy
began the project, she was able to identify the need to consider the perspectives of others and that she would have to be prepared to engage in a conversation with people who held different beliefs. Richardson and Swan (2003) claim that increased social presence is associated with a higher level of student satisfaction and perceived learning.

During the project workday, the students were given the opportunity to use their time on the project in any way they desired. Eisner (1974) described the ability of students to choose what to work on as a common element in student-led pedagogy. One of the students near Cathy used the time to share the campaign ads he created. Cathy said, “I thought it was funny, so I showed another student” (Barron, 2018). When I asked if she thought that was an effective use of time, she responded by saying, “no… but I was trying to get ideas for mine” (Barron, 2018). I disagree with Cathy’s statement. I believe she was using time effectively to learn the political ideology of other class members and find campaign strategies she could employ for her campaign. Brush and Saye (2017) claim tasks like these can help students acquire more authentic experiences. Cathy communicated that looking at other ads was helpful, “I started to see what some of the others’ viewpoints were for some of them, and I got to see what direction they were going, like if they were slandering or sticking to themselves” (Barron, 2018). This provided a chance for the students to make political allies or to identify targets for a smear campaign.

The students continued to use the class period to conduct research and to make campaign ads. One student near Cathy was using his cell phone and began talking to her. I asked if she knew what he was doing. Cathy said, “he was looking at pictures for his slander ads. It was a picture he was going to use for not a slander ad but a campaign ad, and it's him holding a goat and it says vote for the goat” (Barron, 2018). I asked her why do you think he showed you that? “I think he was just showing it because it was funny” (Barron, 2018). The students were using
their peers as sounding boards. Each student in the class was testing an idea and getting feedback on how effective the ad was. This interaction is to be expected in a collaborative learning environment according to Puntambekar (2006) who claims students will co-construct knowledge and move towards a shared understanding. While many students initially were seeking laughter as a signal that the ad was effective, the students were producing ads that communicated a political view.

Cathy was no exception to this. “I just showed Missy my campaign ads. I wanted her opinion because she was helping me come up with things to say so I wanted to see her opinion about that one” (Barron, 2018). I asked Cathy about Missy’s response, “She said she loved it” (Barron, 2018). I followed up that question by asking what would she have done if the students she showed her work to had not responded positively. Cathy claimed, “I would have asked them what I could have done to make it better and what their opinions were” (Barron, 2018). The verbal exchange Cathy participated in helped create a valuable learning experience. Puntambekar (2006) emphasized the importance of collaborative learning experiences to create new understandings through students’ discussions. Throughout the project workday, students shared their work, reviewed what they produced, tested new ideas, and took action to enact their ideas. The individual project inspired the students to utilize the perspectives of their peers to create an effective campaign.

After we discussed how Cathy and the four students sitting around her desk exchanged ideas for the project, I asked her if the project was a group project. She responded firmly, “individual” (Barron, 2018). Cathy communicated that the students talked to each other through the process because “we kind of needed to help each other because if you were going in without any input it wouldn’t have been as good I think” (Barron, 2018). Eisner (1974) communicated
the importance of a wide range of materials and the philosophy that makes it possible for the
students to choose among the resources without expectation as essential in a student-centered
classroom. I was pleased the students utilized all the resources they had available, including their
peers, to enhance their projects. Spears (2012) claims the classroom should have active student
participation, learner-to-learner interaction, critical thinking, and reflection using a variety of
teaching methods (p. 20). In the remaining class period, 10 students posted their campaign ads in
my classroom. Those students were able to utilize the perspectives of their peers to finalize their
campaign posters. “I remember talking to Missy about how to incorporate the topics we were
talking about, into my ads, I think that was the most helpful thing she told me” (Barron, 2018).
The students had a great sense of pride in their work as they displayed their political campaign
posters and directed others to look at their work. Cathy confirmed this when she told me about
what we viewed in the film, “James had a slander ad and he was showing it to me and Missy”
(Barron, 2018). The collaborative learning opportunities helped the students fulfill the
requirements of the project and enhance confidence in their work.

The class collaborated on the Elections project without direct instruction. The actions of
the students created an atmosphere that allowed them to test ideas and provide each other with
feedback. The students continued to benefit from the presence of their peers through social
learning experiences. When I introduced the project to the class, I noticed Cathy was talking and
making hand gestures to another student in the class. She explained,

I was kind of like intrigued because I have never actually done this in a class. I
wanted to do it actually. Me and Missy kind of agree on some issues so when she
said prominent issues, we always talk about them, so I was like already there
ready to argue with someone about the issues (Barron, 2018).

The project introduction triggered a memory of previous conversations Cathy had about political
topics and the presence of Missy created a sense of confidence and familiarity with political
discussion. Brufee (1994) identified friendliness as a key component essential for effective collaboration. Cathy’s friendship with Missy helped contribute to a collaborative learning experience by providing a safe relationship for the exchange of ideas.

As I described the Elections project in more detail to the class, Cathy remembered the student campaign posters from the previous school year. “Last year in your class, AP US, we saw all of the advertisements for their class, it got us excited for the class the next year” (Barron, 2018). Cathy claimed she was excited about the project before she was even in the class, “because we saw how funny they were a year ago” (Barron, 2018). The senior class of 2018 had an impact on Cathy, creating excitement for the project through their campaign ads that presented political perspectives through humor. The students in the senior class of 2018 who displayed their work in my room promoted student interest in the project and political thought. Cathy knew when we started the project, she wanted to produce a memorable campaign. “I kind of knew I wanted to do a poster because I think it is funnier than all the other ones and also because I wanted it to be shown to all the other classes coming” (Barron, 2018). Cathy’s goal was to inspire students in her class and to have an effect on the eleventh-grade students who would see her work. Public presentation of projects has been known to inspire students to produce high-quality work (Larmer, 2018). In this case, the indirect presentation of student work had an inspiring effect on Cathy one year prior and, as a result, she acted to inspire others.

Cathy was involved in the process of selecting topics the class would debate. As students volunteered topics to discuss, the classroom started getting louder. “I just laughed because someone said abortion and gun control and they are really controversial” (Barron, 2018). When I asked why that was funny Cathy said,

it’s not like funny, just the fact that people our age actually [are] interested in that stuff. I think it is good. It’s always good for younger people to get involved earlier
so that when we are older and can vote that we are more informed when we can have a bigger impact on society (Barron, 2018).

Her response suggested that she found value in the activity. When a student sees the importance of learning content, they become more focused and willing to complete the task (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). When I asked Cathy if she suggested any topics for discussion, she responded by saying “I might have said immigration” (Barron, 2018). When asked if that was an important issue to her, she responded by saying, “It is important right now in the political world so I thought we could argue about that in class” (Barron, 2018). Cathy’s topic suggestion demonstrated she understood political issues beyond what was communicated in the classroom. Immigration was not discussed in class. I was waiting to present the class with the unit on Congress or the role of the President to discuss immigration policies and neither of those topics was covered until after the Elections project.

I asked Cathy when she developed an interest in political affairs and started seeking information beyond what was presented at school. “Not necessarily the Parkland shooting but these issues arise and more of it affects people my age it is more about my generation now” (Barron, 2018). The traumatic gun violence that has been occurring throughout the country had a tremendous effect on the students. The day after the Parkland shooting Cathy was in my class and we discussed safety concerns at our school and actions we could all take to help create a safer environment. Cathy told me she started paying attention to politics about a year ago. “That’s when it really hit me” (Barron, 2018). Through the Elections project, students were able to select real-world problems to discuss and to use the opportunity to form a discussion in class that encouraged everyone to share their perspectives. Olbrys (2019) encourages teachers to provide experience for students that enable them “to form their own conclusions backed with evidence from the sources… and gives them a deeper purpose for learning (p. 30).
Awareness of controversial political issues helped the students suggest topics to debate and make informed decisions when they voted for the top five topics. “I voted for the more controversial topics because, well I wanted more people to be interested and argue about these topics too and I want more information on it” (Barron, 2018). Cathy wanted to understand the perspectives of her peers and use the experience to gather information. Olbrys (2019) claimed Deliberation is the key attribute that brings it all together by creating a safe learning environment and providing a tool by which students and teachers can engage in deep discussions. In a deliberation, students weigh potential answers to a question by looking at each option’s strength, weaknesses, and tradeoffs. They are also tasked to consider a strength, weakness, or tradeoff. This approach pushes students to view others’ perspectives and, in many cases, to reevaluate their own answers (p. 31).

I asked Cathy if the information students presented would influence her perspectives. She said “yeah. I think immigration because there are a lot of good ideas and bad so I don’t want to have one set viewpoint so I will listen to ideas” (Barron, 2018). Cathy was happy with the topics that were selected for discussion and stated she communicated with her friend about some of them, like immigration and border control. “I thought they were super controversial right now, so I think it’s going to bring a better atmosphere for the project, more people are interested in the topics” (Barron, 2018). Student choice has a positive effect on project completion (Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018). Because Cathy participated in the selection of topics, she was motivated to work on the Elections project. “I am interested in like every topic we chose so the research is [something] I am interested in and can talk about” (Barron, 2018).

Cathy spoke about the role her peers would play as she conducted research. “I think definitely as I do research and other people give me ideas, I think it will shape into a viewpoint” (Barron, 2018). She suggests that the ideas students communicate will lead to the investigation of facts, and, through the acquisition of new knowledge her perspective could be altered. As the
students started researching the topic for the debate on the project introduction day, Cathy exclaimed, she was “pretty excited about it. I enjoyed seeing everyone get more involved and talk about their viewpoints” (Barron, 2018). Viewpoints were communicated throughout the class period. “When we were coming up with topics everyone was making little comments on their thoughts” (Barron, 2018). This communication exposed the students to a variety of perspectives and helped them consider how they would address those diverse perspectives throughout their campaign.

I explained the process for the debate to the class. Each student would have a turn to address the five issues. When that student was finished, the next student would have the opportunity to address the class. A student asked if the process could be altered to allow the debate to function as a Socratic seminar. Cathy explained why the method would be beneficial “instead of just one person talking, to do a Socratic seminar where one person will say something then people can join in either a debate or agree with them. Everyone would want to join in and share their views” (Barron, 2018). Eisner (1974) noted the increased complexity of the teacher in a student-centered learning classroom because of the required “ability to improvise” (p. 32). The students wanted to enact a presentation change that would transform the debate into more of a deliberation. Deliberation is different than a debate in that it avoids combative conversation (Olbrys, 2019). After listening to the students’ desires and justification for a change, I thought they made a solid point and decided to adjust the presentation portion of the project.

The debate provided the students with an opportunity to hear multiple perspectives. “I never knew what everyone else in my class thought about the topics until we started talking so it was interesting to listen and then compare it to mine” (Barron, 2018). The students in the class appeared engaged in listening to their peers. “It’s a lot more interesting than just taking notes and
reading over your notes I think everyone is a lot more interested in it” (Barron, 2018). The
debate started with students sharing their campaign advertisements. When asked about her ad
Cathy said, “I rhymed with my name making the environment better” (Barron, 2018). Other
students rhymed, used slander tactics, or clearly stated what political issues they support. Cathy
communicated that the student speaking in the video clip, part of the video-elicitation interview
“said something pretty similar to my view” (Barron, 2018). I asked Cathy how this experience of
listening to students communicate a view similar to her own made her feel. “It made me feel like
more people agree with me than I thought” (Barron, 2018). A moment later another student
communicated the same perspective.

I asked Cathy to describe the feeling of the room and the actions of the other students. “I
think this one got our attention because when he started talking about Roe vs. Wade it brought
attention” (Barron, 2018). The introduction of a Supreme Court case to the discussion introduced
a new perspective to the discussion. Cathy claimed it was “something different that we have not
heard yet” (Barron, 2018). I was pleased she communicated that the diverse perspectives helped
the students not only understand the debate but also helped the students consider the perspectives
of all of the students in the class. Olbrys (2019) claimed deliberation “ensures all voices are
valued, and it leads to engagement by all” (p. 31).

I asked Cathy if any arguing broke out during the discussion of such a controversial topic.
Cathy recalled, “that day was more of a calmer discussion” (Barron, 2018). The students
conducted themselves in a respectful manner, listening, asking questions, and providing each
other with an opportunity to respond. Cathy described the behavior of the class as, “pretty calm it
wasn’t aggressive or anything it was calm like a regular discussion” (Barron, 2018). The
behavior of the students would have been easier for me to predict if the class held unanimous
views on the five topics they selected but that was not the case and students presented alternative views. The discussion provided multiple perspectives

well I never heard that viewpoint, I heard others that are different from mine but his reasoning with Roe vs. Wade was different. So, I started to take into account what he was saying because I just never considered that before (Barron, 2018).

The student was claiming that the Roe v. Wade decision was based on privacy rights and did not directly address the rights of the unborn. I asked Cathy if the conversation made her uncomfortable to continue the debate. She responded by saying “I felt comfortable enough to talk but at this point, I wanted to hear what everyone else said before I talked because I just thought it was interesting” (Barron, 2018). The students were engaged the entire class period as they listened to their peers present their perspectives.

The verbal exchange of political topics among my high school students was rare until their participation in the debate. Cathy told me “I don’t normally talk about political topics with my friends so seeing what they had to say about controversial views was different for me” (Barron, 2018). According to Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) “Americans are less likely to hear diverse opinions in their networks and through the news they consume online because of self-selection into like-minded physical and virtual communities (p. 323). Cathy utilized the experience to enhance her understanding of the multiple perspectives her peers held about abortion. Cathy was the third to last student to present her views. When I asked her why she waited to share she stated,

At that point I had basically listened to everyone else so I basically took everyone’s views and beliefs into consideration to what I was saying, I think I was interested in sharing my opinion not so much like a rebuttal like everyone else was saying but voicing my own opinion (Barron, 2018).
The students communicated they enjoyed the opportunity to explain their beliefs to their peers and they were interested in learning the perspectives of others. Cathy described her experience of hearing new perspectives as an opportunity to see more of the other side of the argument better than when I was making my own argument so I took it into consideration, I don’t think I changed my opinion very much but I do think I saw the other side (Barron, 2018).

Understanding diverse perspectives was a great accomplishment from this activity. Kawashima-Mutz (2006) explained, “cross-cutting political discussions are important in helping students understand, rather than demonize, people who hold different views” (p.56). I think the students’ ability to listen and consider new thoughts is valuable in the classroom and helpful in a quest to develop a democratic society. Meissel (2019) claimed civic learning has begun to be revitalized through developing informed and thoughtful youth, specifically, they have a grasp and appreciation of history and the fundamental process of American democracy, an understanding and awareness of public and community issues, an ability to obtain information when needed, a capacity to think critically, and a willingness to enter into to dialogue with others about different points of view and to understand diverse perspectives (p. 4).

These tasks were all elements Cathy encountered in the Elections project. Cathy communicated she did not change her mind, which I believe credits the student’s ability to consider multiple viewpoints yet be able to defend her beliefs. Cathy demonstrated this when she claimed, “instead of seeing 100% my side I started to agree with somethings other people were saying” (Barron, 2018). Even on issues about which Cathy had strong feelings, she was willing to listen to students express contrary beliefs to help her understand multiple viewpoints. “Some people didn’t argue for guns, but they argued the second amendment should be protected. He started throwing out statistics I didn’t know, so I was interested in that” (Barron, 2018). As students
provided information to the class, new facts emerged that were not covered in the textbook or classroom activities.

The communication was authentic and provided deeper insight into the five topics the students selected. Cathy noted that, “some students found statistics that would back up what they wanted to change, and why they need to change it” (Barron, 2018). According to Segall and colleagues (2018), the use of respected sources to validate claims is important in preventing student discussion from becoming led by “second and third-hand personal accounts or claims drawn from questionable sources on the internet or television talk shows” (p. 339).

Because the students conducted themselves in a respectful way, they were able to exchange ideas freely. Cathy claimed, “I learned that in order to voice your opinion you have to respect and listen to everyone else” (Barron, 2018). Through the establishment of an atmosphere that promotes student exchange and respect, the class was able to learn from all their peers. Dabach and colleagues (2018) claim it is important that “if tense topics emerged, there was a broader relationship of trust between teachers and students” (p. 310). Promoting relationship building helped all of the stakeholders have more insights into personal beliefs and situation; thus enabling the students to become more sensitive. Cathy said she learned new things about students in the class through the Elections project, “I didn’t talk to them much, so when they told us their political viewpoints, I learned a lot” (Barron, 2018). Cathy communicated that learning from her peers was important because “you do need to listen to other people rather than just talking yourself, so I think that when we had to listen we all had to think [if] it was beneficial to use” (Barron, 2018). This process encouraged the students to restate information, ask clarifying questions, or refute claims other students made. Ruffing and Arbetman (2018) claim, “for our students to thrive and for our democracy to survive young people must be able to develop
independent thought on controversial issues that are not based solely on partnership and personality” (p. 347). The Elections project helped students investigate political issues, take a stand, define their beliefs, and consider the perspectives of others. I believe the skills the students learned will transcend the classroom and help empower them to become influential members of a democratic society.

In addition to the content and skills the students learned through the Elections project, I wanted to understand the experience of the students. Cathy claimed the workload was in line with a typical AP class and the project was not overwhelming. She communicated the most difficult part of this project was “trying to understand where everyone else was coming from with their viewpoints, so if I felt strongly about something it was hard for me to understand the other side” (Barron, 2018). As Cathy considered the perspectives of her peers and contemplated how to respond she acknowledged the process helped her become a better communicator. “In order to come to a solution, you have to understand all aspects of a problem, so I think listening to the other viewpoints would be helpful” (Barron, 2018). As the debate concluded many students did not come to an agreement on controversial issues but several students explained that they learned more about what other people think and believe.

**Within-Case Analysis for Maddy**

Over the course of three interviews, Maddy Smith communicated that the Elections project was interesting. As I transcribed the interviews and began the coding process the two themes that emerged were student motivation to complete the project and the examination of multiple perspectives. Maddy identified the investigation of topics the students selected and learning the perspectives of peers, tasks that made learning interesting.
Maddy stated she took AP American Government because “I think it’s really interesting and I want to challenge myself and get to learn how government works since I will be voting” (Smith, 2018). Barss (2018) acknowledges the role of teachers and schools in preparing students like Maddy to vote by claiming they “must be prepared to help students delve into complex issues safely and effectively, to honor their voices and identities, and to foster skills that position them for engaged citizenship and academic success” (p. 249). Maddy was interested in the subject and concerned about earning good grades in the class. She entered the course as a motivated student and embraced the instructional methods used in the class. “[In] government I feel like we do a lot of hands-on things and we have a lot of discussions and that helps me learn a lot of things” (Smith, 2018). Maddy’s comments about the methods used in the classroom support what Olbrys (2019) claims as the ways to engage the class through “practicing the kinds of speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills necessary for active citizenship” (p. 31). I specifically asked Maddy about the use of projects and she said

I think they help a lot. I really think that they help learning because it encouraged students to go out and do their own research on their own time and if you are doing a project on something you are interested in and want to be more engaged in you can get really passionate about it and you can do excess research that you don’t really need to do for the project but then it helps you become a more well-rounded student. I think that is just beneficial (Smith, 2018).

The projects Maddy was exposed to, in the AP courses I taught, provided opportunities for investigation of details on specific issues. Piper and Neufeld-Kaiser (2018) stress “AP classes do not have to be synonymous with frantic coverage” (p. 30). Creating opportunities for the students to investigate issues deeply provided an enjoyable learning experience.

Maddy continued to express her interests in projects and specifically the Elections project as I introduced the rubric to the class.
I was really excited, I mean I always like debating, but I think its really exciting to hear people’s opinions and I was excited to hear that we would be able to choose the topics for debate and I think everyone got really giddy about that (Smith, 2018).

Maddy stressed the students’ appreciation for the opportunity to select the topics for the debate. Student choice is one of the seven elements of gold standard project-based learning according to Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) and often leads to increased motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Maddy confirmed the importance of choice when she communicated, “it is easier to plan things we are passionate about and especially in politics today. For example, I have much stronger thoughts about gun rights than economics” (Smith, 2018).

The students compiled a list of topics to debate, and gun control was suggested by one of the students. I asked Maddy what her thoughts were at that moment. She exclaimed, “I was really excited I was like yes! I get to talk about that” (Smith, 2018). After gun control was added to the list the students continued to add topics to the list of potential debate issues. “So, one student suggested climate change as a topic which is also something, I am really passionate about and excited to talk about it” (Smith, 2018). Crowley and King (2018) claim citizenship education through inquiry-based practices will “allow students to pursue questions that are important to their lives and that touch upon important disciplinary knowledge” (p. 15).

Once the students had an opportunity to suggest topics for the debate, they voted on the five topics that most interested them. Maddy remembered four of the five topics chosen, “they were gun control, terrorism, climate change, abortion, and I don’t remember the last one” (Smith, 2018). The fifth topic was immigration and Maddy’s inability to recall the topic was reflective of the investment in preparation as well. None of the three campaign posters she created addressed immigration and she did not participate as frequently in the debate when immigration was the topic discussed. The selection of topics represented the students’ interests in politically
controversial issues. Hess (2009) claims “some issues are more controversial than others because they generate more disagreement” (p. 38). Ruffing and Arbetman (2018) state “abortion, affirmative action, gun ownership, discrimination, immigration, the death penalty, presidential authority, government surveillance, and privacy protection – these are among the most contested public issues in America (p. 343).

When I asked Maddy if she thought the topics selected would be interesting, she stated: “I think so, I think they are all really interesting and I am excited to talk about them” (Smith, 2018). Topic selection became a motivating force because, by putting power in the hands of the students the class bought into the project. Maddy explained, “I think I was more motivated with students choosing them because it’s something that we as a generation bond in a sense because they could affect us in the future” (Smith, 2018). The students continued their investigations of the topics with the remaining time in class.

Maddy’s excitement about the topics influenced her work habits. “I think once I started researching it, I got pulled in” (Smith, 2018). When asked why she felt motivated Maddy explained, “I don’t know a lot about some of the topics and I would like to be more well-rounded” (Smith, 2018). Her curiosity about the topics encouraged her to invest time in researching them to become more knowledgeable. Maddy’s interest in the project continued to grow through the experience. Larmer (2018) communicates the importance of sustained inquiry in PBL, “students engage in a rigorous, extended process of asking questions, finding resources, and applying information (p. 22). As Maddy investigated each topic she saw the need to learn more about each issue.

As Maddy researched the topics for the debate she started directing her attention to develop a campaign strategy. The authentic task required a deep understanding of the topics and
the understanding of the political ideologies of the voting base. Maddy explained, “I liked working on the campaign ads. It was really fun. We were joking around trying to find puns for our names and one student is doing memes and another is doing a slander campaign ad which is funny” (Smith, 2018). Because the project incorporated tasks that Maddy viewed as fun the time she invested in the project was enjoyable and she was more willing to devote additional time to the project. According to Newmann, Wehlange, and Lamborn (1992) “studies of engagement suggest that learners must perceive intrinsic worth and purpose in the task if they are to make the effort required to develop deep knowledge of a subject” (p. 12).

During the project work day, the students reviewed the project rubric and were held accountable for completing a project work report graphic organizer. I collected the graphic organizers to evaluate each students’ progress on the project. Each student who completed the document earned 10 points. I asked Maddy how she felt about the project once she had access to the rubric and the project workday document. She said, “pretty good I felt ready to get working” (Smith, 2018). Maddy communicated that the items had a positive impact on her ability to make progress on the project. “I got out my rubric and I started my sheet of the work report you had given us” (Smith, 2018). I communicated the due dates for the project to provide clarity for the students and encourage them to take advantage of class time. Hung (2009) suggest the first essential step for teachers to consider is the ability to set goals and objectives when enacting project-based learning. “I was already pretty aware of what deadlines were stated already but it helped restate them in my mind and helped inspire me to get more done during the project workday” (Smith, 2018).

Through the course of the project work day, the students began to ask questions about the format of the debate. A student suggested the debate be conducted in a Socratic seminar style
because she thought that would be more engaging. I asked Maddy to explain what a Socratic seminar is and how it might work for this project.

Umm, so a Socratic seminar is like one we have done in our other classes like our English classes. Umm and its basically where we just sit in a way where we can see all of the other students and the main question is thrown into the group per se and students have to take turns putting forth their opinion on the topic or the question and it tends to bounce back and forth between and um the other student and I thought it would be interesting to see um to approach it that way opposed to a typical debate per se because we felt that would ensure we got to know the other students’ perspectives are provide a well-rounded perspective on who were going to vote for and if we wanted to vote for them (Smith, 2018).

Strutchens and Martin (2017) communicate the importance of adjusting the process of the project to a way that makes sense to students and allows them to master the content. After several students spoke in agreement, I communicated to the class the debate would be conducted in the style of a Socratic seminar. The students refocused their efforts on completing tasks essential for the project after the modification of the project.

The students focused their attention on creating campaign advertisements to communicate their political platforms. Maddy explained the experience, “I think we were kind of collaborating, each of us was kind of trying to help the other” (Smith, 2018). Strutchens and Martin (2017) communicated the importance of developing collaborative learning opportunities within project-based learning tasks, claiming “cooperative learning groups have been shown to improve academic achievement, improve behavior and attendance, increase self-confidence and motivation, and increase liking of school and classmates” (p. 11). The students were on task during the day developing, and creating campaign posters while obtaining feedback from peers. I asked Maddy to describe the what was going on in the class she described it saying, “it was pretty light-hearted, we were all just joking around trying to help each other figure out slogans, some of them were pretty funny so we got carried away with that” (Smith, 2018). The students
were able to have an enjoyable experience communicating with peers as they worked on the project.

I asked Maddy what the teacher was doing at this point she explained “he is like on the prowl, laughing, you were kind of like walking around and looking to see if we were on task” (Smith, 2018). I circulated the room to make sure the students were on task and provide help to make sure the students were making progress. Eisner (1974) noted the increased movement of a teacher was common in a student-centered learning approach. As I moved through the classroom, I asked questions to determine their progress on the project. Strutchens and Martin (2017) claim “the teacher is envisioned as an orchestrator of rich exchanges in which students share their ideas… consider the ideas of others, and question the teacher” (p. 13). Through a series of questions, I was able to determine the depth of knowledge each student had acquired through the research conducted at that point.

I asked Maddy if the project workday was an effective use of time. She responded by telling me, “I actually finished all three of my campaign ads so I finished, yeah I feel like I was continuously working the whole day” (Smith, 2019). The opportunity to ask questions and get feedback in a collaborative setting motivated Maddy to utilize her time successfully.

Even though we as a group were socializing a lot most of it was about the project and the other part didn’t really distract me from my work. I think the project workday helped me take a step forward in my project and I am glad I didn’t have to do that work at home (Smith, 2018).

Eisner (1974) describes the role of students in a student-centered classroom as being more responsible to make choices that were productive. Maddy confirmed that she was able to utilize her time responsibility and complete tasks that would have been more challenging to complete independently.
I asked Maddy if there was anything, we did in class beyond the project workday that helped her complete the project. Maddy recalled that watching presidential campaign ads inspired her to complete her campaign.

We watched a series of presidential campaign ads all the way from Eisenhower all the way to Trump today and I think that kind of helped me in a sense of how ads are effective and not effective, that kind of helped me figure out how I wanted to present my campaign so that was definitely very helpful (Smith, 2018).

Providing examples helped the students formulate ideas they could apply to their campaigns. The lesson that featured presidential advertisements was an example of hard scaffolding. Saye and Brush (2017) describe hard scaffolding as instructional methods that can be planned in advance to help enhance student understanding of required tasks.

I asked Maddy her perspective of projects after finishing the project work day. Her response communicated her previous experiences and the specific elements of the Elections project she appreciated.

I am actually a big fan of projects and we have had a lot in the past history classes. I think they are really helpful in allowing a student to do their own research. We have covered some of the things in class already, but it really allows the student to dive in and understand it better and hopefully in a lot of cases. In this one it has helped me learn more about a topic, even if I don’t get to choose the topic, the more I get to research it, the more I learn, and I can become passionate about it (Smith, 2018).

Maddy communicated the importance of investigating topics deeply. The deep investigation of topics has been an area of concern for many AP teachers (Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018). The Elections project allowed each student to become immersed in the topics and learn information that they found interesting and helped the students understand how complex an issue could be. According to Halvorsen and colleagues (2018) the curricular approach to PBL should include “a purpose beyond doing school; sustained exploration of a topic; highly standards-aligned; and grounded in research-based practices (p. 24). Strobel and van Barneveld (2009) found that “PBL
was superior when it comes to long-term retention, skill development and satisfaction of students and teachers” (p. 44). Often in many high school courses, the content is present as a survey. The course becomes the communication of superficial knowledge on a wide spectrum of content (Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018). The ability to investigate topics deeply and learn the intricacies of issues makes the course more engaging.

Maddy continued her investigation of the topics as other students discussed their perspectives on the day of the debate. As we watched the video that captured the actions of the students from class, I asked what she was doing in the scene, where it appeared a student was addressing the class. “I was looking up some information, because I had done research prior to it, prior to the debate, but I had forgotten a statistic, so I was looking up that statistic” (Smith, 2018). Even as the students shared their opinions some students were actively engaged in listening, acquiring more information, and planning their response. Piper and Neufeld-Kaiser (2018) see project-based learning activities as “highly engaging, partly because there’s performance pressure. Maddy’s diligence to conduct research and prepare to address points her peers presented demonstrate her high level of engagement in the project.

After the debates were completed and the Elections project ended, I asked Maddy her thoughts on the experience. She stated

I always liked projects because I feel like it enables students to delve into a topic may be that they were assigned maybe because they were chosen. You could be passionate about it but I feel like in the end the project you end up learning so much more than you would end up knowing which is really important and I feel like with projects and working group in groups you get to work collaboratively and you get to build those skills (Smith, 2018).

Strutchens and Martin (2017) identify the importance of “interdependent group tasks that serve as academic and linguistic resources for one another” (p. 11). The opportunity to work collaboratively helped build social skills and promote tolerance. Olbrys (2019) claims pedagogy
that promotes discussion leads to the acquisition of “skills necessary for active citizenship” (p. 31).

Maddy appreciated the opportunity to use the project to deepen her content knowledge, and her desire to learn more inspired her to complete the project. I asked Maddy if the amount of work to complete the project was more than what is typical of an Advanced Placement class. Maddy said “I feel like this project was pretty comparable to other AP classes, but it wasn’t overbearing, it wasn’t too much, and it was still interesting and engaging” (Smith, 2018). Maddy was able to identify the tasks required for the project as obtainable goals. Her perspective on the project remained positive and she was able to complete the project successfully.

Maddy’s motivation to complete the project was enhanced by her interest in the multiple perspectives that were shared by her peers through the stages of the project. As I introduced the project to the class Maddy recalled her initial thoughts of being apprehensive towards sharing her opinions with others but claimed it was important to have an opportunity to do so.

I think it is very important especially in our class which is a senior class all of us will be able to vote in the next election and we need to take a stance on those issues and understand what we want in a leader” (Smith, 2018).

I asked Maddy her thoughts on how the students in the class might respond to debating controversial topics.

I don’t know I feel like in our class especially the AP because the students here want to learn and want to become better people in general and so they feel like we are all kind of likeminded in that way so we're all smart, so peoples’ opinions should be respected because we have knowledge about those topics (Smith, 2018).

Ruffing and Arbetman (2018) argue the necessity of providing opportunities for discussion claiming, “for our students to thrive and for our democracy to survive young people must be able to develop independent thought on controversial issues that is not based solely on partisanship
and personality” (p. 347). The establishment of a safe environment that promotes independent thought is essential in fostering discourse in social studies classes. Dabach et al. (2018) suggest that teachers begin with trust and relationship building to cultivate an environment conducive to discussion. Maddy continued to communicate the importance of the atmosphere in the classroom claiming,

I think I feel like being in an AP class definitely changes the atmosphere of the room and like for example if I were in a regular class or honors especially government class students are forced to take it’s a required class so they all don’t necessarily want to be there I don’t know if they would want to research as much as AP level students would because we all chose to be in the AP level class (Smith, 2018). Maddy suggested that research would help students consider new information and had the potential to expose them to ideas they have not considered. The research of Hodgin and Kahne (2018) suggests that students’ “prior beliefs can be enormously influential on students’ judgments of the credibility of truth claims related to controversial issues” and “youth, like adults, often focus on whether a statement supports their prior beliefs” (p. 208). Maddy claims that she was investigating the topics with an open mind and believed her peers in the AP class would do the same. While I believe that was true for some of the issues, I believe each of the students had a strong stance on abortion. To communicate their perspectives, they searched for quotes and statistics to support their position. The willingness of students to consider multiple perspectives enhanced the learning opportunity and is a variable determined by the students of the class.

When I asked Maddy what she thought about listening to others she stated, “I think it’s important and hopefully if they don’t see educated on a topic hopefully, they could learn from other students presentations” (Smith, 2018). Maddy’s perspective on the importance of listening to others is echoed by Meissel (2019) who specifically identified “willing to listen to alternative
perspectives” (p. 4) as a moral and civic virtue that is essential to civic learning. Maddy’s response conveyed the importance of the activity. The students had an opportunity to communicate their perspectives on controversial topics and increase their content knowledge of political issues through the tasks required as part of the Elections project.

The opportunity the Elections project provided encouraged the students to consider multiple perspectives. After I introduced the project, the students had time in class to begin planning their campaign and investigating the topics to help them form or support a perspective on each of the five issues. Maddy communicated that she considered multiple perspectives as she developed her campaign ideas and conducted research, which resulted in an increased understanding of the issues. I asked Maddy if she thought a student could sway her opinion on an issued that was debated in class she claimed “some of them I think so, it depends on the reputableness of their sources, I am pretty set in my opinions but I do think it could be good to take the other opinions into consideration” (Smith, 2018). When I asked her to specify the topics, she thought other students could influence her on she stated “a couple issues like health care I didn’t feel like I knew a lot about. Topics like gun control and gun rights I am on one extreme and I don’t think would change my mind” (Smith, 2018). Simpson (2018) stated, “getting students to understand and respect opinions that are different from theirs can be challenging” (p. 305). Through the Elections project, students were required to participate in a debate and ultimately hear and consider multiple perspectives of five controversial issues.

If the students were receptive to listening to their peers, I believed the Elections project would be a powerful learning experience. I asked Maddy what her thoughts were on the opportunity to communicate with her peers and if she believed it would be a valuable experience. She stated
I definitely think so, I think it opens my mind and reminds me other people have different opinions and I don’t want to offend people with my opinions but I think knowing what people think helps me know what they think and who they are as people and their political views don’t define them but I think it shows things about working with them (Smith, 2018).

Maddy was able to communicate the importance of acquiring skills from the Elections project and applying them beyond the classroom. Maddy explained,

even when you’re not talking about politics but anytime there is a problem to solve with people or to see both sides and come to a decision based on your research is important, I think that is valuable in all fields (Smith, 2018).

Maddy’s insight was absolutely correct and many educators have been looking for ways to address teaching students skills that transcend the classroom. Larmer (2018) described how PBL addresses Common Core and other standards that,

ask students to think critically, solve real-world problems, communicate and collaborate with diverse others, and build speaking and listening skills… Compared to most traditional forms of instruction, PBL is one of the most effective ways to build these skills (p. 20).

This project provided the students with an opportunity to listen to perspectives from both sides of the issues. Maddy explained how the Elections project helped her evaluate multiple perspectives

I think not only are there multiple topics but it’s with like 20 some people that you’re trying to figure out their opinions and we need to examine a bunch of different resources and ideas because every different topic there is million pieces of evidence (Smith, 2018).

Maddy prepared for the debate by considering the perspectives of her peers and thinking about what evidence they might cite to justify their positions. Turk and Berman (2018) claim students “truly come to own the material when they learn and see the value and meaning of the work they are engaged in” (p. 36) a process they claim that can only be achieved through “projects that invite transfer” (p. 36). Turn and Berman (2018) describe the process of transfer as “the
extension of learning from one project to another” (p. 36). This process helped inspire Maddy to find research that could help clarify her points and challenge the findings of her peers.

Maddy utilized the perspectives of her peers to her advantage as she started working on her campaign. During the video elicitation interview that captured the project workday, Maddy was communicating with two of her peers in the class. I asked Maddy if the Elections project was assigned to be completed in groups. She responded by saying

    no, I don’t think it was, I mean we were all campaigning for ourselves, but I feel like the entirety of the project is kind of based on a group effort because with the debates you have to collaborate and kind of construct your own viewpoints. I guess based off information other people present so I think it could kind of go off both ways but for the most part it’s individual like each campaign is individual (Smith, 2018).

Despite the project being individual the students often consulted each other to get feedback on campaign ideas and enhance their understanding of their classmates’ political ideology. Lottero-Perdue (2017) claimed a “key facet of PBL learning environments is that students work together to define and solve problems in collaborative teams” (p. 112). The students identified the need to incorporate the perspectives of their peers to develop a stronger campaign. The students in the sixth-period class identified a problem and took action to address the inadequacy that I did not foresee as a potential issue. Through their actions, they formed partnerships that provided reflective feedback to help develop campaign posters. The formation of partnerships also provided insight into the political beliefs of their peers in the class. By exchanging advice and viewing the political campaign posters the students were able to identify the perspectives of others. By identifying the political perspectives of their peers, the students were able to evaluate and adjust their communication strategy for additional campaign posters and how they communicated during the debate.
The formation of collaborative teams and peer feedback occurred most frequently on instructional days in class provided for the students to work on the Elections project. I asked Maddy if she thought the project work day was necessary to complete the tasks for the project. She responded by saying

"umm I think I could have done it at home however I don’t think it would have been as effective because as you can see in the video I was asking, or students were asking each other about our opinions or asking each other opinions about the slogans. [The] campaigns might not have been as effective if we had not gotten the feedback from other students. I know some of my slogans that I came up with were not [as] good as one [I did] with help (Smith, 2018).

Students benefited from the project work days because they were able to test new ideas and receive feedback from their peers. This opportunity encouraged the students to reflect on their work, make adjustments, and start the process again. Maddy confirmed the usefulness of peer feedback when I asked her how she managed her time during the project workday. “I felt that collaboration really helped me with the campaign ads and the research I didn’t need others help for that, but to do it at a time when I can really dive deep into the topics” (Smith, 2018). In the next clip of the video we watched as part of the interview, a student was showing his ad to Maddy. I asked her what she said to the student. Maddy’s response was, “personally I am not a big fan of slander ads, I think, I don’t know, they don’t really make me want to vote for the person” (Smith, 2018). Her feedback didn’t deter the student from making slander ads but he did create an add that communicated his views on the second amendment without slandering anyone.

On the day of the debate, students were able to share their perspectives on the political topics the class previously selected. As we watched the video clip from the debate, I asked Maddy what the student was doing who was talking. Her response was, “he is describing his viewpoint on abortion and why he feels that way” (Smith, 2018). I asked if she thought that was a controversial topic. Maddy said, “definitely, I think that was the most controversial topic out of
the five, I feel like everyone has an opinion on it” (Smith, 2018). Ruffing and Arbetman (2018) listed abortion first in their list of nine most contested public issues in America.

The students were directly involved in the selection process of the five topics that were debated. As the students worked to generate a list of debate topics, a student suggested abortion, causing chatter to fill the room as many students began side conversations. After observing the students’ actions, I agreed with Maddy that abortion would be a controversial topic for the class to discuss and I believed the students would be eager to share their thoughts. Hess (2018) claims that some teachers avoid teaching controversial issues like “access to health care, to voting rights to gun control to abortion” (p. 306). I wanted to take advantage of the student engagement and provide an opportunity for the students to hear diverse opinions. I was encouraged when we started the debate and students were eager to share. The first student to share continued to communicate his perspective as Maddy and I watched the video clip from the debate. As the student presented his perspective of abortion to the class, I asked Maddy to describe the behavior of the class. “I think everyone was listening pretty attentively, I feel like people were respecting what he was saying even if they disagree with it, they were just listening to what he was saying” (Smith, 2018). Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2019) promote the idea that teaching controversial issues can be done in a way that “allows students to feel comfortable exploring their opinions and views on political issues without indoctrinating them into a specific set of beliefs” (p. 327). The members of the class were passionate about sharing their thoughts but did not directly attack others or try to coerce others to change their beliefs.

Each student had an equal opportunity to share their perspectives. The first student to speak, according to Maddy, was “pro-choice and the second student leaned more pro-life” (Smith, 2018). Students exchanged dialogue presenting their views and supporting their
arguments with facts. Maddy recalled her thoughts while the first student speaking in the video clip presented his pro-life perspective. “He was prepared for the debate and he did his research and he knew where he stood, he had the ability to kind of display his view pretty effectively” (Smith, 2018). Segall et al. (2018) discuss the importance of providing the students with packets of documents to help provide the students with resources that can help the students support their claim. In the debate, many students communicated facts and utilized statistics to support their arguments. In addition, students conducted their own research, which required them to identify, analyze, and synthesize information.

As Maddy and I continued to view the film clip of the debate, the next segment featured Maddy explaining her perspective on abortion rights. “I was explaining my point of view on the issue” (Smith, 2018). I asked Maddy if she could recall that experience, she responded by stating “there was something that people had said before, I think the student before me I disagreed with, so I think I was eager to talk and get my point across” (Smith, 2018). Segall and colleagues (2018) research shows that it is common that “male students tended to dominate” (p. 337) and female students “responded to arguments that their male colleagues introduced” (p. 337). I asked Maddy to describe the actions of the class while she was talking as we viewed the video clip. She communicated “they all seem pretty attentive, they all seem to respect what is said and listen to my opinions” (Smith, 2018). This would have been understandable to me if the class held the same perspective. I asked Maddy if any of the students’ perspectives were strongly opposed to what she communicated? She told me “honestly, I think the class was divided pretty evenly with half of them being pro-choice and half of them being pro-life” (Smith, 2018). The ability of the students to respect each other as they communicated different perspectives of controversial issues was to be commended. “Deliberations and discussions, like almost everything we do in
classrooms, require building up the skills of both teachers and students in that area and, often, quite a bit of practice and reflection” (Segall, et al, 2018, p. 342). The students had experience participating in discussions weekly through the first semester. The ability to model appropriate behavior when discussing less controversial issues helped build discussion skills that had a positive effect on the Elections project. I continued to build my skills in the discussion as an educator. I was in my 11th year as a teacher and had been working to develop student discussion since the beginning of my career. My knowledge of discussion that directly related to the Elections project benefited from conducting the same simulation one year prior. I did not take notes as I conducted the simulation the first time, but I did remember elements that contributed to a successful discussion, especially providing time for each student to share to prevent students from monopolizing the conversation. Sibbett (2018) notes, some dominant voices become empowered during discussions, while other students remain unheard.

After the video clip ended, I asked Maddy what she learned from the overall experience of completing the Elections project. “I would say I learned how an election really works and how much really goes into debates and how different people’s opinions are, it’s so crazy how in five topics how many different ideas there were” (Smith, 2018). Each student communicated something different from the other students and potential solutions included a variety of ideas. I asked Maddy, if she learned anything new about the students in the class. She responded saying, “I did. I learned from some I didn’t really know them very well but I feel like getting to know how they think and what their opinions are on topics kind of helped me understand who they were as people” (Smith, 2018). Listening to people communicate their feelings and considering multiple perspectives is part of educating students for a future role in democracy (Hess, 2018). I wanted to know if Maddy valued the opportunity to learn about the perspectives of her peers.
She communicated, “I think so, I think everyone should get a chance to be heard and have their opinion put out there because people do in most cases respect it” (Smith, 2018). I believe Maddy’s claim that everyone respects it was heavily influenced by her experience during the Elections project and her time spent in my class. As the teacher of the class, I was delighted to learn she believes all members of the class are respected and encouraged to share their ideas.

I asked Maddy if she saw a need for communication of controversial topics to transcend the classroom and how that might impact society. She exclaimed “I definitely do! I think that if more people got their opinions out there and had the ability to debate it, it would lead to a consensus or an agreement” (Smith, 2018). I am not sure that discussion would result in an agreement, but I agree that it could accomplish steps that could lead to an agreement. By encouraging people to talk about issues with diverse perspectives would help increase understanding. Segall et al. (2018) claim engaging students in meaningful discussion “is well worth pursuing if we want to prepare students to assume a more active and robust role in our democracy” (p. 342). I asked Maddy if the class had come to a consensus or an agreement, her response was, no. I asked if she changed her mind on any of the topics the class debated? Maddy said, “I didn’t know if I changed my mind completely but on certain topics, no I guess I stayed pretty solid in my opinions, but I think it was good to see the other side because I haven’t done that before” (Smith, 2018). King et al. (2018) claim providing students with opportunities to explore controversial issues equips them to be proactive citizens in a democratic society. Despite the fact that Maddy did not change her opinions, the Elections project did expose her to the perspectives of others and allowed students to communicate their thoughts in a respectful way. Considering multiple perspectives could help the students better defend their positions or be
exposed to new information that causes the student to reconsider their stance. Maddy communicated,

Through this project it helped me become a better listener and respect other peoples’ opinions more because I became more aware of the multitude of different opinions around a high school, a single high school classroom, so it opens my mind to the idea that everyone has a different opinion on something, so even if you have the same general idea about a topic, certain aspects of that opinion are not synonymous with another students views and I think that being a better listener and respecting other people’s views was kind of stressed through this project (Smith, 2018).

Maddy communicated that the Elections project was able to promote civic competence. The National Council of the Social Studies (1994) describes civic competence as the ability to make informed, reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

I asked Maddy if she considered our school a very diverse place. She responded by saying, “not really… I don’t really know about a lot of diversity” (Smith, 2018). Tavares (2018) communicated the challenges of incorporating diverse views in the classroom due to residential segregation. I believe Tavares’s claims reflect my sixth-period class, 20 of the 22 students are classified as Caucasian and most of the students claim they are members of the middle class. Despite the homogeneity of the students, a wide variety of views were communicated throughout the debate. The Elections project provided an opportunity to create bridges and connect students to create a more democratic classroom.

**Within-Case Analysis for Susan**

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, two themes emerged. Susan Aybar communicated the importance of discussing controversial issues and the value of opportunities to interact with her peers through the course of the project. The students compiled a list of topics
for the debate and, as a result, Susan claimed: “I thought they were all pretty good topics most of them were controversial” (Aybar, 2018).

Providing opportunities for students to discuss controversial topics is important in developing democratic citizens (Hess, 2019). Barss (2018) claims “a fundamental goal of education is citizenship, developing young people who are ethical and inclusive citizens with a sense of common good” (p. 249). In order to determine common good, I believe it to be necessary to have the students identify their stance on political issues and defend their positions.

Susan and I watched the video clip from the project introduction class period. I asked Susan what she was thinking as we watched the students suggest topics to be added to the list of possible issues for the debate. Susan responded by stating “probably just how controversial they are and how it might get heated” (Aybar, 2018). Lo (2018) claims “social studies teachers tend to shy away from disagreements because they want to avoid upsetting students or parents by bringing up controversial topics in the classroom” (p. 332). By allowing the students to suggest topics for the debate it invited the possibility of conflict. The students compiled a list of 15 topics then voted for the topics they would most like to debate. As we watched the video clip of the students voting, I asked Susan’s thoughts on the process. She stated, “I thought that was a good way to do it because it shows what people actually want to debate about because if they don’t want to debate about it it’s not going to be interesting” (Aybar, 2018). Larmer (2018) identifies the importance of providing students with a choice to increase engagement. The selection of topics helped fuel Susan’s excitement for the project.

The students had a positive response to the Elections project assignment. Students willingly participated in the process to identify potential topics for debate then began working on tasks associated with the project once I explained the directions. After the topics for the debate
were selected the students began to think about campaign slogans or began research on the topics. I asked Susan why she thought the students in the class were so willing to discuss controversial issues. She said,

I think people want to talk about them because they are relevant issues and we are all almost eighteen and we are going to be able to vote. We are trying to, I guess, learn more about ourselves and become more involved (Aybar, 2018).

Our school has structured the courses in a way that allows the senior class to take economics and government. I agree with Susan and believe this is beneficial to the students because they can make a connection with the topics discussed. Many of the students in my class have developed a curiosity concerning political actions that affect their daily lives.

The ability of the students to select their own topics helped increase Susan’s motivation to complete the project. Susan told me, “I am personally interested in them, so it is more fun to research them, and I am not doing something just because I am forced to” (Aybar, 2018). Student choice has been linked to increased student motivation in multiple studies, so her response was not surprising to me (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Larmer, 2018; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).

Providing the students with an opportunity to investigate topics they were interested in increased motivation for the project. Students were interested in voicing their own opinions and learning the perspectives of their peers. Susan communicated she was interested in hearing from her peers because “it is different from what you hear at home” (Aybar, 2018). Tavares (2018) notes the importance of integrating different voices by finding ways to escape segregation and “bubbles” that prevent students from experiencing diversity (p. 262). Being exposed to multiple viewpoints is helpful in fully understanding a topic and can help the student solidify their own perspectives. Susan communicated that through this process it is more realistic to “get closer to a
solution” (Aybar, 2018). Tavares (2018) communicated the necessity for including diverse perspectives to bridge gaps and make connections. I asked Susan to expand on her thoughts.

A lot of times the controversies are grey areas, things might not be black and white but talking about it allows you to work it out or reach a compromise. People don’t want to talk about issues they want to talk about their viewpoint and not listen to the other side (Aybar, 2018).

Discussing controversial issues will help students acquire skills to help them work through differences and find solutions to problems. Morais (2018) communicates the benefit of project-based learning as a method that helps students practice solving problems. Roberts (2015) research suggests that experiential learning can help students acquire problem-solving skills. Through the Election project, the students participated in an experiential collaborative learning experience that enhanced understanding of multiple perspectives of controversial issues.

In the debate, the students were exposed to multiple viewpoints of controversial topics and developed skills that helped them consider the perspectives of others while addressing issues. As Susan and I were watching the video clip of the debate, I asked her to describe what was going on. She explained, “he’s talking about abortion, his stand on it and trying to relate it to his personal story” (Aybar, 2018). I asked if she thought this was a controversial issue and she replied, “Yeah, for sure” (Aybar, 2018). The debate on abortion captured the attention of all the students. I didn’t notice any students off task as the debate continued for over 20 minutes. Turk and Berman (2018) described the standard PBL unit as sustained and the “main emphasis on what students learn rather than what teachers teach” (p. 35). During the 20-minute period students voluntarily shared their views and responded to questions from their peers. As we continued to watch the video, the student continued to discuss his perspective on abortion. I asked Susan what her reaction was to his comments. She expressed that, “I don’t agree one hundred percent with everything he was saying but he backed it up and I thought he did a good
job of expressing his opinions” (Aybar, 2018). Segall and colleagues (2018) discuss the importance of students supporting their claims to add validity to the discussion. I asked Susan if she thought it was important to participate in debates or discussions like what we witnessed in the video clip. She said, “Yeah, I do think it’s important because the more you talk about it the more informed you are going to be and we are all about to start voting and I think that’s important so” (Aybar, 2018). Ruffing and Arbetman (2018) claim through teaching controversial issues that students “appeal to reason over unsubstantiated opinion” that they recognize this skill as “invaluable not only in the classroom but also in a larger context as students take on their roles as voters and citizens faced with the challenge of grappling with controversial issues” (p. 347).

The students experienced the power of communication that utilized sources of evidence to support claims and, that communicating in a calm and respectful fashion fostered exchange.

The second theme I identified through coding was the interaction that took place between the students. Susan stated, “I am sure there will be controversy, but I am sure no one will be rude about it or anything like that, I think people are just comfortable in this class” (Aybar, 2018). Segall et al. (2018) communicate the first step in engaging controversial deliberations in class is to create a classroom community that values listening. Noddings (2015) identifies the need to develop “soft skills” such as collegiality, cooperation, communication, teamwork, and social skills (p. 115). Because the Elections project was enacted in November it provided time to cultivate a community among the students in the classroom. All but four of the students I taught the previous year and had established a positive relationship that fostered care. Due to the development of the classroom culture, it was possible to have a debate in class because the students respected each other and were mature in the way they handled their emotions as the class discussed controversial issues.
Susan communicated why she thought the class would be able to participate in an effective debate. “I feel like everyone in our class is pretty nice and nobody is going to tear each other apart because of their opinions but also, I feel like a lot of people have similar opinions on stuff so I feel like it will be more to one side than another” (Aybar, 2018). The Establishment of a positive environment and building relationships was an important part of conducting social learning opportunities. I found Susan’s response to many of her classmates having similar opinions to be an interesting claim. As the Elections project encouraged students to share their political perspectives through campaign posters, participating in the debate allowed diverse perspectives to resonate in all five of the topics. Susan claimed “a lot of the people in our class are friends so that helped too but I think we just have a nice class, so everyone is kind of respectful of each other” (Aybar, 2018). Her description of her peers in class as friends is positive and is part of why the classroom is so receptive to collaborative learning. To clarify what she described as friends I asked Susan if she spent time with any of the students outside of class. Susan claimed she spent time with seven of the students outside of the school day. Susan’s description of the class as friends is positive but made me wonder if all the students voluntarily spent time with each other outside of the school day. If all of the students spent time together outside of class that would have impacted the research because that behavior would not be common among many high school AP American Government classes.

The importance of establishing a positive classroom environment was important to me so I asked Susan to explain what a teacher could do to help work towards students becoming more respectful of each other. Susan excitedly exclaimed, “Mental Health Mondays” (Aybar, 2018)! I asked, “What is a Mental Health Monday” (Aybar, 2018)? Susan explained, “It’s typically a break for students to work on their mental health, compliment each other, or learn more about
each other” (Aybar, 2018). I believe it has provided an opportunity to learn more about each of the students and for them to make connections with their peers. I started enacting mental Health Mondays after five students over the course of three years, approached me after class to communicate they were contemplating suicide. I wanted to do something that would help me have a greater understanding of the mental state of each of my students. Because I have at least 150 students each year it became difficult to get to know students without using instructional time. Noddings (2015) describes care ethics as “not simply a matter of having or expressing concern. It is best described as a relation” (p. 120). I needed to build better relationships with my students so I could become proactive in caring for them. Noddings (2015) describes the role of the care giver as one who “attends to the expressed needs of the cared for, is moved effectively by what they detect in the other’s situation” (p. 121). I have been attentive, receptive, empathic and responsive through the enactment of Mental Health Monday. Since I have incorporated Mental Health Mondays, I have learned more about each of my students and I believe it has helped establish a better community within my classroom. Susan confirmed my beliefs when she communicated “I like Mental Health Mondays because we get a break from what we’re doing and it’s fun to learn about other kids in the class” (Aybar, 2018). I asked what she learns about the other students as a result of the activity. She explained

    well, [it] depends what the activity is but sometimes you ask us what our favorite food is or what we did over break and I guess you could form more relationships off of that like oh my favorite food is sushi and you’re like, I love that, you know stuff like that (Aybar, 2018).

Through increased communication with the students, I have solicited responses that help me learn more about each student. This process has fostered care and created an inclusive atmosphere where the students know each other and can identify with the problems, issues,
desires, and goals of their peers. Deliberate action to build positive relationships enhanced the communication skills of the students and enhanced the Elections project.

Susan described other things she thought could be incorporated in class that would enhance the interaction between students. She communicated that people would be more willing to listen to others if instructional strategies were utilized that would increase the frequency of including the perspectives of students. Susan stated, “their open mindedness could change from doing things like this, Socratic seminars, and respectful discussions” (Aybar, 2018). Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) claim teachers should integrate controversial issues in discussions into the curriculum suggesting that some social studies teachers avoid controversial topics completely. Teachers who perceive they have the support of the community and the principal are more frequently integrating discussion of controversial issues in their classes (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Junco, 2018, p. 324). I asked Susan to clarify what she meant when she used the word respectful. She explained, “meaning you’re listening to other peoples’ ideas and actually considering them and not just shutting them off” (Aybar, 2018). Hodgin and Kahne (2018) identified that youths focus on whether a statement supports their stance if it does not it is disregarded. Educators need to support students through the development of a healthy level of skepticism so students can critically evaluate information and form their own opinions. The Elections project provided an opportunity for the students to reflect on the perspectives of their peers and incorporate their ideas or refute them as they addressed the class.

The Elections project provided multiple opportunities for the students to interact with their peers. Susan explained that she anticipated the project would help her reflect on new ideas. She stated “maybe after hearing other viewpoints it will cause me to consider them and it might change my viewpoint a little bit” (Aybar, 2018). After the debate, Susan explained that the
project exposed her to multiple viewpoints, and she used what she learned from her peers when she presented her perspective. She claimed, “people were preparing me for what to say and what they were going to say” (Aybar, 2018). I asked her what she learned from examining the viewpoints of others and she explained: “the abortion viewpoint like morally I don’t think it is right but after you hear people talk, I understand why people would get them” (Aybar, 2018). Based on Susan’s claim I believe the Elections project helped me effectively teach controversial issues. My goal was never to change the mind of students especially on issues tied to religious convictions. I wanted to provide a method that would be memorable and allow the students to simulate an experience that would help them understand the key concepts for the AP American Government and Politics course. Through the process of the debate, the students were able to develop skills that helped them evaluate information presented from diverse perspectives and consider the beliefs of others. Susan admitted that some of the students communicated effectively and it resulted in her reconsidering her perspective. Susan told me, “some people brought up some really good points that I guess influenced some of my viewpoints” (Aybar, 2018). By considering alternative perspectives the students had a better understanding of the issues.

Susan and I watched the video clip of the debate and viewed students presenting their perspectives on abortion. I asked Susan if she could describe how the students were reacting as one student spoke about abortion. She explained, “most people seem pretty involved, I don’t see many reactions mainly just listening at this point” (Aybar, 2018). The students took turns talking being mindful not to cut someone off in mid-sentence. As we returned to the video clip, the second student communicated his perspective on abortion, and it was the opposite of the first student. Susan described the exchange “Phil is really pro-choice like really far on that side and
Bob is the complete opposite because he is saying at conception every fetus has natural human rights and to take those away is wrong” (Aybar, 2018). This interaction represented the diversity of viewpoints that were shared in the class through the debate (Sadler, Amirshokoohi, Kazempour, & Allspaw, 2006). I asked Susan to explain how the students are acting as they communicate. She described it as, “pretty polite because in this whole debate we never really debated everyone just kind of expressed their views politely and then listened to other people” (Aybar, 2018). Susan’s claim that the debate was more deliberation doesn’t detract from the educational value of the project. Olbrys (2019) described deliberation as a method that ensures all voices are valued and all students are engaged. The debate task of the Elections project required all students to participate. I agree with Susan that the students expressed their views politely. I do think there was an element of debate when the students discussed abortion, a volley of facts and counterpoints were exchanged between two students. This exchange was the most interactive between two students through the course of the Elections project. After the two students concluded their exchange the students who had not yet voiced their opinions took the opportunity to share.

Susan and I continued watching the video clip from the debate. The segment of the video featured Susan showing the class the three advertisements she created. Roberson (2018) suggest that teachers have asked students to think critically about information and use their knowledge to construct arguments to help build media literacy skills. The development of the campaign poster required the students to conduct research, form an opinion, or support a previously established opinion and find a creative way to communicate their thoughts to the voters. The video clip displayed Susan holding three advertisements. I asked her if they were all the same? Susan
responded by clarifying, “no! it was three different ads” (Aybar, 2018). I asked her if she needed to do three ads. Susan laughed and said no. She told me she did three ads because

I just thought it would be more effective than doing one because then people would see more of my opinions and it would be in more places in the room and I can do different kinds of advertisements like there was one slander one and two on opinions (Aybar, 2018).

Susan wanted to share her viewpoints with her peers and did more work than was required. According to Myeong-Hee (2018) “project-based learning can contribute to the development of students' creativity, internal motivation and interest” (p. 97). The project helped motivate her to do more work than what was required to earn an A on the project. Susan was so interested in the project that she allocated additional time to develop three campaign posters.

Susan and I continued to watch the video clip as she presented her perspectives on abortion to the class. I asked her if it felt like she had the attention of the other students while she was speaking. Susan responded by saying “yeah, nobody was talking, and everyone was just listening” (Aybar, 2018). Because the students respected each other it was easy to manage the behavior of the students. I did not have to remind anyone to be polite or ask any students not to speak over another student. The same actions were observable as we continued to watch the video clip from the debate. I asked Susan to describe what was going on in the clip. Susan summarized the events by stating,

I was listening to Maddy who gave another viewpoint that was similar to Phil’s but probably not so extreme. James was, I guess you could say he was debating at this point because he directly took something that Phil said and refuted it (Aybar, 2018).

The discussions remained respectful and every student in class appeared to be engaged in the debate.
Due to the positive interaction in the class, all the students felt comfortable sharing their viewpoints. Hess (2015) claims “perceptions of how their peers view their contributions to discussion also affects participation rates… encouragement from classmates would make them more likely to speak during discussions” (p. 263).

I asked Susan to describe the political climate in the class. She responded by saying “there is a pretty good mix of people on the political spectrum, even if people are moderate, people are still leaning one way or the other” (Aybar, 2018). I believe the variety of viewpoints was an advantage in helping students prepare to become active participants in a democratic society. The power of diversity empowers students to reflect, consider and defend their views, and the public school is an excellent setting to develop these skills.

A variety of perspectives is helpful in providing students with an understanding of diversity. The experience was enhanced by the students who were well informed and utilized respected sources to communicate. I asked Susan if she thought the students from the film clip were well informed on the topic. Susan defended her peers claiming,

I think they were because they both used statistics, like Ryan said the statistic about death decreasing with the assault rifle ban and James addressed a different part of it [claiming] that people can obtain guns if they wanted illegally and that we should be looking into the mental health issues, and he provided a number of suspected undocumented people with mental health conditions (Aybar, 2018).

I asked what effect the use of statistics and facts had on her as a student listening to the debate. Susan claimed, “it just makes them a lot more credible because if people are just stating their opinions and not backing it up with anything it just doesn’t seem very accurate and well supported” (Aybar, 2018). Hess (2015) identifies the importance of students preparing for a discussion as an essential component. As Susan stated, the students debating utilized factual evidence that indicated they conducted research and prepared for the debate.
As the film clip concluded, I asked Susan to reflect on her experience with the Elections project and tell me what she learned. She told me, “I guess I just learned more about how elections do work and um, how to debate with people and to go more in-depth with topics we were debating because I learned more about each one” (Aybar, 2018). Learning from peers can be an effective method. Susan also communicated that she learned the content of the election process and learned skills on how to debate or communicate more effectively with her peers. Project-based learning is well regarded because of the ability to teach content and skills simultaneously. When I asked her if any aspect of the project was hard Susan explained: “its kind of difficult to actually express your opinions in words” (Aybar, 2018). Barton and Levstik (2004) claim “that students may be able to gather data from source documents but have difficulty synthesizing that data to create well-reasoned narratives or arguments. I think some of the students struggled with communicating their points in a coherent and concise way. Swan and colleagues (2018) communicate how students can improve.

When students work with the elements of inquiry, they wrestle with important questions, mine disciplinary sources for answers and insight, craft evidenced-based claims/counterclaims, and then communicate their conclusions expressively or civically. If given a chance to do this process repeatedly, students become more proficient at it, helping us achieve the goals set out in the C3 Framework (p. 133).

The Elections project provided an opportunity for the students to practice that skill and it helped identify an area of weakness among a group of academically successful students. The Election project was a valuable addition to the curriculum of the course because it helped my students communicate the thoughts effectively.

The experience of debating controversial issues and interacting with peers helped make the Elections project a valuable part of the AP American Government class for Susan. She
communicated that she learned much about the five topics from her peers and utilized the opportunity to enhance her communication skills.

**Conclusion**

The decision to use a qualitative descriptive case study for this research project was a good choice. The use of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory was appropriate in determining the students’ perspectives of project-based learning. I was able to use Kolb’s (1984) learning theory to reflect on the experiences, the opportunities for reflection, the thinking processes, and the opportunity to act that each participant encountered through the Elections project. The use of video-elicitation interviews was conductive to obtaining a better understanding of students’ perspectives. The stimulation of the video to specific events helped increase communication during the interviews and added richer descriptions. The purpose of acquiring the students’ perspectives was to add motivated and academically proficient students’ voices to the literature. The research provides a look at challenges, obstacles, and benefits of students who completed the Elections project in an American Government and Politics course.
Chapter 6:
Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Shaping Change

I believe it is important to consider the perspectives of Dewey on shaping change in education as I reflect on this study. Dewey’s own experience confronted him with the idea that democracy as a form of community life was growing, changing, and education should grow with it. Dewey (1937) claimed “democracy in order to live must change and move” (p. 183). I believe as society changes it places an emphasis on different skills and educators must enact pedagogy that provides students with opportunities to grow.

Biesta (2010) communicated, “this begins to explain why there is relatively little in Dewey’s work that tells us how we should educate” (p. 214). Dewey’s efforts were focused on articulating a theoretical position that indicated changes in educational practice accruing from the connects he observed between education and the growth of democracy. As I have observed society change over the course of my career, I believe it is essential to implement instruction that encourage students to build 21st century skills.

PBL can help students master material and build skills that can help them become democratic citizens but no education method it perfect. Dewey (1938) warns that creating a new curriculum will not fix all of the problems of the previous curriculum because new problems will be exposed that will need to be addressed. Dewey’s point is important to consider as educators
enact new method in their classrooms, however I believe this research can have a positive affect on education.

**Summary of the Study**

In this study I examined the enactment of a project-based learning method in a social studies course. A growing body of work has emerged to develop projects that can be adapted to Advanced Placement classes (Hallock & Smoot, 2018; Halvorsen et al., 2018; Lo, 2018; Parker et al., 2011; Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018). The goal of many educators has been to develop project-based tasks that help students develop a deep understanding of issues. The advantages of PBL tactics have been associated by some researchers to include eradicating students’ misconceptions while stimulating more meaningful learning (Liang & Gabel, 2005). The groundbreaking work of Parker and Lo (2015) has helped educators utilize their five projects that teach essential concepts for the American Government and Politics course through simulations.

What the research lacked was information on the enactment process the teacher faces. This study provided data that examined the major issues when enacting this new method in the classroom. I identified three themes that emerged from my experience: the need to cross-reference key concepts with tasks, to remain flexible, and to maintain effective communication with the administration and students.

I believed it was important to include the perspectives of students in the class who experienced the enactment of the Elections project. Research has shown when students are provided with opportunities to express their identities, experiences, and opinions, schools and teachers have better chances to improve learning for students (Flutter, 2007; Hajisoteriou, Karousiou, & Angelides, 2018; Lodge, 2005). Students are directly affected by the methods teachers use in their classrooms and their thoughts should be considered when enacting a new
method. The perspectives of students enhanced the literature by providing more data regarding their thoughts and feelings while engaged in the Elections project.

This study is helpful for educators to consider the essential elements of enacting a project and how students may respond. By understanding the steps a teacher will encounter in the enactment of the Elections project many elements can be applied to other projects at other locations. It is possible this data could be used to provide professional development training to educators who would like to enact project-based learning in their classrooms. The research of Avery, Freeman, and Carmichael-Tanaka (2002) suggested the implementation of professional development had a significant increase on the teachers’ utilization of the new skills (Avery, Freeman, & Carmichael-Tanaka, 2002). Social Studies methods instructors may consider preparing preservice teachers to enact project-based learning methods by considering the themes that emerged in this study.

It is also beneficial to see perspectives of the students who worked through the Elections project. In today’s climate, it is typical to focus on effectiveness and testing, which could exclude the importance of students’ experience. According to Phillips (2018) “taking student voice into account throughout the process of educational change can improve both the experience of students and the profession of teaching” (2018, p. 13). The data from this study suggests the Elections project was an enjoyable experience that was frequently described by the participants as interesting.

The purpose of conducting this research study was to answer the questions: How does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class? What contextual factors help shape how a social studies teacher enacts PBL into instruction? How do the social studies teacher's beliefs, skills, and life
experiences influence the enactment of PBL? How do the social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment? How does a social studies teacher apply PBL principles in planning for instruction? How does a social studies teacher implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum? How do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and perceive enactment of PBL?

The summary of findings from the case study and conclusion provided a comprehensive view of the purpose of the research study. The result of the study added to an existing body of literature on project-based learning and students’ perspectives of that method. In addition, this research filled a gap in the literature regarding the lack of information on the process the teacher faces when enacting PBL in their class. The study results will help administrators, teachers, students, and methods instructors, equip educators with the knowledge and skills to enact project-based learning.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative case study research was accomplished by providing additional knowledge to the body of literature on the implementation and reflections of an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class using project-based learning methods, and I believe that the findings will help teachers enact PBL tasks in their courses. The summary of findings and conclusions were addressed according to each research question in order to add to the body of knowledge on project-based learning.

Enactment

The first research question of this study was analyzed using codes that were identified from sources that included narrative inquiry, document analysis, and observations. Through my
dual role as the teacher-researcher, I was able to describe my experience enacting the Elections project in my class. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as "situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 3). The first question in this study was: how does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class?

The first theme that emerged was the importance of communicating with the administrative team at the school. According to Johnson, Whittington, and Scholes (2011), managerial discourse can play a large role in innovation and enacting change in an educational setting. I found it valuable to know the administrators who would be evaluating me knew about project-based learning. We conducted several discussions on the goal of enacting project-based learning in social studies classes. I had an opportunity to speak in detail about the projects I was using in multiple classes, the tasks the students would complete, the learning goals, and the students’ processes in completing the tasks. This ability to discuss methods I was using in my classroom provided me with the confidence that the administrative team was aware of how I was teaching the course. The first year I enacted the five simulations developed by Parker and Lo (2015) the assistant principal who oversaw my department visited my classroom weekly. The frequency of observations and walkthroughs comforted me because the total collection of what she saw reinforced her belief that the students were learning content, and they were doing it in a fun and memorable way.

After my first year teaching the AP American Government and Politics course, I was not pleased with the scores of my students on the AP exam. I communicated with my principal and assistant principal to reevaluate methods and consider future alternatives. Both administrators
favored continuing the use of project-based learning tasks. With their support, I revisited the alignment of key concepts to the tasks required in the project.

The second theme that emerged from this study to address the enactment of PBL was the need to align project tasks to key concepts from the curriculum. Halvorsen, Duke, Brugar, Block, Strachan, Berka, and Brown (2012) communicated the need for “aligning project-based units to specific learning standards” (p. 204). Because AP courses have a large amount of curriculum to cover and a limited time to do so, every task had to be purposeful. I evaluated the key concepts that were provided by the College Board and read the description of the Elections project that Parker and Lo (2015) provided. I then planed the unit by aligning key concepts for each project task.

I determined the amount of time I was able to spend on the unit and then started the unit with the project introduction. Parker (2018) recommends starting a unit with the project to get the students invested in the task. Through the initial introduction of the project, the students would utilize the lesson in class to enhance their understanding of the content and to apply what they learned to their projects. The unit covered key concepts that addressed elections, campaigns, the role of the media, journalism, and interest groups.

The lessons constructed for the unit focused on an element that would provide a deeper understanding of a key concept during each class period. The research of Avery and colleagues (2002) showed student had gains in “understanding of significant disciplinary concepts” (p. 54). As the students were shown how elections worked, they applied that knowledge to their projects. The students learned about the importance of the media, journalists, and interest groups as they took on those roles to showcase their understanding through the creation of authentic campaign advertisements, newspaper articles, and lobbyist proposals.
The third theme that emerged when considering how to enact project-based learning in my classroom was the need for flexibility. According to Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith, and McDonald (2005), the ultimate aim is for teachers to become “flexible adapters” of the curriculum, making changes that embody the design principles and meeting the specific needs of their students (p. 363). I was confronted with unforeseen circumstances that provided additional advantages to the curriculum my class was covering. The volunteer coordinator scheduled Florida House representative Kathleen Peters to speak to my class days prior to starting the unit on campaigns. Ms. Peters communicated her strategy on campaigns, actions she took as a politician, and the role she can play as a leader in the community. The experience directly related to the topic the students were studying, and it provided a first-hand account of participation in elections. This experience would not have been possible if I had to follow the lesson plan, I had established in prior weeks. The flexibility to rearrange content and to modify plans provided my students with a powerful experience. Other writers and researchers have suggested the importance of making changes to the curriculum to benefit learning. For example Phillips (2018), claimed the adjustments the teachers made to the curriculum led to “a deeper and richer understanding of the content by the students” (p. 108).

The need to remain flexible resurfaced only three days later when the C-SPAN bus visited my school. The purpose of the bus was to generate viewership for the C-SPAN network, but the staff provided important information on the role of the media in politics, and specifically elections. My students benefited from the experience as they considered how news corporations generate revenue and the value of nonbiased media. My students were able to participate in this event because I adjusted lesson plans and merged the material I was going to cover in two days into one lesson.
Beyond including unforeseen education events into my course, flexibility remained essential. As I explained the tasks required, the students asked me to consider using a different method that would allow them to voice their opinions more frequently. I utilized the students’ request to amend the project and provided a more appealing debate format for the students. Larmer (2018) communicated the importance of providing students with a voice and some choice in project-based learning tasks. During the first day of debate the students were actively engaged and spoke on the topic longer than I anticipated. I adjusted the schedule once more to allow the students to continue the debate the following day.

When the class voted for its nominee to represent the class and two candidates were tied, I arranged an additional debate to determine the party nominee. The adjustments helped the students to feel more included in the process, and in control of the project. The adjustments I made, allowed the project to seem more authentic and also helped to maintain the interest of the students.

I had the confidence to conduct my class in a manner I thought would best address the key concepts and to allow the students to actively participate in the simulation because my administration was informed of the process and supported me. I believed every task that I had planned for the class was essential because each was aligned to key concepts. Through the lessons, activities, and simulation I believed my students were learning material that would help them to succeed on the AP exam. The flexibility allowed me to incorporate unique learning experiences and to take the concerns and recommendations of the students into account. The ability to effectively communicate, plan, and remain flexible is essential in enacting the Elections project.
Contextual Factors

The second research question of this study, what contextual factors helped shape how a social studies teacher enacted PBL into instruction this was analyzed using codes that were identified from the use of narrative inquiry. Through my experience as the teacher-researcher, I was able to describe my experience of working at the school, and how that affected enacting the Elections project in my class.

The contextual factors that I considered when enacting the Elections project in my classroom were the age of my students, motivation to complete tasks, the classroom workspace, and what resources were available to me and the students. By considering these factors I was able to plan enactment of a project-based learning task in my course.

The academic sequencing at the school where I teach, requires seniors to take American Government. According to Reinhardt (2015) increase in the student age and education levels are indicators of interest in politics. I found that teaching senior students about government was an advantage because some of the students were able to identify the importance to better understand the government and their potential involvement in government. One of the participants communicated her interest in the class because she would soon be able to vote, and she wanted to have a better understanding of political issues that face the country today.

The next factor I considered was how motivated the students were to learn content. In my class I had many AP veterans who were accustomed to large amounts of work that often-required time outside of class to complete the tasks. My students were highly motivated to learn and to complete assigned tasks. The students built on their reputation to complete projects in the AP United States History class through the completion of two simulation projects for the AP American Government and politics course earlier in the year. I knew my students utilized time in
class effectively when they were given proper instructions and a task that held them accountable. I also was aware of numerous occasions the students completed assignments or projects at home. Knowing the students’ work ethic inside of class and outside of class enhanced my ability to assign tasks that addressed important elements, while assured that the students would invest the time to complete those tasks.

I was familiar with the ability level of my students by the time I planned the curriculum for the course. I knew my students had experience conducting research, analyzing documents, and explaining their perspectives. I knew that I did not have any students whose reading comprehension threatened their ability to succeed in the course according to recent state testing data available to me. The students had numerous opportunities to showcase understanding multiple ways so I understood some of the strengths of my students. Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) described the utilization of students’ strengths and ability levels as constructivist pedagogy. Knowledge of the students’ skills enhanced my ability to structure activities for my students that would be challenging and obtainable.

My physical classroom was advantageous for planning purposes. I taught in the same classroom over the past 10 years, so I was familiar with the ability to move furniture, the number of students it could hold, and how to structure the room for a variety of instructional tasks. The research of Suleman and Ishtiaq (2014) supports the significance of the layout and organization the classroom plays in teacher effectiveness. I typically split the room by facing the student desks toward each other, and the room also accommodated group work, lecture, or debate throughout the Elections project.

The classroom housed materials with which I was familiar, and I knew how to use those items. The familiarity allowed me to concentrate my efforts on curriculum and instruction rather
than the acquisition of materials or learning how to use technology devices. According to Papanastasiou, Zemblyas, and Vrasidas (2003), it is only when they are provided the knowledge, skills, resources, and support that they will integrate technology in the curriculum to maximize its effects on teaching and learning. I had computer paper, chart paper, and markers available for the students to use on the campaign advertisements. The Smartboard and projector system accommodated showing the students clips from C-SPAN on presidential campaign television advertisements. The computer cart helped my students to access the iCivics network to enhance their understanding of campaigning by reinforcing concepts through gameplay.

Understanding the context of the school, my classroom, and my students was an advantage for enacting PBL. I was able to concentrate on curriculum and aligning tasks to activities, without consciously considering elements with which I had become accustomed to working. The lack of knowledge of the context of the school could influence the enactment process that would require an educator to invest more time in the process of enactment.

**Teacher’s Beliefs**

The third question in this study was: How does a social studies teacher's beliefs, skills, and life experiences influence the enactment of PBL? This was analyzed using codes that were identified by the use of narrative inquiry. Through my role as the teacher, I believed it was important to identify my perspectives on the use of PBL methods in social studies education to help to address this question.

My beliefs and the development of my skills to enact project-based learning were cultivated through the exposure to project-based learning methods as a student. The ability to capture my interests in content during my time in middle school remains an important part of my understanding of the effectiveness of the method. I remember being captivated through the deep
analysis of specific problems. Through the understanding of details, it made the curriculum more interesting to me. The requirement to produce something with the knowledge I learned to help me develop creative ways to demonstrate mastery. The ability to cultivate purposeful and memorable learning experiences through project-based learning has resonated with me through my educational career.

Because I was exposed to the method during my education as a middle school student, I was able to compare my experiences with a more traditional teacher-led pedagogy in my high school experience. I remember more of the content and think back on those educational experiences that utilized PBL methods more fondly. My personal experiences cultivated my beliefs on what education should be.

My belief that PBL is a valuable method to enact in my classroom has led to the acquisition of skills to help me do so. My findings are supported by the research of Adams, Lo, Goodell, and Nachtigal (2017) who found teacher belief in the method was an essential element of enacting PBL. Once I became an educator I communicated with colleagues, attended training and searched for ideas on how to incorporate projects in my classroom. After being disappointed with a lack of information to help me enact projects in my classes, I returned to school to enhance my knowledge of American History. Upon completing my degree, I knew more content, but I still felt I needed more guidance to develop PBL tasks for enactment in my courses. The same year I enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of South Florida, and, from the first class I was able to identify the subject of my studies.

Over the course of more than three years, I have acquired skills that helped me to enact PBL in my classroom. I learned curriculum theories and enactment techniques from my professors. I reviewed research from scholars like Hmelo-Silver (2004), Larmer (2018), and
Parker (2018) and applied their research to my classroom. I have had the opportunity to enact projects and to learn valuable information through trial and error.

I believe that educators must continue to learn because every class and each student within that class is unique. The research of Adams and colleagues (2017) supports the continued process of reflection and evaluation of processes. Through the opportunities I have had, I believe I have been able to lead students through significant project-based learning tasks. I believe I can continue to learn and work to improve the process after each enactment. My life experiences have cultivated my beliefs and that has encouraged me to acquire and refine my skills to become an educator who can utilize project-based learning tasks with students.

**Social and Environmental Factors**

How do the social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment? This question was the fourth research question in this study. This was analyzed using codes that were identified from the use of narrative inquiry, document analysis, and observations. Through my role as the teacher-researcher, I believed it was important to identify the social and environmental factors on the use of PBL methods in social studies education to help me to address this question.

The educational beliefs of the leadership team had a positive effect on the enactment of PBL instruction. The principal with whom I worked during the first year I taught the AP American Government and Politics course was supportive of the project-based learning. He formed an academic academy within the school population that featured project-based learning as an essential piece of instruction. Project-based learning tasks were promoted in other courses, and praise was showered on teachers who enacted the method.
Once the principal left his position, a new principal was promoted. This person formerly served in an assistant principal role at my school. She, too, communicated her support for any method that would help the students. According to Meyers and Hitt (2017), more successful principals can create a culture of learning, mentoring, and improved teaching conditions within the school. I found the words of Meyers and Hitt (2017) accurately portrayed the actions of my new principal. She is a doctoral student at USF, and in the hallway, we frequently have quick discussions on education theory and the enactment of new methods. The administrative team that was assembled while I conducted the research for this study was supportive of the method.

Apprehensions some teachers communicated about the method were alleviated because the administrative team was familiar with the method and supported it. removed apprehensions some teachers communicate about a student-led classroom. I was not concerned that it would appear I was not in control of my classroom, or that the room was noisy or disorganized. Full administrative support was conductive in encouraging me to enact PBL in my classroom.

The promotion of project-based learning was evident at my school the previous five years. Due to the establishment of the academic academy, many of my students were familiar with project-based learning. Teachers had exposed the students to project-based learning in other classes, especially in the social studies courses. 18 of the 22 students in my sixth period were in my Advanced Placement United States History course during the previous year. In that course, the students completed five project-based learning tasks. Each student had some experience with PBL, and many had several years of utilizing the method as a learning strategy.

Due to the support and exposure to PBL at my school, I found the contextual factors to be very supportive of the enactment of the method. The role of the administrators through their understanding and continued verbal support and praise pushed me to enact project-based
learning. Because the students were exposed to this method, they were able to adapt to the technique and to provide one with suggestions to enhance their experience.

**Planning for Instruction**

The fifth research question of this study how does a social studies teacher apply PBL principles in planning for instruction. This was analyzed using codes that were identified from the use of narrative inquiry, document analysis, and observations. Through my role as the teacher-researcher, I identified the application of PBL principles when planning for instruction.

When I planned the course, I followed the advice of Parker (2018) to use the engagement first strategy to create a need-to-know for the students. The first day of the unit I introduced the project, reviewed the rubric, and provided an opportunity for the students to conduct research. I did consider the students’ perspectives in Parker and colleagues (2011) research that identified student complaints about the lack of understanding of the required tasks. In the study conducted by Parker et al. (2011), students in the first year of the project voiced frustration with the "engagement first" design principle (p. 533). Many students found it frustrating, arguing that without sufficient background information "we don't know what we're doing" (Parker et al., 2011, p 552). To combat that, I felt the placement of the unit after covering political parties helped to eliminate total confusion. The unit on political parties provided students with information they could utilize to get started on the project.

I planned the tasks involved with the project by consulting the work of Larmer (2018), and I utilized the gold standard concepts as a guide to creating an effective project. The first step was to create a challenging problem or question (Larmer, 2018). I required each student to participate in a presidential campaign. The tasks each student had were to formulate an effective campaign strategy, to communicate political ideologies clearly, and to develop supportive
partnerships. Over the course of the simulation, the students had to take on the role of a journalist and a lobbyist for an interest group. Students had to decide in those roles the effect the media had on a campaign; the kind of article he should create; and the article’s impact to support or diminish the reputation of the presidential nominee. For the role of the lobbyist, the students had to consider what would appeal to the president, and what actions could they take to generate support for their cause.

Through the development of changing roles and new questions, the students were able to sustain inquiry through the project. Larmer (2018) list sustained inquiry as the second element of project creation. The debate encouraged students to conduct research and to apply that information to an issue that they wanted to communicate in class. Some students actively took notes and conducted research during student presentations, so they would be able to effectively refute the statements of their peers. The elements of the project for the debate, campaign, journal article, and lobbyist proposal, helped to sustain student inquiry throughout the project.

Larmer (2018) identified authenticity as a vital aspect of project-based learning. The project should feature a real-world context, tasks, and tools in a way that speaks to students’ concerns of issues in their lives (Larmer, 2018). The project provided students a chance to debate issues they identified as important. Providing students a voice and choice are other elements essential in promoting project-based learning (Larmer, 2018). The students had the opportunity to select topics in which they were interested and to use those topics to fuel a debate as part of the election process. Each student ran their campaign and decided what strategies to use, what ideas to promote, and what forms of media to use.

The students were able to reflect on their learning through the course of the project. The students communicated through the completion of tasks required to match the project with
sections of information from the textbook. The students identified terms and answered questions that allowed them to communicate their personal experiences of running a campaign and participating in a debate. The students were also required to complete a graphic organizer that required the students to predict a challenge to the project and to identify a way they could overcome that situation. Reflection provided the students with an opportunity to address obstacles and discuss how they could overcome them (Larmer, 2018).

The students created public products to generate support for their campaign. Each student was required to create one campaign marketing item. All the students chose to create political posters and to display them in my classroom. The students then participated in a debate with the entire class, which required the students to be able to communicate factual knowledge and to respond to student questions, comments, and attacks. The students who did not win the party nomination created a newspaper article on the political beliefs of a presidential nominee. All the items for the project became public products.

By applying the research of Larmer (2018), I was able to utilize the description of the Elections project from Parker (2011) and to create tasks that required that students conducted a simulation that relied on project-based learning principles.

**PBL-Aligned Instruction**

The sixth research question of this study was: how does a social studies teacher implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum? This was analyzed using codes that were identified from the use of narrative inquiry, document analysis, and observations. Through my role as the teacher-researcher, I identified the implementation of PBL principles in instruction.
The first step in implementing PBL-aligned instructional approaches was to determine the key concepts that needed to be covered and to adapt or develop a project around the goals. Markham (2003) defined standards focused project-based learning as an “extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks” (p. 4). This corresponds with the essential features of Gold Standard PBL provided by the Buck Institute for Education (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). The next step required thoughtful planning that provided opportunities to teach the key concepts to the students in a way that helped them to implement their knowledge into the project tasks successfully.

By starting the students with an introduction to the project, they became interested in acquiring resources they could apply to the required tasks. The students were engaged in learning more about the election process and roles the media and lobbyists played, but I had to scaffold instruction appropriately to help all students to achieve success. Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, and Chinn (2007) explained that problem-based learning and inquiry learning approaches should be “highly scaffolded” (p. 99). The second day of instruction I had the students play Win the White House, a simulation game created by iCivics. The game introduced the students to the importance of identifying issues of your voting base, fundraising, communicating ideas, and advertising.

The game helped me to identify the concepts my students would need to investigate in order to run a successful campaign. The next scaffold I included was the presentation of presidential campaign television commercials. The lesson helped the students identify techniques that have been used in the past then and to determine which ideas they found effective. The next class period provided students time in class to apply what they learned and to create a campaign
advertisement for their campaign. This activity served as a formative assessment. I was able to review the work of the students to determine if they identified campaign strategies, and if they conducted any research on the five topics they chose to debate.

I was able to implement PBL-aligned instructional approaches by enacting a project that aligned to the key concepts required to be taught in the class. Once the project and key concepts were identified, it was important for me to provide clear directions, I used scaffolding to assist students in mastering material. I provided formative assessments to check for student understanding and to determine if I needed to reteach concepts. The research of Saglam (2010) supported the use of using formative assessments during the PBL process as a way that could help teachers better judge student understanding. Through the inclusion of these steps, I was able to enact PBL-aligned instructional approaches.

**Student Perceptions**

The seventh research question of this study: how do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and perceive enactment of PBL? This was analyzed using codes that were identified from the use of semi-structured video-elicitation interviews, document analysis, and observations. Elements of the four learning styles identified by Kolb (1984) were utilized by the participants to complete the Elections project. The four learning styles include converging learners who can solve problems through the completion of technical tasks that are less depended on interpersonal aspects (Kolb, 1984). Accommodating is the second learning style that utilizes hands-on problem solving and intuition (Kolb, 1984). Assimilating is the third style; this approach involves ideas and concepts as more important than people (Kolb, 1984). Diverging is the fourth learning style; this learner tends to look at things
from different perspectives and flourish in situations that require the generation of new ideas (Kolb, 1984). I observed the students utilizing multiple learning styles in class and recorded them in jottings. The tasks of the Elections project utilized the skills of diverging learners, assimilating learners, converging learners, and accommodating learners. Four themes emerged as the students accessed all four learning styles. They participated in a series of three interviews, combined with the evaluation of student work, and observations conducted in my classroom. The students communicated the importance of choice, collaborative learning, social learning, and discussing controversial issues.

Kolb’s Learning Style

Kolb (1984) claims people who have a diverging learning style are best at examining situations from multiple perspectives. During the Elections project, the students had to gather information that would help them to become informed on five controversial issues. The required participation in the debate allowed students the opportunity to examine situations from multiple perspectives. The students needed to anticipate how others might perceive a topic, the claims they might make, and what aspect might be unclear. By preparing to communicate personal perspectives effectively the students needed to address the thoughts of peers who held alternative perspectives. This task helped students to understand the position of others and to strengthen their claims by becoming more informed.

The second learning style Kolb (1984) identified was the assimilative learning style. The attributes of help the learner understand a wide range of information and put it into a logical form (Kolb, 1984). Students utilized the assimilative learning style by conducting research on the five topics and by selecting key points to communicate. Each student had a limited time to address the class, so preparation was essential in communicating effectively. This learning style
was also adapted to the development of the campaign advertisement, newspaper article, and lobbyist proposal. Each item would be constructed and reviewed by their peers. The students had to find a way to condense the information and to present it in a way their peers would find powerful.

The third learning style was the converging style. Kolb (1984) claims a person who is dominant in this area is best at finding practical uses for ideas. During the Elections project, the students had numerous opportunities to solve problems. The student developed individual ideas on how to solve political controversies. The task strongly associated with this learning style was the development of the lobbyist proposal. The students were tasked to find an element they thought could be improved upon through the allocation of one million dollars and then to convince the recently elected president of the simulation to fund that request. This utilized the ability of the students to try new ideas and develop a practical application that could improve society through the allocation of one million dollars.

Kolb identified the fourth learning style as an accommodating learner (1984). An accommodating learner prefers to work with others and prefers to carry out hands-on activities (Kolb, 1984). The Elections project confronted the students with the need to work with others to develop campaign strategies and to enhance their knowledge on controversial issues. The ability of the students to work collaboratively surfaced in every task as they exchanged ideas, determined political ideologies of their class members, and expanded their understanding of the issues debated. Despite the Elections project being introduced as an individual project the student immediately saw the value of collaborative and social learning to enhance their ability to complete the project.
Kolb (1984) claims people can learn to work through multiple stages of learning styles to enhance their ability to learn. I believe the Elections project allowed each student to progress through the four learning stages and served to increase their learning power. Through the opportunity to access the four learning styles and to complete tasks aligned to each, the four participants identified themes that they found influential to their experience and perceptions of the enactment of project-based learning in an AP American Government and Politics class.

**Complex Perspectives**

The students who participated in this study communicated complex perspectives of project-based learning. James and Maddy explained that projects can be daunting tasks that require an increased workload compared to traditional tasks. However, the required tasks of the Elections project were viewed differently because of the motivational factors of student choice and the ability of the students to express their thoughts. All the participants expressed their appreciation to select the issues to investigate in the debate. They spoke about how the project allowed them to investigate topics in depth that they were concerned with. Each of the students was interested in learning the perspectives of other students in the class. James explained he was excited to share his thoughts with the class because he had not had that opportunity previously.

As the students worked through the project tasks, they communicated the challenge of finding ways to creatively share their thoughts. The Elections project required the students to market themselves as political candidates and each student spent a great deal of time developing campaign advertisements that would capture the attention of others. Communicating effectively in print was not the only challenge. James spoke about the difficulty of speaking during the debate. He told me it was difficult to be prepared to respond to questions with all the information he had in a clear and thorough way.
Communicating effectively was a concern raised by Susan. She pointed out that the perspectives of others had to be taken into consideration and preparing for diverse perspectives was challenging but made the project interesting. All the participants claimed they enjoyed learning the perspectives of their peers and were motivated to learn more about the topics so they could participate in the conversation.

Despite the numerous challenges and difficulties, the participants faced as they completed the tasks of the Elections project, they each communicated they were interested in the project, found it to be valuable, and at times it was fun. I believe the complexity of emotions the participants communicated signals the value of the Elections project. As we encounter obstacles in life, we experience different emotions, ways of thinking, and thoughts. This project helped the students grow through a new experience while learning the content of the AP American Government and Politics class.

**Choice**

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with the four student participants was the importance of choice and its positive influence on motivation. The influence of PBL on student motivation and engagement is well documented (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Blumenfeld, et al., 1991; Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005). James stated that he thought it was interesting that they had the ability to make their own decisions on how to conduct their campaign. James was able to adopt a form of entertainment into his campaign through the use of memes. The student was able to adopt an interest he had in a way that fulfilled a required task of the project. Maddy claimed she enjoyed projects, because they encourage her to engage in the material of her choice and invest more time in areas that
interested her. She claimed it was easier to plan things that she was passionate about and allocate time to those tasks.

For Maddy, the importance of choice was directly related to the real world. She explained she would soon vote, and she wanted to become more informed on issues so she could exercise her rights in a responsible way. Susan communicated she also wanted to become a more informed voter. The students were able to see the authenticity of the project and identified how the tasks served them beyond the classroom.

Freedom of choice was also applied to the identification of topics for the students to debate. The students were able to “chime in” to get involved with topic selection (Dean, 2018). Maddy (2018) claimed the ability for the students to select the topics made the class exciting. James communicated the importance of the teacher not selecting the topics, but that the decision of the students brought more buy-in to look at topics they selected. The participants agreed the topics selected were controversial and they thought that would lead to an interesting discussion.

Student choice was applied in other tasks including how they conducted research. The students were free to gather information from the internet from the outlets they preferred. The opportunity allowed the students to select the elements of issues they wanted to focus on and to choose how informed they wanted to become on the entirety of an issue. The students exercised their ability to choose how to develop campaign posters. Some student chose to slander others, some students used rhymes, and others directly addressed issues. James communicated that he completed several campaign posters to support his cause.

The students had the opportunity to choose how to use class time. Many of the students utilized class time to work on their campaign posters. James claimed he “basically worked on campaign ads all day” (Dean, 2018). The freedom inspired James to create more ads than
required and it resulted in the production of thirty ads that decorated the classroom. All four participants utilized class time to incorporate the perspectives of their peers to determine if their campaign ads were effective. Maddy (2018) communicated she was setting aside time to work on the project over the weekend.

Students determined what facts they would share and how to craft their arguments during the debate. What issues to raise and what points to stress to the class were determined by the students. They determined if they would respond to the comments of their peers and why to make counterclaims.

The project allowed the student to control elements through choices, which helped the students to learn lessons and allowed them to have fun by taking an active role in the simulation. All the students were informed on the topics that were selected, had at least one campaign advertisement, and communicated their thoughts on the political issues while infusing facts. The ability to allow students to exercise choice throughout the project helped motivate them and encouraged the class to complete the associated tasks.

**Collaborative Learning**

The second theme that emerged in this case study was the use of collaborative learning. Despite the construction of the Elections project as an individual assignment, the students found ways to incorporate their peers to enhance their educational experience. The findings were supported by the research of Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, and Chinn (2007) who communicated “students learned content, strategies, and self-directed learning skills through collaboratively solving problems, reflecting on their experiences, and engaging in self-directed inquiry” (p. 100). The campaign advertisement task promoted collaborative opportunities. As each student considered developing an ad that would promote their thoughts, he began thinking of ways to
promote his message while capturing the attention of his peers. Students, like James, began soliciting peers for their thoughts on slogans and pictures he selected. The use of the perspectives of his peers allowed him to test an idea, reflect on the decisions, then determine to act and post the ad. Other students like Cathy reviewed the work other students posted. She utilized the other students work as a way to identify tactics others were using, like slander. Cathy drafted an idea for a campaign ad then shared her idea with a peer. Cathy recognized the need for peer feedback claiming, “without any input, it wouldn’t have been as good” (Barron, 2018).

As the students prepared for the debate, they began to think about the issues their peers might raise. The task required the students to become knowledgeable about the topics selected to be able to defend their positions. The students talked to each other throughout the project workday. The conversation was established by the students within the area of the room where they were working. Cathy communicated that this opportunity served for her to understand the perspectives of the students prior to the debate. As students posted their campaign ads the political ideologies became easier to identify and the students utilized the knowledge to prepare for the debate.

Throughout the debate, the students exchanged perspectives, information, and challenged each other. The presence of diversity helped enact more responses that attempted to explain decisions and perspectives more clearly. As each student shared their thoughts and data the students were able to build upon the opportunity to clarify information, challenge facts, or agree with statements.

Social Learning

The third theme that emerged from the research that attempted to answer: How do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and
perceive enactment of PBL, was the presence of social learning experiences. The students were interested in learning the perspectives of their peers and understanding what they believed and why. The research of Ladson-Billings (1995) supported the ability and desire of “students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another” (p. 480). Cathy claimed she had never participated in the project like the Elections simulation and she wanted to do it. She communicated that she was ready to argue one of the topics that were selected. The students anticipated they would hear information from both sides of an issue, and they would need to take all of the information into account when they worked to develop a solution.

On the day the project was announced students were able to suggest topics they wanted to discuss. Through the participation of peers and listening to suggestions, the students were able to learn what issues were important to their peers. Cathy appreciated that I was able to take student interests into account and modify the project so students could accomplish an educational goal while learning more about their peers.

The students communicated they were interested to hear the perspectives of their classmates. Some students even claimed it would be possible for students to change their mind on some of the topics if they were able to support their information with factual knowledge that would challenge their preconceived thoughts. Maddy admitted she didn’t know a lot about all the topics but could use the information her peers provided to become more well-informed. James mentioned we had a very diverse class and many people were very engaged, so he anticipated an interesting dialogue. Through the debate, the students heard the multiple viewpoints and utilized the statements from other students to shape their opinions or challenge their perspectives.

Cathy claimed the participation of her peers in class made the project more enjoyable. The students participated in nominating topics for the debate, creating campaign ads,
participating in the debate, creating newspaper articles, and proposing lobbyist issues. Each of the tasks provided the class with a diverse perspective on political issues and helped the students learn more about their peers. James was curious to learn the views of his peers so he could look at issues from different angles. The project allowed the student to go in-depth on investigating issues and share his knowledge in class. Requiring the participation of each student during the debate was an advantage. Many students did not know their friend's perspectives on the issues discussed so it became a way to know each other more deeply.

The debate provided an opportunity for students to share their views. Some students found members of the class held similar viewpoints. Cathy claimed after the debate it “made me feel like more people agree with me” (Barron, 2018). “The debate was really interesting because there were more than two sides to consider, there is a bunch of gray areas” James (Dean, 2018) commented. Other students communicated ideas that brought resistance from their peers like the claim that abortions should not have been decided using privacy as a determining factor. This and other comments shared resulted in students hearing perspectives they were not exposed to before. The debate caused students to process new information and determine how they would react to it and what actions they would take in response to the new information. Not everyone changed their mind on the perspectives they held prior to the debate but the participants did claim the experience helped them examine the new viewpoints and helped them understand why people held different views.

In addition to the examination of diverse perspectives, the students became more comfortable communicating with others about political issues. The participants each communicated they felt respected through the process and were comfortable enough to share
they learned it was important to listen to others even if you don’t agree with them and it was important to show respect and try to understand their position.

**Controversial Issues**

The fourth theme that emerged from the research that attempted to answer: How do students in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class experience and perceive enactment of PBL, was the interest in discussing controversial topics. The students selected the topics for the debate by brainstorming ideas then voting on five issues they were most interested in. All four of the participants identified the five topics that included abortion, gun control, immigration, environmental conservation, and terrorism as controversial topics. Susan commented that the student selection of topics was a good way to do it because it allowed the student to determine what they were interested in debating (Aybar, 2018).

Susan claimed the students wanted to talk about controversial issues because they are relevant issues and the students will soon be eighteen and will have the opportunity to vote (Aybar, 2018). Maddy echoed the importance of becoming a more informed voter to fulfill the role of a democratic citizen (Smith, 2018). The students wanted to learn more about themselves and become more involved. Discussing controversial issues in the classroom was beneficial because it exposed students to a variety of thoughts. Discussing controversial issues is integral to democratic citizenship education (Camicia, 2008; Hess, 2009; Hess, 2011; Hess, 2018; Parker, 2012). Exposing students to diverse perspectives and considering multiple viewpoints is an element of developing democratic citizens. This study resulted in students being exposed to diverse perspectives. Susan confirmed that when she claimed what they heard in the class was different than what they hear at home (Aybar, 2018).
Susan voiced her concern about discussing controversial issues prior to the debate. She feared that students may not listen to the other side but they would be only interested in talking about their viewpoint. Her thoughts were expressed in the research of Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) who suggested students would conduct research to support their own opinions without considering the perspectives of others.

During the debate, the students were able to communicate their perspectives using statistics and knowledge acquired from outside resources to support their claims. The participants recognized the importance of discussing controversial issues claiming the more you talk about them the more informed you are going to be.

**Implications**

This study was a qualitative case study. The research methodology was utilized because according to Stake (1995), case study methodology was employed for this research, as the methods of data collection included an exploration of a particular educational method (PBL in AP American Government and Politics) in a bounded environment (one secondary social studies classroom). This study followed Creswell’s (2007) design for a case study by utilizing “in depth data collection” (p. 73). I selected a qualitative approach for this study because I was “interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28-29).

**Theoretical Implications**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the actions of a teacher to enact PBL in an AP American Government and Politics course and students’ perspectives on that experience. The study attempted to determine the effects of the context, social environment, personal beliefs, and the essential tasks the teacher must take to plan and enact PBL.
One of the key findings of the study was the importance of personal beliefs on the enactment process. I was not surprised by this due to understanding the role a teacher plays as an instructional gatekeeper. My beliefs as a teacher cultivated my understanding of what curriculum and instruction should look like in a social studies class. I invested time, energy, and financial resources to enhance my education to equip myself with the skills necessary to develop and enact PBL opportunities. My beliefs were communicated through discussions with administrators and helped provide insight into why the tasks I was using in my classroom were appropriate.

Discussions and communication were reinforced by research I conducted to become more knowledgeable on the method and the adaption of the Elections simulation to my class. My beliefs fueled my desire to plan the unit, which is known to be a painstaking endeavor. I was motivated to scaffold instruction appropriately, provide students opportunities to construct meaning from the material through formative assessments, and provide students with choices to direct their own learning.

My decision to enact PBL in my AP American Government and Politics course was not because it was easy, or it would be fun, but because I believed it was the way to provide students with an appropriate education that would teach the key concepts from the AP College Board in a way that would become indelible and enhance their academic experience. Borko and Shavelson (1990) found teachers’ decisions are affected by several factors that influence their decision-making including information about students, nature of instructional tasks, the context of instruction, and teacher characteristics. Ruppar, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015) specifically addressed the importance of teacher characteristics claiming, “relationships among teachers’ beliefs and contexts were dynamic, and teachers’ self-efficacy provided a key link between beliefs and contexts in influencing decisions” (p. 221).
Practical Implications

This research can be used to help identify different ways of teaching the American Government course. Utilizing methods to teach social studies should feature an opportunity for students to learn to analyze, evaluate, and effectively participate in our political and social systems (Parker, 2008). Through the incorporation of PBL in the AP American Government and Politics, course students had an opportunity to achieve the goals Parker (2008) communicated.

The practical implications applied to the enactment of PBL tasks are prevalent within this case study. The findings of this study could assist principals and school districts by providing professional development that provide instruction to educators on the essential elements of enacting project-based learning. According to the research of Shulman (2004), asking teachers to implant complex practices requires ongoing and responsive professional development. This research can help identify the steps required to enact project-based learning.

The perspectives of four students helped identified the experiences of participating in an AP course that utilized PBL tasks. The students communicated the positive effects of the Elections PBL simulation: increased motivation through choice, collaborative learning experiences that enhanced content knowledge, social learning that expanded student knowledge through the contributions of peers, and the importance of discussing controversial issues with diverse peers. Toplis (2012) described the importance of student voice as a way to examine general aspects of teaching and learning. Through student contributions, educators can consider the positive effects PBL may have in their classrooms.

Personal Insight

As I reflect on this study, I identified three insights I will apply to my personal practice. I will continue to be a lifelong learner, I will spend time communicating the reasoning behind
making decisions, and I will continue to listen to the voices of those who are affected by my decisions. Through the process of conducting educational research, I was able to learn a lot. As I began the Ph.D. program over three years ago, I was challenged to investigate different methods to use in the classroom. My experiences have provided knowledge that I have been able to implement in my classroom that I believe has had a positive impact on my students. I am not satisfied to conclude my education upon the completion of this research but encouraged to continue to learn and test new ideas to acquire knowledge that can benefit others.

I believe in order to have a sustaining impact on the perspectives of others it is imperative to communicate why I make decisions. I found that the beliefs of a teacher have a profound effect on the methods they select to use. By explaining the processes and reasoning behind decisions it encourages reflection and can lead to real change.

Explaining my decisions is important but I must be willing to listen to others. As an educator the decisions I make directly and indirectly affect the lives of others. I think it is important to investigate student perceptions. Students have provided valuable information to me as an educator over the last 11 years. While I have not catered to every request or instilled change upon each discrepancy I have reflected upon their concerns, experiences, and insights.

I believe understanding the value of continuing to learn, effectively explaining decisions, and listening to others will make me not only a more effective educator but a better person in general. I think our society struggles to learn new things from multiple perspectives, explain decisions in a way that challenges people to reflect upon their own decisions, and listen to the concerns of others. Being mindful of these things will help create more effective democratic citizens.
Future of Civic Education

In the state of Florida, where this study was conducted recently elected Governor DeSantis signed an executive order to eliminate the last vestiges of Common Core (Bland, 2019). Common Core is a national education initiative that set standards for K-12 students. Florida adopted Common Core standards in 2010, then in 2014 altered the standards and rebranded them as “Florida Standards” (Bland, 2019).

The Common Core State Standards were developed to create one set of challenging academic expectations for all students to help improve achievement and college readiness (Gewertz, 2019). The Common Core standards are descriptions of the skills students should have at each grade level in mathematics and English language arts upon the completion of high school (Gewertz, 2019). Three of the English language arts standards required for high school juniors and seniors are:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3
Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019).

These and the other standards emphasize students’ ability to read complex literary and informational texts and cite evidence from them in constructing arguments and interpretations (Gewertz, 2019). The required standards are a logical inclusion to the skills taught to equip students with the skills necessary to function as a contributing member of society.
The Common Core standards were officially launched in 2009, at that time all but four states embraced the standards (Gewertz, 2019). In 2010, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, embraced the standards as a way make education more rigorous and set a higher bar for students (Camera, 2019). Opponents argue the Common Core standards ushered in an era of intense standardized testing that allowed little time for non-core subjects, like music, art, and civics (Camera, 2019). Due to numerous variables and debatable definition of success, it is hard to determine if the effect of the enactment of the Common Core standards. DeSantis claimed, “Common Core has failed teachers, parents, and our children” (Camera, 2019, p. 1). DeSantis followed that claim by stating, “We will streamline standardized testing, make civics a priority in schools and increase the literacy rate” (Camera, 2019, p. 1). I think teaching civics in schools is essential to develop informed democratic citizens, but I am concerned with how that class will be taught in the wake of the elimination of the Common Core. The class should encourage students to investigate topics, present their findings, and engage in discussion. The Common Core standards promote those tasks and their elimination I perceive as detrimental to civic education.

I am not in support of high stakes testing especially through the utilization of multiple-choice tests. When I hear people talk about streamlining testing my thoughts shift to the implementation of a multiple-choice test. The summative assessment is easy to administer and requires less time to grade than most other forms of assessment, thus making it a low-cost option. I believe in order to enact a purposeful and meaningful civics course we must infuse the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for the Social Studies State Standards.

The C3 Framework was developed to serve two audiences, the first was for states to upgrade their state social studies standards and the second was for local school districts, schools, teachers and curriculum writers to strengthen their social studies programs (National Council for
the Social Studies, 2013). The objectives are to enhance the rigor of the social studies disciplines, build critical thinking, problem-solving, and participatory skill to become engaged citizens, and align academic programs to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts in Literacy in History/Social Studies (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The C3 Framework emphasizes the acquisition and application of knowledge through four dimensions constructed to spark curiosity, guide instruction, deepen investigations, acquire rigorous content, and apply knowledge to become active and engaged citizens in the 21st century (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The four dimensions of the C3 Framework include the development of questions and planning inquiries, the application of disciplinary tools and concepts, the evaluation of sources and use of evidence, and the ability to communicate and take informed action (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013).

This infusion of civic concepts and academic rigor has been acknowledged and encouraged by the Civic Learning Impact and Measurement Convening Report (CivXNow, 2019). This group of professors, teachers, and community leaders discussed the development of a roadmap to help improve civic education in the United States. The group communicated, “The actual goal of education is to prepare students for civic life and develop civic dispositions that are increasingly required for success in college and career” (CivXNow, 2019, p. 4). The CivXNow group communicated their thoughts on the current state of civics education in the following statement,

Today, the opportunities to engage in civic life in and around schools are insufficient and not available equitably. The goal is then to ensure that the institutions tasked with promoting civic outcomes must attend to youth interests and their lived experiences while also developing their civic knowledge, skills, and commitments. Because young people exposed to high quality civic learning are significantly more likely to contribute to civic life and vote, we must resolve to expand opportunities for all of them (CivXNow, 2019, p. 10).
I believe teachers should use project-based learning methods to engage students in the acquisition of skills and content knowledge to help develop informed democratic citizens. The Elections simulation increased my students’ content knowledge and helped them develop skills for the 21st century. Above all other academic gains, the most significant outcome was the ability of the students to conduct research, become informed on issues, support their thoughts, discuss and debate issues with their peers in a respectful way, and consider the perspectives of others. Educational opportunities like this should be applied across the country. The application of pedagogy that encourages the understanding of civic concepts through the development of academic skills will signal a true desire to make civic education a priority.

**Future Implications**

This research study explained my role as a high school social studies teacher enacting project-based learning in my AP American Government and Politics class. The findings which were based on the analysis of the data collected from narrative inquiry, document analysis, and observations revealed that teachers can have an influential role in the curriculum and instruction adopted in classrooms. Books (2001) suggest teachers who do not know their students, the needs of the students, and what motivates them, will have trouble creating meaningful classrooms where learning occurs. Kincheloe (2003) claims schooling “is a dominant struggle where knowledge and power are always functions of one another” (p. 16). By providing students with the power to communicate their perspectives it enhances the knowledge of the method.

Maintaining communication between the administration and faculty members can sometimes be a difficult task. At many of the schools in my district, there are over one hundred teachers, which creates challenges for the administration to find time for conversations.
Identifying communication as a vital part of enacting new methods in the classroom requires action. Perhaps administrators can be cognizant of the need and utilize observational time in pre and post conferences to ask questions about the methods used and allow the teachers to communicate the methods they are considering enacting beyond what might be seen during the observation period. Danielson (2006) claims the quality of communication between principal and teachers within the school has been identified as a factor that can positively influence school improvement.

Communication is an essential part of PBL enactment and when discussing the method with administrators, it is essential to communicate the alignment of project tasks to key concepts or curriculum standards. In order to align tasks to key concepts, it requires the teacher to become familiar with the content and standards of the course and how to sequence them in a way that is logical to enhance student understanding. PBL should be aligned to standards that help students master concepts and content that are essential parts of the course. Delisle (1997) communicated the need to align projects and inquiry questions to state and national standards. The alignment of tasks to key concepts helps maintain the validity of the PBL opportunity and utilizes instructional time effectively.

Planning tasks that align with key concepts helped provide a foundation for the unit. From the foundation, it is important to be willing to make changes. One may need to adapt to utilize new opportunities that develop. Students may require more time to grasp concepts and reteaching may become essential. Students may have recommendations on how to alter the project, so it becomes more beneficial to them. Understanding that a plan is important but the willingness to improve upon that plan and modify it is essential to PBL enactment. The ultimate aim is for teachers to become flexible adapters (Hammerness, et al., 2005).
The findings further suggest the ability of administrators, teachers, and students working together can have a positive effect on the enactment of PBL. All stakeholders are essential in the process and the incorporation of the skills, suggestions, and concerns of each help develop a better constructed project-based learning experience.

Recommendations

Seven major themes emerged from this research study. The first major theme was maintaining communication with administrators and students to help enhance understanding. The second major theme was the need to align project tasks to key concepts to effectively utilize time master content. The third major theme that emerged was the need to remain flexible to address situations that developed and to address the needs of the students. The fourth theme was the importance of student choice and how choice positively affected motivation. The fifth theme was the value of colobrative learning and the feedback students provided to their peers. The sixth theme was the use of social learning to help expand the curriculum and provide students a voice to communicate their thoughts. The seventh theme was the students desire to discuss controversial issues. Each of these themes along with the evidence produced from the study to answer the research questions provides direction for administrators and district leadership. I believe more research is still required to determine if the findings of this research can be generalized to other high schools throughout the nation.

Future Research

Since this case study was conducted using narrative inquiry of one teacher-researcher experiences at one high school in the southwestern region of Florida, it is recommended that, in order to allow for a greater generalization of the result, a research case study using a larger sample size in different regions of the country should be conducted. Some scholars such as Fusch
and Ness (2015) claim saturation is an essential element within qualitative research, thus requiring a larger sample size. This case study explored the perspectives of four veteran AP students who held overall grade point averages above a 3.88, at one high school. In order to allow for greater generalization, the sample size should be increased and include students from multiple classes throughout the country.

Exploring the perspectives of first-year AP students who were exposed to PBL would be valuable. It would be worth researching the effect PBL had on students adjusting to the rigorous curriculum. The study could provide research that may identify obstacles, challenges, or success first year AP students had using PBL methods. Some researchers have argued that PBL was more appropriate for gifted learners and not a proven instructional strategy for struggling learners (Mergendoller, Maxwell, & Bellisimo, 2006). Scholars such as Diffily (2002) have argued that, “Project-based learning was particularly suited to the needs of gifted children” (p. 40). Conducting research with first time AP students would increase the literature of PBL methods with a more diverse group of students.

Conducting a study to determine the methods used by administrators, district leaders, and methods instructors to equip educators with the skills to enact project-based learning would be a valuable contribution to the literature. A case study that examined professional development opportunities or instructional methods could help identify areas of strength and weaknesses. Avery et al. (2002) found that exceptional professional development sessions dedicated to authentic instruction helped teachers to utilize new methods. Through additional research, it could be possible to identify procedures that would help educators have more success enacting PBL in their classrooms.
Conducting a longitudinal study to determine the long-term effects of the method on civic engagement would be valuable. Research could be conducted to determine the student participation in civic activities over various increments of time. That research could provide a better understanding of the power of the method to increase civic participation.

**Recommendations for Practice**

A school-wide effort should be made by the administration team and faculty members to identify a time to discuss the enactment of new methods in the curriculum. A collaborative time period should be allocated that provides teachers an opportunity to share their thoughts and receive feedback from an administrator. The administration should take an active role in the school to investigate the methods their teachers are using and the effects of those methods. Through this understanding they can utilize their experiences and resources to positively impact their teachers. I believe this interaction would increase the ability for teachers to enact new methods and also improve moral through increased interaction and feedback.

Administration and district leaders should provide comprehensive training that equips educators with the skills and understanding to correctly enact new methods. The professional development opportunities should be led by educators with expertise in education who have experience with the method and experience working with the grade levels targeted. Effective communication is necessary to explain why the method has been selected and why the district is working to enact it. In education, it seems far too frequently a new idea emerges, and educators are pushed to adopt the idea without fully understanding the preparation, enactment, or outcomes. Through support, the district could provide resources to help teachers prepare and enact the method (Adams, Lo, Goodell, & Nachtigala, 2017).
One of the resources that would aid teachers in the enactment of PBL would be the revision of teacher evaluation tools. Creating an evaluation for teachers implementing PBL could provide teachers with valuable feedback. The evaluation tool could more accurately measure the actions of teachers to determine how they support learning in their classrooms. I believe an evaluation constructed for teachers enacting PBL would encourage increased utilization of the method. Adjusting an evaluation tool like the Marzano or Danielson models to more accurately measure the actions of a teacher using PBL would be more equitable and thus encourage the utilization of the method.

Finding a way to increase teacher knowledge of emerging methods and discuss the possibility of adopting new methods is essential. Through the effective use of department meetings, educational leaders who portray a growth mindset could have a positive effect on the department. The department chair should be communicating new ideas, methods, resources, and modeling techniques to the department. This effective leadership would expose others to possibilities and would have the potential of transforming education in each department. It is essential that administrators appoint department chairs that can carry out this mission. Research has revealed department chairs frequently earned their positions because they excelled at departmental duties not because they displayed leadership skills (Inman, 2009). Identifying leaders and appointing them as department chairs could have a positive effect on the enactment of new methods.

The incorporation of student voice should be included within the school. Students determine in some respects the courses they select during their academic careers at a high school. Conducting a student survey to determine methods students enjoyed using in their classes could be beneficial to the school. Utilizing methods students enjoy could help increase attendance rates
(Sanson-Fisher & Lynagh, 2005), and foster a more inclusive atmosphere that promotes inclusion and care. The student survey could provide the administration with an understanding of areas of weakness and help determine professional development opportunities for the staff.

The school should communicate to all the stakeholders via a newsletter or school webpage that actions are taken to promote the most effective instruction methods and are being used in the students’ classes. The incorporation of student surveys, district initiatives, administrative targeted items, and teacher beliefs should be considered. Professional development opportunities in departments, at the school, and at district levels are working with teachers to enact methods supported through research.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study I was interested to learn the perspectives of students who experienced PBL as a method used to teach key concepts to prepare for the AP American Government and Politics exam. As the students participated in the Elections project, they communicated advantageous experiences such as increased interest in the course, improved motivation, increased opportunities to learn with and from their peers, the opportunity to communicate their beliefs, listen to others, and reevaluate their own positions.

My understanding of PBL was enhanced through the experience of reflecting on the process and considering the factors of the enactment of a new method. It became clear that my beliefs played a seminal role in the selection of methods to use in the classroom. I identified the importance of communication, alignment of tasks to key concepts, and flexibility as essential parts of enactment. The study confirmed my belief in the benefits of using PBL in the AP American Government and Politics course. Beyond teaching the curriculum I experienced what I perceive to be an effective way to teach civics. Students should be encouraged to conduct
research, share their perspectives, consider the thoughts of others, and discuss issues in a respectful manor, if we can enact these things in our classrooms maybe we can improve civics in America.
References


272


http://bie.org/object/document/gold_standard_pbl_essential_project_design_elements


Dean, J. (2018, December 10). Project work day interview. (A. Swift, Interviewer)


296


Spears, L. R. (2012). *Social presence, social interaction, collaborative learning, and satisfaction in online and face-to-face courses.* Ann Arbor, MI: Proquest LLC.


Vigue, J. (2019, May 1). AP Open Enrollment. (A. Swift, Interviewer)


Appendices
Appendix A: Child Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # 00037067

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

PBL in AP American Government

The person who is in charge of this research study is Arren Swift. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Michael Berson.

The research will be conducted at Seminole High School.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of the study is to understand students’ perceptions and experiences of project-based learning. The project will include video recordings of lessons taught, samples of student work, and student interviews to provide information that will help answer the research question.

Why are you being asked to take part?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a student in my sixth period Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course and you were in my Advanced Placement United States History class last year. The sixth-period class was chosen because sixteen of the twenty-two students were in my class last year. The sixth-period class contains vocal students who can express themselves clearly and are comfortable interacting with me. Each student has been exposed to project-based learning in these social studies courses for at least two years.

Project description
This project promotes student inquiry through a simulation of the election process. This project presents multiple concepts, terms, and events students will need to master to show competency on the AP American Government and Politics exam. The Elections project will help students communicate their understanding of key concepts. Through a series of tasks, in which students explore how to become a candidate in the general election, students learn about public opinion, political ideology, polls, campaign finance, and voter characteristics. They also learn the relationships between interest groups, political parties, and the media as they attempt to navigate and influence the campaign. All students in the class will be required to complete this project regardless of their participation in this research study.

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- You will be asked to be video record in the class three times; when the project is introduced, a day the students work on the projects in class, and when the students present their projects at Seminole High School.
- This research study will start in November and conclude on December 20th, 2018.
- Students will be interviewed three times over the course of the study using, video-elicitation, an interview conducted while playing video recordings of the students’ class.
- Students will be asked to sit in certain rows of desks in the classroom.
- The interviews will be conducted in an open classroom area in the media center at Seminole High School.
- Interview questions that will be asked include
  - Did you examine multiple perspectives to when you constructed your campaign strategy and if so can you explain that?
  - Can you describe how you generated ideas for this project?
  - Did you take any time to reflect on your ideas prior to taking action and if so can you describe that process?
  - Do you think you were able to solve any problems and if so can you describe that process?
  - Did you develop any useful ideas during the project and if so can you explain that?
  - Did your project require you to take action?
  - What did you do, and can you describe that experience?
  - Do you think PBL required you to think in many ways?
  - For example, do you think you created new ideas, reflected on new ideas or organize thoughts, thought through plans or problem solved, or did you take action?
  - Did you perform tasks that you found to be difficult if so what?
  - Was there anything you enjoyed about the project if so what?
  - How would you describe this learning experience?
- I will interview each of the participants after an introductory lesson that presents the project, after a project workday, and after student presentations.
- I will schedule the video-elicitation interviews the day after the recording and three consecutive school days following the video recording lesson.
- Each of the three interviews will last one hour.
• Each interview will be audio recorded with your permission. Agree ______ Disagree ______
• The participants will be asked to review the analysis of the interview to assure the students’ perspectives were accurately communicated.
• All files including audio and video will be saved on an encrypted hard drive that will be locked inside a closet to be locked inside my classroom.
• The files will be saved for five years upon that date the digital files will be deleted and paper documents will be shredded and disposed of.

**Total Number of Participants**
About six individuals will take part in this study at USF.

**Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**
You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses or training opportunities.

**Benefits**
You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

**Risks or Discomfort**
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**
Each participant will be provided with a snack upon the completion of the research.

**Costs**
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**
We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

• The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
• Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.

• Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
  o The Department of Education

• The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

**You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call *Arren Swift* at [redacted].

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____________________________________________  __________________________________________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                     Date

_______________________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____________________________________________  __________________________________________________________
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent                     Date

*Arren Swift*
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix B: Adult Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # 00037067

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

**PBL in AP American Government**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Arren Swift. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Michael Berson.

The research will be conducted at Seminole High School.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to understand students’ perceptions and experiences of project-based learning. The project will include video recordings of lessons taught, samples of student work, and student interviews to provide information that will help answer the research question.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a student in my sixth period Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course and were a student in my Advanced Placement United States History class last year. The sixth-period class was chosen because sixteen of the twenty-two students were in my class last year. The sixth-period class contains vocal students who can express themselves clearly and are comfortable interacting with me. Each student has been exposed to project-based learning in these social studies courses for at least two years.

**Project description**

This project promotes student inquiry through a simulation of the election process. This project presents multiple concepts, terms, and events students will need to master to show competency
on the AP American Government and Politics exam. The Elections project will help students communicate their understanding of key concepts. Through a series of tasks, in which students explore how to become a candidate in the general election, students learn about public opinion, political ideology, polls, campaign finance, and voter characteristics. They also learn the relationships between interest groups, political parties, and the media as they attempt to navigate and influence the campaign. All students in the class will be required to complete this project regardless of their participation in this research study.

**Study Procedures:**
If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- You will be asked to be video record in the class three times; when the project is introduced, a day the students work on the projects in class, and when the students present their projects at Seminole High School.
- This research study will start in November and conclude on December 20th, 2018.
- Students will be interviewed three times over the course of the study using, video-elicitation, an interview conducted while playing video recordings of the students’ class.
- Students will be asked to sit in certain rows of desks in the classroom.
- The interviews will be conducted in an open classroom area in the media center at Seminole High School.
- Interview questions that will be asked include
  - Did you examine multiple perspectives to when you constructed your campaign strategy and if so can you explain that?
  - Can you describe how you generated ideas for this project?
  - Did you take any time to reflect on your ideas prior to taking action and if so can you describe that process?
  - Do you think you were able to solve any problems and if so can you describe that process?
  - Did you develop any useful ideas during the project and if so can you explain that?
  - Did your project require you to take action?
  - What did you do, and can you describe that experience?
  - Do you think PBL required you to think in many ways?
  - For example, do you think you created new ideas, reflected on new ideas or organize thoughts, thought through plans or problem solved, or did you take action?
  - Did you perform tasks that you found to be difficult if so what?
  - Was there anything you enjoyed about the project if so what?
  - How would you describe this learning experience?

- I will interview each of the participants after an introductory lesson that presents the project, after a project workday, and after student presentations.
- I will schedule the video-elicitation interviews the day after the recording and three consecutive school days following the video recording lesson.
- Each of the three interviews will last one hour.
- Each interview will be audio recorded with your permission. Agree ______ Disagree ______
• The participants will be asked to review the analysis of the interview to assure the
students’ perspectives were accurately communicated.
• All files including audio and video will be saved on an encrypted hard drive that will be
locked inside a closet to be locked inside my classroom.
• The files will be saved for five years upon that date the digital files will be deleted and
paper documents will be shredded and disposed of.

**Total Number of Participants**
About six individuals will take part in this study at USF.

**Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**
You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is
any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at
any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop
taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your
student status, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses or training
opportunities.

**Benefits**
You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

**Risks or Discomfort**
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this
study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who
take part in this study.

**Compensation**
Each participant will be provided with a snack upon the completion of the research.

**Costs**
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**
We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute
confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people
may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

• The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all
other research staff.
• Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study,
and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the
right way.
• Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
  o The Department of Education
• The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Arren Swift at 727-547-7536.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at R SCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study
I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study  Date

_____________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____________________________________________
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent  Date

Arren Swift
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix C: Parent Informed Consent Form

Parental Permission for Children to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk
Information for parents to consider before allowing your child to take part in this research study

Pro # 00037067

The following information is being presented to help you and your child decide whether or not he/she wishes to be a part of a research study. Please read this information carefully. If you have any questions or if you do not understand the information, we encourage you to ask the researcher.

We are asking you to allow your child to take part in a research study called: PBL in AP American Government
The person who is in charge of this research study is Arren Swift. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Michael Berson.

The research will be conducted at Seminole High School.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of the study is to understand students’ perceptions and experiences of project-based learning. The Elections project will include video recordings of lessons taught in your child’s class, samples of student work, and student interviews to provide information that will help answer the research question.

Why are you being asked to take part?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a student in my sixth period Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course and were a student in my Advanced Placement United States History class last year. The sixth-period class was chosen because sixteen of the twenty-two students were in my class last year. The sixth-period class contains vocal students who can express themselves clearly and are comfortable interacting with me. Each student has been exposed to project-based learning in his social studies courses for at least two years.

Project description
This project promotes student inquiry through a simulation of the election process. This project presents multiple concepts, terms, and events students will need to master to show competency
on the AP American Government and Politics exam. The Elections project will help students communicate their understanding of key concepts. Through a series of tasks, in which students explore how to become a candidate in the general election, students learn about public opinion, political ideology, polls, campaign finance, and voter characteristics. They also learn the relationships between interest groups, political parties, and the media as they attempt to navigate and influence the campaign. All students in the class will be required to complete this project regardless of their participation in this research study.

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- The student will be asked to be video record in the class three times; when the project is introduced, a day the students work on the projects in class, and when the students present their projects at Seminole High School.
- This research study will start in November and conclude on December 20th, 2018.
- Students will be interviewed three times over the course of the study using video-elicitation, an interview conducted while playing video recordings of the students’ class.
- The interviews will be conducted in an open classroom area in the media center at Seminole High School.
- Interview questions that will be asked include
  - Did you examine multiple perspectives to do this Elections project and if so can you explain that?
  - Can you describe how you generated ideas for this project?
  - Did you take any time to reflect on your ideas prior to taking action and if so can you describe that process?
  - Do you think you were able to solve any problems and if so can you describe that process?
  - Did you develop any useful ideas during the project and if so can you explain that?
  - Did your project require you to take action?
  - What did you do, and can you describe that experience?
  - Do you think PBL required you to think in many ways?
  - For example, do you think you created new ideas, reflected on new ideas or organize thoughts, thought through plans or problem solved, or did you take action?
  - Did you perform tasks that you found to be difficult if so what?
  - Was there anything you enjoyed about the project if so what?
  - How would you describe this learning experience?
- I will interview each of the participants after an introductory lesson that presents the project, after a project workday, and after student presentations.
- I will schedule the video-elicitation interviews the day after the recording and three consecutive school days following the video recording lesson.
- Each of the three interviews will last one hour.
- Each interview will be audio recorded with your permission. Agree ______ Disagree ______
• The participants will be asked to review the analysis of the interview to assure the students’ perspectives were accurately communicated.
• All files including audio and video will be saved on an encrypted hard drive that will be locked inside a closet to be locked inside my classroom.
• The files will be saved for five years upon that date the digital files will be deleted and paper documents will be shredded and disposed of.

Total Number of Participants
About six individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses or training opportunities.

Benefits
You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
Each participant will be provided with a snack upon the completion of the research.

Costs
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

• The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
• Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
• Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
  o The Department of Education
• The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

**You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call *Arren Swift* at [redacted].

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

**Consent for My Child to Participate in this Research Study**
**& Authorization to Collect, Use & Share His/Her Information for Research**

I freely give my consent to let my child take part in this study *and authorize that his/her information as agreed above, be collected/disclosed in this study*. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to let my child take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Parent of the Child Taking Part in Study               Date

________________________________________________________________________

Printed Name of Parent of the Child Taking Part in Study

**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their child’s participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent               Date

**Arren Swift**  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix D: Video-Elicitation Interview Questions: Project Introduction Day

- Did you examine multiple perspectives to do this project and if so, explain that?
- Can you describe how you generated ideas for this project?
- Did you take any time to reflect on your ideas prior to taking action?
- Describe that process.
- Do you think you were able to solve any problems and if so, can you describe that process?
- Did you develop any useful ideas during the project and if so, can you explain that?
- Did your project require you to take action?
- What did you do, and can you describe that experience?
- Do you think you created new ideas, reflected on new ideas or organize thoughts, thought through plans or problem solved, or did you take action?
- Did you perform tasks that you found to be difficult? What were they?
- Was there anything you enjoyed about the project if so what?
- How would you describe this learning experience?
Appendix E: Video-Elicitation Interview Questions: Project Work Day

- How much of the Elections project have you completed?
- Were any parts challenging?
- What things in class did you find helpful?
- Did you consider multiple perspectives?
- What words would you use to describe the project?
- How did you generate ideas for this project?
- Did you test campaign ideas?
- Do you think any of your campaign ideas worked?
- What actions did you take to launch your campaign?
- What have you learned about elections?
- Did you read the textbook to help you with this project?
- Did you conduct research?
- How would you describe this project?
- Describe the project workday.
- Did you accomplish anything during the project workday?
- When did you do most of the work for this project?
- Do you think having a project work day in class was important?
- Did you fill out the project work report graphic organizer? If so, did the report help you stay organized?
- What additional materials or things could I have provided to help you?
- What do you want me to know about this project?
Appendix F: Video-Elicitation Interview Questions: Project Debate Day

- Is there a connection between parties, interest groups, elections, and media?
- Explain how campaign organizations and strategies of national political campaigns influence the election process.
- If you were running for election again would you do anything differently? If so, what?
- Were controversial topics covered?
- What did you learn from this project?
- Did you learn anything new about the students in class?
- Do you think it is important to learn about the viewpoints of others? Why?
- Did this debate change your perspectives of others?
- Did the project change your perspectives on issues that were discussed?
- Did you examine multiple perspectives during this project?
- Did you create anything new in this project?
- Did you reflect on your ideas in this project?
- Did you make plans for this project?
- Did you find any parts of the project difficult?
- What words would you use to describe the project?
- Was this project time consuming?
- Did anything we did in class help you with the project?
- What would make this project better?
- What should be done differently next time?
- What were your thoughts on project prior to this one?
• Did your thoughts on projects change?

• What should I know about this project?

• What is the most important part of projects?
## Appendix G: Elections Project Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Not Yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campaign Advertisement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of media advertisement is submitted prior to the primary debate. The item should appeal to voters and have a clear message and communicate the candidates’ perspective or goal. The message should address one of the topics selected by the class that will be featured in the primary debate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement is submitted on time. Item appeals to voters and communicates a clear message. Item does not directly address a topic to be covered in the primary debate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement is submitted on time. The item does not present a message or relate to a topic to be covered in the primary debate but provides more than a name of political party.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Debate Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective for each of the five preselected topics and supports each with factual evidence. Shows evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective for each of the five preselected topics but lacks factual evidence to support each topic.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective of four of the five topics with some factual information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective of three of the five topics and uses at least one fact to support their argument.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have a perspective on all five predetermined Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response shows evidence of student research, assessment, ability to hypothesize, and predict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response shows evidence of student research, ability to explain, and analyze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response shows evidence of student research, ability to describe and explain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response lacks evidence of research but student can identify terms and concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continue to campaign and prepare for General Election Debate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of research, assessment, ability to hypothesize, and predict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of student research, ability to explain, and analyze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of student research, ability to describe and explain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of research but student can identify terms and concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participate in General Election Debate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective for each of the ten preselected topics and supports each with factual evidence. Shows evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective for each of the ten preselected topics but lacks factual evidence to support each topic.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective of seven of the ten topics with some factual information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student communicates their perspective of five of the ten topics and uses at least one fact to support their argument.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>or</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Become a Journalist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of research, assessment, ability to hypothesize, and predict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of student research, ability to explain, and analyze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of student research, ability to describe and explain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacks evidence of research but student can identify terms and concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Become a Lobbyist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of research, assessment, ability to hypothesize, and predict and shows understanding demonstrated by their ability to appeal to the President and receive approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of research, assessment, ability to hypothesize, and predict and shows understanding but fails to appeal to the President and receive approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of student research, ability to explain, and analyze but fails to win approval of the President</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows evidence of student research, ability to describe and explain but fails to win approval of the President</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Earned</th>
<th>/100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>318</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: District Approval Letter

November 26, 2018

Dear Mr. Swift

We are pleased to inform you that all required documentation has been received and reviewed. Your research proposal, "Student Perceptions of Project-based Learning: An Instrumental Descriptive Case Study of an Advanced Placement American Government Class" has been approved. Approval is based on the application submitted to this office for review.

Neither preliminary determination nor final approval requires schools/staff/students or families to participate in any proposed research; participation in the aforementioned project remains at the discretion of the PCS contact (e.g., principal) and must be voluntary for any intended participants. Any data collection activities at school sites must be completed outside of the PCS assessment calendar and cannot interfere with core instructional time.

Please notify the Assessment, Accountability and Research (AAR) office if any modifications are made to the study. Any changes made to research after IRB approval is granted must be reported to the IRB and approved prior to implementing them.

This approval expires one year from the date of this letter. If the study extends beyond one year a request for continuing review will need to be submitted at least 60 days prior to the expiration of the current study for approval for the following year. Please include any modifications/changes to the current study in the application.

Upon completion of the research study, researchers/study investigators are responsible for supplying the Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Research with a written summary of their findings and confirmation of data disposal timeline. AAR reserves the right to provide input that the author will consider prior to dissemination of the results. In addition, if the anonymity of participant(s), school(s), or the district is compromised, AAR reserves the right to restrict dissemination of the results. Any publications resulting from the research including journal articles, book chapter, or dissertation must be submitted to AAR promptly. Researchers/study investigators may be requested to report detailed research findings to interested school personnel at a meeting arranged by AAR.

Please notify this office of any modifications made to this study prior to initiating your study. If there are any questions or if additional information is needed, please contact the AAR office at 727-588-6253.

Best wishes for continued success.

Autumn M. Frei, Ph.D.
Executive Manager, Evaluation
Assessment, Accountability, & Research
Pinellas County School District

The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida, prohibits any and all forms of discrimination and harassment based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status, age, sexual orientation or disability in any of its programs, services or activities.
Appendix I: Letter of Support

Request for School Principal Agreement to Conduct Research in School

[Form A]

The Department of Assessment, Accountability and Research (AAR) has given preliminary approval to conduct research in Pinellas County Schools (PCS) to the following:

A copy of the preliminary approval letter from AAR is to be included with this form.

Student Perceptions of Project-based Learning: An Instrumental Descriptive Case Study of an Advanced Placement American Government Class

Research Applicant: Arren Swift

Date: 8/15/2018

Letter of Invitation to Principals Instructions

Approval by the PCS IRB does not guarantee access to any particular school, individual, or data source. Principal(s), or other PCS staff dependent on the research proposal, may choose that their school/program/staff/students not participate in the research, or may withdraw their school program from participation at any time without any consequence. The researcher must provide the principal, or other relevant PCS staff, with a letter of invitation to participate in research. The principal is entitled to review the complete research application on file with AAR and to contact the department to discuss the proposed research. The letter of invitation to the principal should outline the research design/methodology and provide enough information to assist the principal to make an informed decision about their school’s participation (see Guidelines for Conducting Research document p.7).

NOTE: Please insert the text of the Letter of Invitation to Principals below

Video Elicitation Research Request

Many educators are integrating PBL into Advanced Placement classes as a method to make the curriculum more relevant (Adams, Lo, Goodall, & Nachitshala, 2017). I believe instructional methods in social studies courses must change, to provide memorable experiences that lead to growth and the development of skills that are useful beyond the classroom, and, I suspect project-based learning may be a method to help make this change. I intend to capture students’ perspectives of learning in a class that uses the project-based learning method.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to add to the knowledge of project-based learning, which will identify the benefits project-based learning may offer students, as well as the challenges and obstacles they might encounter through the process.

Qualitative Research Questions

The study intends to answer the following questions:
What are the perspectives high school students in an AP American Government and Politics course have about project-based learning and its effects on Koby’s four learning styles?
What are the experiences of high school students in an AP American Government and Politics course using project-based learning methods?

Methods

I will use a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study strategy. The focus of the research question, students perspectives of project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course, dictated the selection of a descriptive case study. I plan to use video elicitation to generate a discussion with the participants about their experience in my Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class that utilizes project-based learning. I will video record the class three times. The first recording will be when I introduce the project. The second recording will be on a project work day. The third recording will be during student presentations of their projects. I will engage the participants in three, individual, semi-structured interviews. The interviews will occur after school the week of the recording and will be conducted in the school media center.

Importance of the Study

Understanding the experience of students in project-based learning classes will help educators identify areas of strength and weaknesses. This new literature will lead to the potential of improving the implementation and success of project-based learning.
Principal Name: Jane Lucas
School: Seminole High School

☐ I have reviewed the above research request, and I agree for this school to participate. I understand that the research will not begin at this school until the applicant has provided a copy of the final approval letter from AAR.

☐ I agree to oversee (or assign a designee to oversee) the collection of signed parent/guardian consent forms at this school, to verify the parent/guardian signature, to place a copy in the student's cumulative folder, and to assure that only students with signed consent forms participate in the research. I can review all consent forms and research documents at any time during the study.

☐ I am aware that if this study extends beyond the current school year, the primary investigator is required to renew the school principal agreement (Form A) each year.

Signature: [Signature]
Date: 8/16/2028 12:09:10 PM PDT

School Principal

Please sign and scan or electronically sign using the “Fill & Sign” button in Adobe [Place Signature]. If you submit this document with an electronic signature, you acknowledge that this electronic signature serves as your valid signature under the Florida Electronic Signature Act and the federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act.

[Form A]
Appendix J: IRB Certificate

Certificate of Completion

Arren Swift

Completed the Social / Behavioral Investigators and Key Personnel Basic Course

on Friday, January 13, 2017

USF
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

CITI Certificate ID#: 58846
November 14, 2018

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00037067
Title: Project-Based Learning: Implementation and Reflections of an Advanced Placement American Government Class

Study Approval Period: 11/13/2018 to 11/13/2019

Dear Ms. Swift:

On 11/13/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Swift Protocol Guidelines

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Adult Student, Version #1, 11.13.18.pdf
Child Written Assent, Version #1, 11.13.18.pdf
Parental Permission, Version #1, 11.13.18.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review
The research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

This research involving children as participants was approved under 45 CFR 46.404: Research not involving greater than minimal risk to children is presented.

Requirements for Assent and/or Permission by Parents or Guardians: 45 CFR 46.408: Permission of one parent is sufficient.

Assent is required of all children.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) business days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board