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# Benefits of the Current Events Component in a Humanities Program

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**BENEFITS OF THE CURRENT EVENTS COMPONENT  
IN A HUMANITIES PROGRAM**

**THESIS**

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the  
Department of Education and Human Development

State University of New York

College at Brockport

in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Education

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>	
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Need for the Study.....	3
Essential Questions.....	6
<b>II. Review of the Literature</b>	
Introduction.....	7
Whittle Communications Project.....	7
Virginia Study.....	10
Channel One Summary.....	12
Modifying Factors.....	14
Humanities Program.....	17
<b>III. Research Design</b>	
Setting.....	19
The Research Process.....	22
Participants.....	22
Instruments.....	23
Limitations.....	25
<b>IV. Findings</b>	
Quiz Scores.....	27

Survey Findings.....	28
Observations.....	32
Conclusion.....	34

## **V. Implications of the Research**

Discussion.....	36
Recommendation for Further Study.....	40

<b>References.....</b>	<b>42</b>
------------------------	-----------

## **Appendices**

Appendix A.....	46
Appendix B.....	48
Appendix C.....	51
Appendix D.....	53

## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

In an increasingly interdependent world the need to prepare competent global citizens is more vital to our national interest than ever before. Social Studies education must focus not only on preparing students for citizenship in a democratic society but must work to enable them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In Global Education for the 21st Century Siegfried Romler states that "students must develop an international perspective and international skills if they are to participate as successful and productive citizens on behalf of their separate nations in the global environment." (Romler, 1991, p.46) This will require knowledge of, not only world history, but the current affairs of those regions that impact on America's foreign policies and economic decisions.

It is a widely held belief that Social Studies education should include contemporary issues such as terrorism, deforestation, and toxic waste disposal. (Fleming & Weber, 1983; Romler, 1991; National Council

for the Social Studies [NCSS] position paper, 1980)  
Students also need to study diverse cultures in order to comprehend the effects of nationalism on modern society. We are continually barraged with media images from nations and people very different from our own culture. Mass media and modern telecommunication networks regularly bring our global neighbors into American living rooms but fail to help the student understand cultural diversity. Knowledge of different cultures will enable students to broaden their perspective, develop respect for other cultures, and critically explore current affairs. (Romler, 1991)

The challenge to Social Studies teachers is compounded by the explosion of information which continually outdates textbook materials. Rapidly changing world events such as the most recent Russian revolution of 1991, the reunification of Germany, and the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, quickly render history textbooks obsolete. The Essentials of Social Studies Education concludes that "textbook lag is a real problem if the reality of the contemporary world is to be the primary focus of our instructional efforts."  
(NCSS, 1980, p.5) It would seem impossible to teach Social Studies without access to updated material made

available through newspapers, news magazines, and electronic media such as the Internet; which certainly meet the need for the most current information. In particular, the "newspaper is viewed as essential to the achievement of the goals and purposes of social studies education." (NCSS, 1980, p.5) When used to supplement the traditional textbook, the newspaper can become a student's window on history, a "living social studies textbook." (NCSS, 1980, p.5)

#### Need for the study

The traditional Social Studies curriculum in the area high school studied includes two years of Global Studies, one year of American history, one half year of Participation in Government, and one half year study of economics. Contemporary issues and current events are incorporated into these classes usually at the discretion of the teacher and as time allows.

The study of news events in Social Studies classes can add relevance to students' lives, increase interest, and make the subject more meaningful. To meet the objective of preparing future citizens who have developed an international perspective, and those



critical thinking skills necessary to conducting business and politics in an increasingly interdependent world, Social Studies educators must do a better job of bridging the gap between textbook studies and the real world. (Romler, 1991; Benenson, 1991) In addition, "the study of current affairs can provide students with opportunities for applying problem solving and decision making strategies that will help them develop their critical and creative thinking abilities." (Clarke & Zelinski, 1992, p.9)

Essential to the study of current events is the use of mass media to engage students in developing problem solving techniques, skills in interpretation, analysis, and critical thinking. (Clarke & Zelinski, 1992; Johnston, 1994; Johnston, Anderman, Harris, Milne & Klenk, 1993) Newspapers readily offer students a window on world affairs as they unfold but unfortunately, "trends showing dramatic decreases in newspaper reading among the young have given a special imperative to concern about young people's current affairs awareness." (Baskette, Sissors & Brooks, 1992 cited in Newhagen, 1994) These habits seem to mirror those of a larger segment of society that read less and rely on electronic media for news. Without consistent attention to

contemporary issues and current events Social Studies educators are failing to provide authentic learning challenges for students. Students need to be prepared to assume their roles in a democratic society. As citizens of the 21st century they will be expected to take active part in global markets, explore and devise new methods to cope with environmental concerns, and lead the way for developing nations to reach their potential. In Educational Leadership, David King aptly sums up this conundrum: "If anything can put a nation at risk, it will be a generation of high school graduates who lack the will or the capacity to confront those issues that profoundly affect their lives." (King, 1984/1985, p.65) Therefore, Social Studies should include regular study of current events and contemporary issues that complement the curriculum and provide a rich field for the development of higher level thinking skills.

Study of current affairs and contemporary issues is not standard throughout Social Studies curricula and is dependent on many variables: teacher interest and knowledge, access to materials, time available, and program limitations. This study will examine a program that specifically included a regular current events

component to complement Global Studies in grade nine and ten. The following questions will be addressed to determine the success of the Humanities program as it relates to students' comprehension and interest in world affairs.

Essential Questions:

1. Does regular exposure to current events, which is a component of the Humanities program, help students to foster more interest in world affairs?
2. After two years of studying current events, do these same students sustain an interest in world events (news) beyond tenth grade?
3. Does the current event component in the Humanities program enhance students' performance on current events quizzes?

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

By its very nature, Social Studies encompasses far reaching and diverse areas of study which include history, geography, political science, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and economics. Study of current events and contemporary issues play a natural role in keeping a student aware of changes around the world. The Global Studies curriculum does not provide for separate attention to these areas. Individual teachers develop unique methods to incorporate world news into an overloaded content area. Research into this area yielded few programs that include a regular current event component. (Merryfield, 1993)

The largest effort to expose students regularly to news in the classroom is the Whittle Communications Project. Launched in the fall of 1990, the program initiated an ambitious plan to provide video technology and a daily twelve minute newscast to students in grades six through twelve. Of the ten minutes of news and features, an average of six and one half minutes covered

news stories similar to those found in all major media. Science stories and specials of interest to teens, along with occasional sports stories filled the remaining time. (Johnston, 1994) The twelve minute news program, known as Channel One, is just one element of a larger package that is currently reaching over twelve thousand secondary schools across the United States. (Tiene, 1993a, 1993b) In exchange for a satellite dish, two videocassette recorders, a television for each classroom, the cabling required, as well as a variety of educational programming, schools allow two minutes of commercials to be viewed daily by students. (Tiene, 1993a, 1993b) The two minutes of advertising, viewed during the daily newscast, has generated considerable controversy, including accusations of a *sellout* by the educational establishment. Drew Tiene sums up the criticism aimed at schools who have entered the program as, "a Faustian bargain, in which educators sell their souls." (Tiene, 1993a, p.36) Channel One was sold by media entrepreneur, Christopher Whittle, in 1994, to K-III Communications. (Gwynne, 1995)

Drew Tiene conducted a study of Channel One to assess its effects on student knowledge of current events. He compared Channel One viewers with students

of similar age and background who did not view the Whittle newscasts. The study included: four Midwestern junior high schools; tested three hundred and three students who regularly viewed Channel One newscasts, and a control group of two hundred and sixteen students in schools not involved in the Whittle project. (Tiene, 1993b) Overall performance on the tests ranged from 60% answered correctly for the Channel One group, to 52% of questions correctly answered by the control group. Tiene concluded that, "based on this data, it appears that Channel One only slightly enhanced levels of awareness about current events among junior high school students." (Tiene, 1993a, p.38) These results were also consistent with prior Channel One studies, "in that students seem to only answer about half the questions correctly and the Channel One viewers receive slightly higher scores." (Tiene, 1993a, p.38) These results, hardly laudable, do confirm the need for consistent instruction in current affairs. It should also be noted that television viewing in a classroom setting such as that of Channel One requires little to nothing on the part of the student-viewer. Some students in Tiene's study reported they did homework, talked or read other material during Channel One broadcasts. (Tiene, 1993a)

It is noteworthy that research in this area has raised the possibility of variables other than media use as predictors of current events knowledge. Gender, grade level, political self-efficacy, social class, and grade point average have emerged as variables that could impact a student's knowledge of the news. (Newhagen, 1994; Johnston, 1994; Fleming, 1983) There are additional variables more applicable to college-age students and adults in the work place. This study will be limited to a review of those factors more common to students in high school. Those pertinent to the Humanities program, and which this researcher will review include grade level and regular exposure to current events.

In a broad study conducted in Virginia in 1983, researchers studied the different ways students acquire the news and their knowledge of the news. The study was extended to compare the performances of males and females, an area previously undocumented. (Fleming & Weber, 1983) Two thousand students in eighth and eleventh grade, from four Virginia school districts, were given a current events quiz. The quiz covered the previous two weeks' news and included questions on international, national, state political and economic

events. (Fleming & Weber, 1983) The study showed significant differences between the boys and girls studied. On the current event test boys in both classes, across the four districts, scored higher than girls. When surveyed, both boys and girls overwhelmingly chose television as their main source of news. The newspaper and the classroom both appeared low on the list of news sources. (Fleming & Weber, 1983)

Modifying factors proposed by the researchers included the strong male interest in sports, which causes boys to read sports news and might lead them to casually read other news articles. Likewise, the early socialization of females outside of the political forum could lead to disinterest in political news. Since their evidence pointed out a difference in the news acquisition habits and knowledge of boys and girls, Fleming and Weber advised, "If the cause of these differences is the result of varying experiences for males and females in society, then social studies educators must re-examine current events teaching and the use of media." (Fleming & Weber, 1983, p.218)

The discrepancy in scores according to gender was also noted in a summary of three years of independent study of Channel One by the Institute for Social



Research at the University of Michigan from 1990 to 1993. According to the executive summary of Channel One: A Three Year Perspective, boys scored higher than girls when tested on current events, and "this difference has appeared in every single analysis across the three years of the study." (Johnston, 1994,p.63) Researchers concluded that boys seem more interested in national and international news, which in turn draws their attention to those news stories, and results in more knowledge of current affairs. (Johnston, 1994) The disparity between boys and girls when tested is not large but should be a legitimate cause for concern among educators.

The same three year study by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan determined that "grade level is another predictor of current events knowledge." (Johnston, 1994 p.63) Students in ninth grade appear to score the lowest of all four grade levels. Tenth and twelfth grade students score just above average when tested and appear on par with each other. Students in eleventh grade score the highest when tested. (Johnston, 1994) Researchers attributed this to courses usually taken in the third year such as American History. Many news stories presented on

Channel One could be tied in with regular course work making them more relevant and interesting to students. Furthermore, junior year in high school seems to be critical for college bound students. The level of engagement among these eleventh graders may have resulted in higher scores on current events tests.

The lower performance by twelfth grade students could be attributable to early onset of "senioritis", that trend noted among some seniors to disengage from school work as graduation becomes a reality. Lower scores among ninth graders could be a result of those students experiencing a period of adjustment to high school and more demanding courses. Social development during adolescence might also translate into less interest in the outside world and more focus on the personal environment. Students at the ninth grade level may also lack the skills and background knowledge necessary to comprehend some news stories.

A third characteristic that impacts on current events knowledge and performance on current events quizzes is a student's grade point average (GPA). In research on the effectiveness of Channel One, GPA emerged as the strongest predictor of performance on current events quizzes. Students who perform well

academically overall, also excelled when tested on current events. Are these students just naturally more interested in world news than less motivated students? Do they simply retain more facts from exposure to the news through television viewing and/or newspaper reading? Researchers concluded in Taking the Measure of Channel One that, "Part of being a good student academically is an interest in the more adult aspects of life, which includes news about politics and world events." (Johnston, 1994, p.93) This may explain the strong relationship between those students who regularly achieve high grades in school as well as perform well on current events tests. Intrinsic motivation, along with the desire to be part of the adult world, may result in better performance for this particular group of students.

Gender, grade level, and grade point average all play a role in student achievement on current events tests and general interest in the news. Most significant seems to be a student's grade point average, a measure of academic ability and motivation. One three year study noted that, "The highest levels of learning are associated with being academically talented, male, and motivated to learn about what's happening in the

world...". (Johnston, 1994,p.98) Further research in this area is necessary to determine the effects of socialization, curriculum design and course offerings at particular grade levels, on student awareness and interest in current affairs.

It is important to note the lack of regular current events components in Global Studies courses to compare with the Humanities program. Channel One is a regularly viewed news program in numerous high school classrooms across the country that has been studied for its effectiveness. To examine if regular exposure to the news enhances a student's performance on current events quizzes, I reviewed studies of Channel One. Studies conducted by the University of Michigan evaluated Channel One viewers through surveys and current events quizzes. Such a program raises a variety of questions including: the effectiveness of television as a teaching tool, its long term effects on news gathering methods, and how it impacts on sustained interest in world news. Has regular exposure to world news made these students more cognizant of changes in global politics, environmental concerns, or the status of America in the post Cold War era? Is simply listening to, or watching a newscast daily for minutes, sufficient exposure for

high school students? Without discussion of a news broadcast or teacher-guided debate of issues, students are left to sift through complex information on their own. Previously discussed personal characteristics such as gender, grade level, and grade point average also have a strong impact on how much a student learns from such newscasts. Whether Channel One is viewed during homeroom or in a Social Studies class as part of the curriculum are other variables that could influence its effectiveness and how it impacts on student achievement.

In its three year study of Channel One researchers at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan found that students in schools receiving Channel One performed better on quizzes than those in control schools by a very small margin. (Johnston, 1994) Results of the national study, funded by the Whittle Corporation, showed slightly better performance on multiple choice questions by Channel One viewers. Overall, the research mirrored other similar studies showing Channel One viewers correctly answering approximately 50% of the questions correctly while non-viewers often scored somewhat lower. (Gorman & Primavera, 1991; Greenberg & Brand, 1992 cited by Tiene, 1993a) Drew Tiene proposes that,..."Whittle's

programming was only moderately successful at raising levels of awareness about current events." (Tiene, 1993a, p.39) In a survey conducted by Tiene, Channel One viewers averaged 60% correct answers opposed to 52% correctly answered by the control group on a twenty seven question multiple choice test on the news of the previous two weeks. These findings are very consistent with a study conducted by Johnston and Brzezinski in 1992. That study showed students answering about 50% of questions correctly while Channel One viewers correctly answered a slightly higher percentage. (Tiene, 1993a)

A 1993 thesis project by Mr. William Baird examined the same Humanities program researched for this study. One area he analyzed was the current events portion of the program. His essential question, "Did the emphasis on world news provide students with a better understanding of current events?" was included in his survey of Humanities students. (Baird, 1993 p.3) In response to the question, "The news time in Humanities helped me have a better understanding of current events around the world", 90% answered agree or strongly agree. (Baird, 1993) Sixty-three per cent answered agree or strongly agree when asked, "Because of the Humanities program, I am now more likely to watch or read the

news." (Baird, 1993) Student comments from interviews and those added to surveys also provided anecdotal evidence of the positive effects of the program on student news gathering habits. (Baird, 1993)

To determine if regular news watching fostered more interest in world affairs among students, and if that curiosity was sustained over time, was not specifically addressed in these studies. Data collected do not support the hypothesis that daily news viewing, as it pertains to Channel One, leads students to further explore news stories outside of the class room setting. Discussion with friends and family, and further investigation of a news topic do not occur as a result of daily exposure to newscasts. Rather, surveys revealed no difference between viewing and non-viewing students' news gathering habits or on increased interest in news items. (Johnston et al., 1993 cited in Channel One, 1994) The report, Improving Civic Discourse in the Classroom: An Experiment, proposes that, "It would appear that viewing the news everyday satisfies rather than stimulates, the need to know." (Johnston et al., 1993 cited in Channel One, 1994, p.66) Further study is necessary to determine how significantly students benefit from Channel One program.

## Chapter III

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### Setting

A unique approach to teaching Global Studies 9 and 10 was designed and implemented in a suburban New York high school in the fall of 1990. The Humanities program was started with the support of school administrators and a core of devoted teachers. One of its distinguishing characteristics was utilization of a fixed block of three periods (135 minutes). The two year course of study integrated Global Studies, English, and Art, and included an Academic Advisement advisor, and a daily, fifteen minute current event component.

The Humanities program differed from the traditional classroom in design and instructional methods. The two classes of fifty students were a heterogeneous group who remained together and with the same teachers through grades nine and ten. The fixed block of three periods allowed far greater flexibility in scheduling speakers, films, and cooperative learning projects. Students had regular advisement time in small groups and many chose to stay in that setting for lunch



period. A daily fifteen minute current event segment required each student to work through various assignments on a nation/region assigned at the beginning of the year.

The teachers involved in the Humanities program shared a common planning period each day. They worked closely to integrate their subjects and present material within a thematic framework. Although each subject area was presented separately, teachers often teamed for instruction. Teachers worked closely with students to identify various learning styles so that students could build on their strengths and develop weaker areas. A variety of teaching methods was employed: independent projects, small and large group instruction, peer teaching, reading and writing across the curriculum, and cooperative learning.

Global 10 students were required to take the New York State Regents Global Examination at the end of the second year. In addition to the traditional forms of assessment, the Humanities program also utilized alternative assessments which included performance, portfolio, and long term projects.

The current events segment of the Humanities program consisted of oral presentations by students on

news articles they collected weekly on an assigned nation or region. All students were held accountable for this information through a series of current event quizzes at the end of each week. Each student became an "expert" on a particular region in this way. More complex assignments were completed at the end of each marking period. Students developed analytical skills when forced to distinguish fact from opinion; organizing and presenting their findings to others strengthened language arts and oral presentation skills. Awareness of cultural diversity was another result of regular news gathering and presentations by students. (Baird, 1993)

Three essential questions posed by this researcher to determine the effectiveness of the current event component of this program include:

1. Does regular exposure to current events in a classroom setting help students foster more interest in world affairs and the news?
2. After two years of studying current events do these students sustain an interest in world events (news) beyond tenth grade?
3. Does the current event component in the Humanities program enhance students' performance on current events quizzes?

### The Research Process

An action research study was used to evaluate the current event segment of the program. It included students in both traditional courses of study and the Humanities program.

### Participants

Students from predominantly middle class homes attend this high school which is situated in a suburban area adjoining a mid-size city.

Students surveyed for this project included:

(36) 10th grade students participating in the Humanities program

(36) 10th grade students chosen at random from the traditional programs of Global Studies 10, English 10 and Studio Art

(18) 11th grade students who completed the two year Humanities program

(18) 11th grade students who completed traditional courses of study in Global Studies, English, and Art

(19) 12th grade students who completed the Humanities program

(19) 12th grade students who completed the traditional courses of study in Global Studies, English, and Art.

Students in traditional courses followed a regular schedule of individual classes taught by different teachers, and chose an Art component to fulfill graduation requirements. Therefore, traditional students may not have taken Studio Art in grade nine.

Instruments A survey designed by the researcher was used to identify grade level, gender, and general news gathering habits for students in grades 10, 11, and 12.

Those students who had completed the Humanities program were also identified from grades 11 and 12. (See Appendix A) Students were asked to respond to questions pertaining to personal news gathering habits to determine their main source for news, and what interested them more, local or international news. To examine the influence of parents/guardians on students' habits, they were asked about family news reading habits, the frequency of news discussions with parents, and the availability of news magazines and newspapers in their homes. Students could also indicate the medium they preferred to use when seeking current event information, television or the newspaper. Students were asked to reply to questions by circling the general data that applied to them, and then by circling *frequently*, *sometimes*, or *rarely*.

Included was a fifteen question quiz on current events that had been covered in the media, both print and television newscasts. (See Appendix B) Questions covered such topics as: apartheid in South Africa, the ethnic conflict in Bosnia, U.S.- Chinese relations, Haiti, and the Middle East. Of the fifteen questions, twelve were multiple choice and three were answerable as

true or false. A score of 15 was equivalent to a score of 100%.

Students remained anonymous when filling out the surveys. The current events quiz was administered along with the survey and students were given as much time as they needed. They were instructed to give their own answers on the quiz without collaborating with others.

### Limitations

Surveys and quizzes were administered in Social Studies classes in grades 10, 11, and 12 by different teachers. This researcher had little control over test taking conditions. Students in grades 11 and 12 may have had less exposure in class to international news. Their aptitude on this particular quiz may have been influenced by their studies which focus more on American history and civics. The limited scope of this study must also be considered. It resembles a "snapshot" of a particular group rather than a complete analysis of students' current events awareness at a given time.

## Chapter IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this survey was to determine the effectiveness of the current event component of the Humanities program. The two methods of instruction examined were a Humanities Program which featured a regular current event component, and traditional classes that included current events at the teacher's discretion. Students in the Humanities Program spent 15 minutes each day studying current events. Each student summarized two news articles every week and students usually presented three news stories each day to the class.

An essential question addressed in this study was, "Does the current event component in the Humanities Program enhance performance on current events quizzes?" A current events quiz created by this researcher was administered along with the survey to all participants.

### Quiz Scores

The mean quiz score for the 36 students in the 10th grade Humanities program was 10.0278 while the mean quiz score for 36 students in traditional 10th grade programs was 7.1944. To compare the data on both groups a T-test (Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances) was utilized. The calculated T (T-stat) was 4.7697 and the critical t was 1.9944 which shows a significant difference between the quiz scores of the (36) 10th grade Humanities students and those 36 students in traditional courses.

The mean quiz score for (18) 11th grade students who completed the two-year Humanities program was 9.222 while (18) 11th grade students in traditional courses had a mean quiz score of 8.6111. When the T-test was performed it revealed a calculated T (T-stat) of 0.8575 and a critical t of 2.0322. Since the calculated T is not greater than the critical t, there is no significant difference between the scores of 11th grade students who had completed the two year Humanities program and (18) 11th grade students who completed traditional courses.

Those 19 seniors surveyed who had also completed the Humanities program had a mean quiz score of 8.7368 compared to the 19 seniors in traditional courses who



had a mean quiz score 7.2632. The T-test revealed no significant difference between the quiz scores for Humanities students and traditional students. The calculated T (t-stat) of 1.7121 is not greater than the critical t of 2.0280.

### Survey findings

According to the survey administered to all participants, 38% of the Humanities students (grades 10,11,and 12) answered *frequently* to the survey statement, *I read the newspaper or watch the news*. Of the 73 traditional students surveyed, 33% answered *frequently* to the same question.

Of the total Humanities group, 85% answered *frequently* to the statement, *My parents/guardians read the newspaper or news magazines*, in contrast to 77% of the traditional students. Thirty-four percent of the Humanities group also replied *frequently* to the statement, *I watch television news* while the traditional group used *frequently* 22% of the time. Is there evidence of influence from home/family on the news gathering habits of these students? Are some students simply more aware of the family news-gathering habits due to their own exposure in school, in particular, in

Social Studies class? Would projects involving current events or issues, which were emphasized in the Humanities program, make students more aware of the degree of exposure they received in their home setting? Humanities students at the 10th grade level were daily discussing world news, and becoming familiar with national leaders and the challenges they face. They were also writing about, and analyzing the effects of geography, culture, and nationalism on a particular nation. It may be possible that students seeking assistance with assignments were simply drawn into more discussions with family and/or friends pertaining to the news.

Those students in traditional classes may not be involved in similar projects and therefore, not as aware of family news-gathering habits. They may not regard their own news reading or viewing as pertinent to Social Studies if a teacher has not tied the curriculum to current world affairs.

When a T-test was performed on survey data (using questions 5-11) collected from 10th grade students concerning their personal news gathering habits, there was no significant difference found between students in the Humanities Program and those students in traditional

classes. (See Appendix C) Students surveyed in 11th grade included (18) students who had completed the two year Humanities Program and (18) students who had completed two years of traditional classes which included Global Studies and Language Arts. When a T-test was performed utilizing the data collected from the survey (using questions 5-11) no significant difference was found between the two groups of students. (See Appendix C) Nineteen seniors who had completed the Humanities Program and 19 seniors who had completed two years of traditional classes were also surveyed. When the T-test was performed using the survey data, there was no significant difference found between the two groups of students. (See Appendix D)

Questions 12-15 on the survey were used to help determine a student's individual interest in the news, and the type of medium preferred, television news viewing or reading news articles. When T-tests were performed on the individual grades, no significant difference was found in any of the groups being compared. (See Appendices C and D)

Additional survey questions on the influence of the home included questions on family discussion of current

events and the availability of news sources in the home such as the newspaper, and/or news magazines. The entire Humanities group (of 73 students surveyed) replied *frequently* only six times to the statement, *I frequently discuss current events with my family*, while students in traditional classes answered, *frequently*, seven times. Forty-two Humanities students (57%) answered *sometimes* to the same question, compared to 31 of the traditional students (42%). Therefore, it appears that there is no strong evidence of student-family news discussions in either group of students surveyed.

Question 16 was included on the survey to determine the availability of newspapers to students outside of the school setting. (See Appendix A) Newspapers and news magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report* are always available in the school library and in the classrooms used as Academic Advisement areas. Students were asked to answer yes or no to questions pertaining to the availability in their homes of newspapers and news magazines such as *Time* or *Newsweek*. Twenty-seven of the 73 Humanities students (37%) replied that they did receive a news magazine at their home,

while 16 of the 73 traditional students (22%) confirmed that their home received news magazines.

Forty-nine (67%) Humanities students came from homes that received the newspaper seven days a week, compared to 37 (51%) of the students surveyed from traditional classes. Overall, those surveyed from the Humanities group received the newspaper slightly more often than those students in traditional classes (93% of the Humanities group replied that they received the newspaper compared to 89% for the traditional group.) T-test results reveal no significant difference when the groups of Humanities students are compared to traditional students. (See Appendices C and D)

### Observations

While there can be no relationship drawn from simply having news sources available outside of the classroom, specifically in the home, this researcher questions whether the Humanities program may attract students already interested in world news.

Student perception of class time devoted to the discussion of current events differs very little between the two groups. When asked how often they discussed current events in their Social Studies classes, the

Humanities group of 73 students replied *frequently* 33 times (45%); 22 out of the 33 students were 10th grade Humanities students. Eight out of the 73 surveyed replied *rarely* to the same question (11%), while those students in traditional classes answered *rarely* seven times (10%). Twenty-five of the 73 traditional students (34%) answered *frequently* to statement, *We discuss current events in my Social Studies class.*

It may be that Humanities students are simply reacting to the fact that each day a fifteen minute frame of class time is devoted to current events study. Students in traditional Social Studies classes may not perceive attention to current events as distinct from their regular studies when it is presented by teachers as part of the regular curriculum.

Another influencing factor may be the value students place on current events knowledge. Humanities students are regularly assessed on their knowledge of world news in the form of current events quizzes. Their regular oral presentations on the region assigned to them are also graded. The thematic presentations of all three areas of study in the Humanities program also require more understanding of the relationship between current events and the history and geography of

individual nations. Those students in traditional classes are usually graded on tests and quizzes that may include questions on the news but students are not involved in regular news gathering or presentations. Therefore, the value that each group of students places on their aptitude in current events may be directly influenced by the assessments used in the different programs.

### Conclusion

This study revealed no significant difference in interest in world affairs or current events between students who experienced regular exposure to the news and those who did not. The data did not support the hypothesis that students (after two years of current event study) might sustain a higher interest level in world events. Finally, it appears from the data collected that student performance on current events quizzes improved slightly only in the 10th grade when students were actively researching current events and were regularly assessed on their current events knowledge. Poor performance by both groups studied generally reflected previous studies. Humanities students in 10th grade averaged 67% of the questions

answered correctly, compared to 47% for the traditional group of 10th graders. The gap in mean scores narrowed considerably for the groups of 11th and 12th grade students surveyed. (See Appendices C and D)



## Chapter V

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

#### Discussion

The results of this study did not support my original hypothesis that a regular current events review would produce students more cognizant of and interested in world affairs. The only significant difference between students in the Humanities Program (including those who had completed the two year program), and students in traditional courses of study, appeared in the data on 10th grade students.

An essential question posed in Chapter One was, "Does the current event component in the Humanities program enhance students' performance on current events quizzes?" The data show that there is a significant difference between the two groups but the effects seem very limited. The mean quiz scores for both groups of 10th graders were dismal. Even with daily discussion, reading and writing about world news, students in Humanities only achieved a mean quiz score of 67%. These were the same students who read and analyzed two news articles weekly and were presented summaries of

news articles by their peers daily in class. The 15 minute segment was also used to help students to develop connections between a nation/region's geography, culture, and economic development, and events featured in the news. Class discussion followed oral presentations of news summaries and the class was held accountable for the information with regular current events quizzes.

One would expect that this variable alone would greatly impact on students' aptitude on a current events quiz. The quiz scores may have been affected, in part, because students viewed the quiz as unimportant since it was not part of their regular class assessment.

Students surveyed from traditional 10th grade courses had a mean quiz score of 47%. This could be a result of a lack of regular current event study in Global Studies classes. Individual teachers may integrate the news into the curriculum when it complements the lesson or is of importance to the entire population. Some teachers may not be making connections between the news and topics being taught. These students would generally not be asked to analyze news articles nor present them to other students. The quiz

questions may have covered areas that students in traditional courses had not yet studied.

The first two essential questions posed in Chapter One involved student interest in world affairs and continued interest in the news after completion of 10th grade. I wanted to know if making the news a regular classroom element would pique student curiosity in world news and if that interest was sustained after the second year of the Humanities Program. Survey questions used to determine students' interest in world news and the medium preferred for news gathering also revealed no significant difference between Humanities and non-Humanities students in any of the grades. It appears that any news viewing or reading habits required for the Humanities Program are not carried into the final two years of high school. Students in junior and senior year Social Studies classes focus primarily on American History. This may have influenced their aptitude on the current events quiz which dealt with world news.

If the regular study of current events and assignments using newspapers and news magazines did not produce a higher level of interest in the news among students in the Humanities Program, I wondered if other factors had more influence on students. Could it be

that a certain group of students came from homes where news viewing and family discussions occur more frequently, and that this influenced student habits or attitudes? The survey did not bear this out though. There was no significant difference between Humanities students and traditional students who replied *frequently* to the statement, *My parents/guardians read the newspaper or news magazines*. In fact, the entire Humanities group replied *frequently* a mere six times to the statement, *I frequently discuss current events with my family*, while students in traditional courses replied *frequently* seven times to the same question. Neither group appears to carry an interest in world affairs beyond the classroom. The need to be informed appears to end with completion of the assigned task.

An additional factor examined through the survey was the availability of news materials in the home. Question 16 was included to try to detect any difference in students' ability to access the news. Again, there was no significant difference when the two groups were compared.

### Recommendation for Further Study

Social Studies education plays a vital role in the preparation of competent citizens. Inclusion of current events in the curriculum not only adds relevancy for students but helps to teach critical thinking skills. By their very nature, controversial topics covered in the media draw students' interest and are more meaningful to them. Such topics can readily be linked to Social Studies curricula and provide students a rich field in which to develop critical thinking skills and a global outlook.

While limited in its scope, this study did show that inclusion of current events in the regular Global Studies curriculum could produce some positive results. Further research is required to determine if a current event component added to the study of Social Studies can improve student performance on standardized tests such as the New York State Global Regents Examination. Additional studies might also follow students after they leave such programs to determine if they pursue more Advanced Placement courses in Social Studies.

This project was also limited by the small sample of students involved in the Humanities Program. Few

programs of similar content could be found to study and compare.

Additional research in the changing news gathering habits of Americans in general might also shed more light on how students in the Information Age will seek world news. The methods they use to retrieve this type of information will likely change as new technology evolves but what remains for educators is the task of preparing students capable of being independent and critical thinkers who can solve problems and ensure peace and prosperity into the next century.

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

## SURVEY OF 1993 -1994 SOCIAL STUDIES STUDENTS Grades 10, 11, 12

The information gathered from the following questions will help me develop a study on students' attitudes toward current events. All of your answers will remain confidential. Thank you for your assistance!

*Please circle the answer that best applies to you.*

- |   |             |             |             |       |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| 1. My present Social Studies class is:  | 10          | 11          | 12          |       |
| 2. My Gender:   | Female      |             | Male        |       |
| 3. I am currently in the Humanities Program:                                      | Yes         |             | No          |       |
| 4. I have completed the two-year Humanities Program:                              | Yes         |             | No          |       |
| <hr/>   |             |             |             |       |
| 5. I read a newspaper or watch the news:  | Frequently  | Sometimes   | Rarely      |       |
| 6. My parents/guardians read the newspaper or news magazines:                     | Frequently  | Sometimes   | Rarely      |       |
| 7. I watch television news:   | Frequently  | Sometimes   | Rarely      |       |
| 8. Knowledge of current events helps me in my Social Studies class:               | Frequently  | Sometimes   | Rarely      |       |
| 9. My friends discuss current events outside of class:                            | Frequently  | Sometimes   | Rarely      |       |
| 10. We discuss current events in my Social Studies class:                         | Frequently  | Sometimes   | Rarely      |       |
| 11. I frequently discuss current events with my family:                           | Frequently  | Sometimes   | Rarely      |       |
| 12. We receive news magazines such as <i>Time</i> or <i>Newsweek</i> at my home:  | Yes         |             | No          |       |
| 13. International news interests me:  | Yes         |             | No          |       |
| 14. I am more interested in local news:   | Yes         |             | No          |       |
| 15. I would rather watch a news program on television than read the news article: | Yes         |             | No          |       |
| 16. Our home receives the newspaper:  | 7 days/week | 5 days/week | Sunday only | Never |

**APPENDIX B**

## CURRENT EVENTS QUIZ

*Please circle the correct answer*

1. Political experts expect that black leader Nelson Mandela will become South Africa's
  - a) next ambassador to the United States
  - b) president
  - c) most important religious leader
  
2. One reason President de Klerk decided to end apartheid was
  - a) worldwide trade boycott that weakened South Africa's economy
  - b) an appeal from former U.S. President Ronald Reagan
  - c) Nelson Mandela's argument that apartheid was wrong
  
3. Mandela and de Klerk's plan for multiracial elections is
  - a) welcomed by all South Africans
  - b) opposed by most blacks
  - c) opposed by extremist Afrikaners and the Inkatha Party
  
4. President Clinton favors
  - a) a two-year limit on welfare benefits for most recipients
  - b) a two-year extension of benefits for most current welfare recipients
  - c) two-year prison terms for people who abuse the welfare system
  
5. The war in Bosnia began in 1991 after
  - a) Croatia invaded Bosnia
  - b) Bosnia declared its independence from Yugoslavia
  - c) Muslims overthrew the elected government of Bosnia
  
6. The goal of the Bosnian Serb policy of ethnic cleansing is to
  - a) set up racially segregated towns in Serb-controlled areas
  - b) kill or drive away non-Serbs from Serb-controlled areas
  - c) convert Muslims to Christianity
  
7. All sides in the Bosnian war have committed atrocities, but human rights groups say the worst offenders are the
  - a) Serbs
  - b) Croats
  - c) Muslims
  
8. Sarajevo's different ethnic groups have
  - a) always been bitter enemies
  - b) fought each other since the founding of Yugoslavia in 1918
  - c) coexisted peacefully until the outbreak of war in 1991

9. The United Nations has tried to halt the war in Bosnia by
- a) sending troops to fight with the Muslims
  - b) sending troops to fight with the Croats
  - c) imposing an arms embargo on all sides
10. The UN has condemned war crimes in Bosnia. These crimes include
- a) the killing of enemy soldiers in battle
  - b) the illegal seizure of land
  - c) the killing of civilians and mistreatment of prisoners
11. By agreeing to give most-favored (MFN) trading status to China, the U.S. would
- a) sell more to China than to any other nation
  - b) give China the same economic preferences that it gives to its closest allies
  - c) buy more from China than from any other nation
12. Democracy in the Caribbean nation of Haiti is threatened by
- a) that nation's military
  - b) Communist rebels
  - c) invading forces from the neighboring Dominican Republic

True/False: On the line to the left of each statement, indicate whether it is true (T) or false (F).

- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Muslim militants in Egypt want to overthrow their government and replace it with one based on the principles of the Koran, Islam's holy book.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Muslim extremists believe in freedom of expression for citizens who do not share their views.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Many leading Muslim militants seek peaceful cooperation with the leaders of Middle East nations.

**APPENDIX C**



TENTH GRADE			GRADE 11		
t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances			t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
QUEST 5 - 11			QUEST 5 - 11		
	<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>		<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>
Mean	15.25	14.3888889	Mean	14.6666667	13.2777778
Variance	6.19285714	4.01587302	Variance	7.29411765	5.62418301
Observations	36	36	Observations	18	18
Pooled Variance	5.10436508		Pooled Variance	6.45915033	
Hypothesized	0		Hypothesized	0	
df	70		df	34	
t Stat	1.61705422		t Stat	1.6394609	
P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.11036458		P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.11033896	
t Critical two-tailed	1.99443548		t Critical two-tailed	2.03224317	
t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances			t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
QUEST 12 - 15			QUEST 12 - 15		
	<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>		<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>
Mean	6.30555556	6.22222222	Mean	6.22222222	5.88888889
Variance	1.53253968	0.74920635	Variance	0.65359477	0.81045752
Observations	36	36	Observations	18	18
Pooled Variance	1.14087302		Pooled Variance	0.73202614	
Hypothesized	0		Hypothesized	0	
df	70		df	34	
t Stat	0.33100637		t Stat	1.16879058	
P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.7416285		P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.25061772	
t Critical two-tailed	1.99443548		t Critical two-tailed	2.03224317	
t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances			t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
QUEST 16			QUEST 16		
	<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>		<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>
Mean	4.80555556	4.02777778	Mean	5.11111111	3.66666667
Variance	9.36111111	9.62777778	Variance	7.28104575	10.5882353
Observations	36	36	Observations	18	18
Pooled Variance	9.49444444		Pooled Variance	8.93464052	
Hypothesized	0		Hypothesized	0	
df	70		df	34	
t Stat	1.07091994		t Stat	1.44971808	
P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.28788404		P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.1562995	
t Critical two-tailed	1.99443548		t Critical two-tailed	2.03224317	
t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances			t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
QUIZ			QUIZ		
	<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>		<i>HUM</i>	<i>TRAD</i>
Mean	10.0277778	7.19444444	Mean	9.22222222	8.61111111
Variance	8.14206349	4.56111111	Variance	5.00653595	4.13398693
Observations	36	36	Observations	18	18
Pooled Variance	6.3515873		Pooled Variance	4.57026144	
Hypothesized	0		Hypothesized	0	
df	70		df	34	
t Stat	4.76971893		t Stat	0.85757263	
P(T<=t) two-tailed	9.738E-06		P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.39713338	
t Critical two-tailed	1.99443548		t Critical two-tailed	2.03224317	