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**STUDENTS TELL THEIR STORIES TO LEARN ABOUT
SOCIAL STUDIES: AN EVALUATIVE CASE STUDY**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

degree of

Master of Education

at

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Sue Blackwood

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I certify that the thesis entitled *Students tell stories to learn about social studies: An evaluative case study* and submitted as part of the degree of Master of Education is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged and that this research thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:  _____

Date: 10 December 2009

Abstract

A fundamental learning and teaching principle involves drawing upon prior knowledge. This may encompass reflecting upon a past experience and using it to make learning 'connections' with new information. One strategy to assist in making those connections in the curriculum area of social studies is to reflect on one's personal history. By doing so, social studies can become more meaningful for students. Social studies is not only about content knowledge but the development of life skills enabling students to confidently participate in society.

This research used an evaluative case study approach, to establish how writing a personal history could assist students to learn about social studies in a teacher education context. Through the analysis of questionnaire responses, focus group discussions and document analysis of student assignments, themes emerged relating to how personal histories supported their learning. These themes suggested that personal histories had allowed students to realise the personal and social significance of their past and the social studies curriculum. Personal histories had also supported the development of the student/teacher relationship, which had a positive effect on learning. In addition, the use of personal history supported emerging teacher identity, and the role student teachers play in children's learning. The effectiveness of this learning process was derived from a social constructivist theory of learning. The use of personal histories as a form of assessment is recommended for developing knowledge of social studies and its participative pedagogy.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“All thinking begins with wondering”

Socrates

1.1 Introduction

This thesis evaluates the effectiveness of a personal history assignment to develop social studies understanding in a teacher education context. To evaluate how social studies understanding developed using a personal history assignment the researcher explores features of a personal history, the social studies curriculum, learning theory and assessment at a tertiary education level. This chapter will introduce what a personal history is and identify why it was chosen as a topic for this research.

1.2 Motivation for the study

It was by wondering if an innovative assessment strategy called a personal history could be used to assist students' to understand social studies that this research began. A personal history is a person's chosen past experience which is used in a variety of ways to learn. As such, it involves reflecting upon that experience and in doing so, discovering the complexities of it. These complexities include the feelings the experience evokes, the people involved in that experience and the changes in either mind or action that occurred as a result of that experience. When past experiences are reflected upon in depth, new meaning can evolve.

The prompt to 'wonder' arose from reading an article by Andrew Gitlin about his use of personal histories when teaching children with reading difficulties. Gitlin's account of how a young boy with a difficult home life developed self esteem, friendships, a sense of belonging and an improved reading ability through the use of personal histories 'moved'

the researcher. While reading Gitlin's (1992) article the researcher wondered if she could apply this strategy to assist student's to understand social studies in their tertiary learning context.

The personal history seemed to be a strategy to acknowledge important aspects of social studies. Social studies includes important ideas about society, students participating in society and issues and events that are significant to students. A personal history is about this too. For an experience to evoke feelings, the personal and social significance of it is considered. An experience reflected upon, considers how the individual was part of or participated in the experience and in doing so helped form ideas about society. Whilst there are links between a personal history and social studies, this research thesis focuses on *how* social studies learning was assisted using a personal history strategy.

The personal history strategy encapsulated many social constructivist principles of learning - a theory of learning advocated when teaching social studies. The challenge was for the teacher/ researcher to demonstrate the use of social constructivist principles in a social studies teacher education context, where such theories are not always modelled. This research, therefore, was an opportunity for the teacher/researcher to incorporate a social constructivist strategy into her teaching, and to review the use of personal histories in assisting students' social studies understanding. Personal histories have been used at Waikato University as part of Women's Studies (Middleton, 1993), but the researcher found no research on their use when teaching social studies to NZ tertiary students.

1.3 The research problem?

Within a curriculum that is increasingly recognised as 'packed', it is crucial that social studies is taught in New Zealand schools in a way that is relevant to the students' lives. It needs to turn around student's negative attitudes towards social studies. Social studies is about the social significance of the past, present and future. Teacher education programmes constantly attempt to overcome the theory/practice divide. If social studies learning involves ideas about society, students participating in society and issues and

events that are personally and socially significant to the student, then it is crucial teacher educators foster these ideas in both their teaching and assessment practices which are inextricably interrelated (Gipps, 1999). The main aim of social studies is for students to apply their new understandings through social participation or citizenship (Alleman & Brophy, 1996). How we teach to effectively achieve this aim is the focus of this research.

Social constructivist principles of learning require knowledge to be personally constructed in order to make meaning, thus assessment needs to be structured so knowledge is personally constructed. It is through the use of a personal strategy that this study developed with a need to evaluate its effectiveness in developing students' social studies understanding.

1.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study where data were sought on the effectiveness of using a personal history assignment in social studies was conducted by the researcher in 2002. The study was part of a post graduate research methods paper which gave the opportunity to see if the research problem was worthy of investigation. Procedural matters when gathering data for research were trialled. Research questions were formulated in this data gathering process using a questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD). The questions were then refined for this present study in order to attain 'richer' data. The pilot study was a chance to evaluate which questions encouraged interaction and detailed responses in a focus group (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001).

The researcher had not previously facilitated a FGD. The pilot study allowed her to have a trial run under realistic conditions to then reflect upon her role as an effective facilitator (Drever, 1995). Practicalities associated with gathering data such as the time taken for a FGD and the subsequent transcribing were also a benefit of conducting a pilot study (Bloor et al.,; Drever, 1995).

1.5 The research questions

The overarching question for this research is:

How do personal histories assist student teachers to gain an understanding of the knowledge strands of *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997)?

Within this overarching question sub-questions were posed.

2. Does making a personal connection to the knowledge strands of the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* help student teachers understand social studies?
3. What constraining and enabling factors are experienced by student teachers as they complete their personal history assignment?
4. Do student teachers perceive personal histories as supporting their understanding of social studies?

To answer these questions the researcher chose an evaluative case study method. This methodology uses a qualitative approach as it focuses on students' perceptions of their learning (Stake, 1995). Participating student teachers completed a questionnaire, supplied copies of their marked (personal history) assignments and reflected on their experience of writing in a focus group interview. The evaluative case study sought to explain and understand how the implementation of a personal history strategy affected students' understanding of social studies content (Yin, 1994).

1.6 Emergent themes

Analysis of the data focussed on answering the research questions. Data from each of the sources (questionnaire, document analysis and interviews) were combined from which five themes emerged. These themes relate to: understanding social studies, learning theory, teacher education, assessment and the value of personal histories. Social studies understanding developed through the use of a personal history assignment. The assessment strategy enabled students to make a 'connection' between a personal experience and the

social studies curriculum. In doing so the students appreciated the personal and social significance of social studies. The process encapsulated social constructivist principles of learning which require the use of things personal and social in the construction of knowledge. This process has not been easy to adopt in teacher education, but has been identified as an effective way to value the adult learner, to build teacher/student learner relationships, assisting them in not only their social studies understanding but as an emerging teacher. On the basis of the emergent themes the researcher developed a series of recommendations and conclusions for the future use of personal histories in education.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is structured to portray this research through a literature review (chapter two) of social studies pedagogy, teacher education, learning and assessment theory and the value of personal histories. A more detailed discussion occurs on case study methodology in chapter three. The actual methods used are outlined in chapter four. Key results are presented in chapter five leading to a discussion on effective learning about social studies for student teachers (chapter six). The conclusions and recommendations for future teaching and research are presented in chapter seven.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

“Vygotsky has suggested that teaching means relating to students and relating the curriculum to their lives” (Wink & Putney, 2001, p.83).

2.1 Introduction

The role of the educator in the area of teacher education is a multifaceted one. One of these facets includes curriculum knowledge. In this study, that knowledge is in the field of social studies. In addition, the teacher educator needs to have knowledge of the students as learners, knowledge about teaching and knowledge of themselves as teachers (Dinham, 1996). Understanding the teacher’s role in combining all these domains of knowledge is the goal of teacher educators in social studies curriculum courses.

The tradition of developing citizenship in social studies has continued to prevail in New Zealand schools. However, citizenship education and the best way to achieve it continues to remain unclear. Some researchers believe the best way to attain citizenship is by designing and delivering a social studies programme that balances content and skills necessary for citizenship (Barr, 1995). The teacher educator plays a key role in how student teachers perceive the aim of social studies, and how in the future they will balance the acquisition of content and development of skills to participate in New Zealand’s changing society.

Teacher educators are instrumental in raising the level of interest in social studies. In doing so, the teacher educator needs to appreciate the characteristics of adult learners and understand how to best teach them, so as to help them go on to provide a balanced curriculum relevant to their students needs. In addressing the ‘relevance’ of the social studies curriculum, teacher educators have given credence to social constructivist theories of learning and teaching (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Jadallah, 2000; Scheurman, 1998).

These theories are advocated due to their underlying principles of social interaction, valuing students' ideas and interests as well as their past social and cultural experiences.

Social studies teachers strive to adopt strategies that help learners to identify the relevance of the curriculum and to 'build' upon what the students already know. To what success, teachers do this is not well understood. The word 'strive' suggests that teachers continue to grapple with the selection of strategies and how best to implement them. It is in the quest to use strategies that acknowledged students' interests, ideas and experiences so they could see the relevance of social studies to their lives, that personal histories were introduced as an assessment strategy in a pre-service teacher education course.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of personal histories assisting students with their social studies learning. The literature review is organised under five themes. The first theme explores: i) the social studies curriculum and issues and considerations for teaching social studies, ii) characteristics of adult learners in the context of social studies teacher education and iii) social constructivist theory of learning and the impact on assessment. The final theme focuses on the definition and educational use of personal histories as an assessment strategy.

2.2 Introducing and defining personal histories

Personal histories can be defined in a variety of ways. Polkinghorne(1988) regards personal histories as being 'a true story or stories of one's life, or the story composed of historical episodes' (p.14). These past events or the account there of, can be presented in a written or spoken form and presented at the request of someone other than the person the personal history describes (Knowles, 1991 cited in Calderhead & Gates, 1993). Personal histories are similarly defined by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) as stories or narratives recalling events in an individual's life. Personal histories are also described as life stories, life histories, life narratives, self stories, "mystories", autobiographies, oral histories, personal testaments or life documents (Plummer, 2001).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher's definition of a personal history is a reflection on a past experience to consider its significance. An additional step is required for the student teachers to link their personal history with the concepts embedded in the social studies curriculum. Interpreting personal experiences in light of key conceptual strands of the *New Zealand Social Studies Curriculum (NZSSC)* is intended as a learning and pedagogical tool for student teachers to make the transition to emerging teacher.

2.2.1 Wider Use of Personal Histories

Personal histories have been used by a range of people in a variety of ways. Teachers, philosophers and social scientists working in the fields of education, welfare, medicine, psychology, sociology and anthropology have all used personal histories (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Oral historians use personal histories to 'illuminate' the past, and anthropologists investigate the culture from where the personal history originated (Plummer, 2001). Philosophers have used personal histories when gaining meaning for the way in which people live (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

The social scientist has used personal histories as a tool in understanding societal change, and perspectives on life as a whole (Plummer, 2001). Personal histories have helped people interpret the complexities of their experiences within a certain context. For teachers personal histories have been used to negotiate shared understandings about pedagogy and content in a wide range of curriculum areas. They have application as a way to interact with others to 'talk' about teaching and learning (Beattie, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Zeek, Foote & Walker, 2001). Further, reflection on past experiences forms the basis of teacher-student discussions with the intention to improve future practice.

Teachers have used personal histories in education when working alongside school age students with reading difficulties and limited interest in learning (Gitlin, 1994). Developing reading skills was the rationale behinds Gitlin's (1994) use of personal histories. Gitlin drew upon children's past experiences and uses these to help children with reading difficulties. Personal histories have also been used by secondary school history

teachers as a means for their students to connect with or write themselves into historical records (Makler, 1987, cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

For the purpose of this research, the focus is on personal histories in social studies teacher education. Personal histories have been considered central to the role of preparing teachers, in that they assist in the reflective process about their rich life experiences (Knowles, 1991, cited in Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Personal histories have also been used as a means to 'talk' about teachers' experiences and examine and re-examine their practice, and hence further their pedagogical expertise (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Wells (1993) also encouraged the use of personal histories as a basis for teacher discussion and Zeek, Foote and Walker (2001) used personal histories as a way to examine teachers' beliefs which influence the way they teach. Dhunpath (2000) used personal histories as a vehicle in pre-service education to understand the developing student teacher and how past experiences affected their present thoughts on teaching. Personal histories enabled student teachers to understand more about themselves with the potential for personal growth, and in doing so, clarifying views on teaching and learning (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Personal histories have been useful in achieving a connectedness and a sense of community in higher education classes by students sharing their experiences, and interpreting the significance of them (Cole & Knowles, 1993, cited in Russell & Korthagen, 1995). The voices of feminist educators, school administrators and students can be heard using the personal history to critique women in education (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997). 'Connected knowing' refers to new learning that is connected to self knowledge (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Personal histories can be a means to 'develop 'form' or 'order' from our often chaotic experiences and in the process develop one's voice' (Grumet, 1988, p.97, cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Teaching and the social studies curriculum both have their complexities in what to focus on and how. Personal histories can be a means to order these complexities.

A challenge for teachers at all levels of education lies in engaging students in meaningful and relevant learning. The profession this study focuses on is teacher education. If we are to agree with Knowles (1991) and Witherell and Noddings (1991), that student teachers have rich experiences, it seems the practice of connecting these experiences to acquire knowledge relevant to teaching is sensible assessment practice (Friend & Grant, 2001). The personal history assignment is one way to assist student teachers to make connections between their rich life experiences and educational theory and practice.

2.2.2 Justification for using personal histories

Schubert (1991, cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991) takes a constructivist view in using personal histories with student teachers. He feels student teachers need to share in the creation of knowledge so as to participate in a co-construction process. The development of understanding that informs teaching can sometimes be best communicated when relating it to a personal experience. Schubert's motive is to interpret teachers' stories to give meaning to their practice. Words and language shared using a personal experience can sensitise and expose key issues and areas of inquiry (Blumer, 1969, cited in Plummer, 2001). A personal history requires skills of collaboration, listening, empathy and understanding and these skills benefit students by improving their understanding of practice (Dhunpath, 2000; Schubert, 1991, cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Zeek et al., 2001). All these skills find favour in varying forms in the definition of citizenship (Barr, 1996).

If caring is widely believed to be a central facet of teaching (Goldstein & Freedom, 2003; Noddings, 1999), then personal histories can be a way for teacher educators to model caring in their work with student teachers and to help prepare caring teachers. Students reveal something of themselves and their beliefs in a personal history. Personal histories can also address a frequent complaint from student teachers about the absence of personal concern and respect from teacher educators (Carson, 1999).

Communication can be improved when teachers are asked to relate their teaching practice

to previous experiences through stories. Such dialogue with other educators can seed collaborative practice and the celebration of that practice (Sparkes, 1994, cited in Collay, 1998). Plummer (2001) takes a stronger stance, by using personal histories as a way to not only understand theory and practice, but to challenge it. The opportunity to reflect or “recherche”; a French word for reflecting on a personal experience, is a means to understand, inform and possibly change professional practice (Collay, 1998).

School reform can be made by using personal histories. School participants can re-imagine their professional lives, work together, listen, negotiate and change in a more imaginative way (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Schulz, Schroeder & Brody, 1997). Personal histories have also been a way to explain, illustrate and convert practice (Convery, 1999), as drawing upon an experience, encourages teachers to consider their practice and identity.

Bruffee (1995), see the ultimate use of personal histories in pre-service teacher education as a vehicle to move student teachers across professional community boundaries and develop three way partnerships among pre-service teachers, mentors and teacher educators at university. Such partnerships offer opportunities for all voices to be part of the student teacher's growth (Zeek et al., 2001). Teachers and students in a college or university classroom can also appreciate social and cultural similarities and the different communities they belong to (Bruffee, 1995). The sharing of personal histories can help students stand back, gain perspectives and imagine the future (McAdams, 1990, cited in Belenky, Bond & Weinstock, 1997).

If student teachers perceive the benefit of writing a personal history themselves then they are more likely to take Gitlin's (1992) lead and use them in their future teaching. Personal histories can enable children to identify what they have in common, their diversity and to address learning difficulties. For children who have used personal histories, a 'door is opened' (p.172) where their knowledge is valued and seen to be worthy of discussion. Children have felt valued and less isolated, developed a sense of belonging and reassurance, that their life experiences are shared by other members of the class (Gitlin, 1992).

2.3 Personal histories: Links to social studies

As a result of the Thomas Report (1943), social studies was introduced in 1946 as a new curriculum subject in New Zealand secondary schools. The main aim of this curriculum was prescribed as citizenship, defined sixty years ago as the understanding of human affairs (Barr, 1996, cited in Benson & Openshaw, 1998). In the 1950s social studies focussed largely on the transmission of factual content. Yet, by the 1960s and 1970s skills of critical and reflective thinking and decision making became a more prominent focus. By the 1990s and beyond the aim is still citizenship (Barr, 1995).

Because schools and society are constantly changing, the argument is often made that teachers need to be reflective in order to cope with changing circumstances (Schön, 1983, cited in Calderhead & Gates, 1995). Attempts to adjust to changing social circumstances are evident in the changes made in the draft essence statement for Social Sciences due for release in 2007. Debate regarding social studies continues with the formation of this 2007 document.

Social studies has never been clearly understood in New Zealand, with many different views of what it encompasses. To pull together some commonalities of views (e.g. Hursh & Ross, 2000; Lee & Hill, 1996; Ross, 1997) social studies can be presented as an integrated field of learning which draws upon a range of subject disciplines, developing citizenship skills, including the skills of inquiry, values exploration and social decision making. Development of these skills and understandings culminates in the achievement of two key social studies goals; understanding the world, and effective participation in that world as informed, confident and responsible citizens (Barr, 1996).

Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1997) has goals and achievement objectives which begin to clarify social studies learning and teaching. A consistent understanding of social studies and how to best achieve its citizenship aim is still being debated. The most recent 'tradition' is that of social studies having a strong focus on

students considering the effects of societal changes and how best to cope with them. Students are also encouraged to participate and take social action to deal with social issues (Aitken, 2004). With an ever changing society the focus on what constitutes good social studies continues to be debated. The different traditions of social studies reflect the need to provide a balanced programme.

2.3.1 The importance of a balanced social studies curriculum

It is argued that a balance between the processes and content aspects associated with social studies is needed for effective learning (White, 1999). New Zealand teachers are challenged to teach information about our society whilst developing the social studies learning processes of inquiry, values exploration and social decision making (Owens, 1997). One way this balance has been addressed is through the development of social studies exemplars (www.tki.org.nz/r/socialsciences/curriculum). The purpose of these exemplars is to provide teachers and students with snapshots of learning that reflect good Social Studies learning and achievement (Aitken, 2003). Principles underlying exemplars reflect the social studies traditions of social action and reconstruction (Aitken, 2004); these being evidenced based ideas about society, participation in society, personal and social significance.

Participation is key to social studies. Participation was argued to be a central focus of both social studies pedagogy (teaching and learning) and content (Sewell, et al., 2003). These developers of social studies exemplars claimed that teaching and learning in social studies needs to become more social and participatory in nature, where the relevance of social studies as participation in New Zealand society is highlighted. This participation is not just the students alone; it needs to be collaborative participation, where students and teachers learn together as they inquire into social studies concepts.

Personal histories are one means to negotiate shared understandings about pedagogy *and* content. Personal histories have been used as a way to interact with others to 'talk' about teaching and learning (Beattie (1995); Clandinin and Connelly (1998); and Zeek, et al.,

(2001). Reflection on past experiences forms the basis of their discussions with the intention to improve future practice. Even if teachers are clear about the goals of social studies, the approach and teaching strategies taken to achieve its goal will differ (Hope, 1996). In addition, teachers' attitudes, skills and philosophies on what they deem important will impact on their social studies teaching. The importance of attitudes to social studies is the topic of the following section.

2.3.2 The importance of attitudes in the teaching of social studies

Research in North America has found that the teacher plays a key role in students' attitude formation in social studies (Moroz, 1999; Ross, 1997). Learning new teaching strategies can assist with the formation of positive attitudes towards social studies, but it is too easy for teachers to remain attached to old ways of teaching (Brophy & Merrick, 1987, cited in Hope, 1996). Attempts to motivate student teachers to change their attitudes to social studies include finding different ways of teaching them. One strategy is to make meaningful personal connections between new information and what students already know (Kizlik, 2002). Hope (1996) also sees a need to enliven social studies by linking students to their community and the world and to see the relevance of the past on their present and their future.

For decades, social studies in North America has been rated as one of the least liked subjects in the curriculum because students could not identify the relevance of the subject (Shaughnessy & Halayda, 1985, cited in Hope, 1996). This theme of relevance is also noted by Moroz (1999) who believes the decline in Australian students' attitude to social studies is due to perceived lack of relevance to their future occupations. In New Zealand, according to the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) (2001), the popularity of social studies in primary schools remained similar between 1997 and 2001. Social studies rated 10th out of 12 subjects for preferred learning in a Year 4 sample, and 8th in a Year 8 sample. This low popularity rating maybe misleading as social studies is often embedded in theme work. It was when social studies related to living in the future and Year 4 and Year 8 level students could see the relevance of social studies that their attitude towards

social studies became more positive (NEMP, 2001).

To attract students and transform negative attitudes, social studies must become more 'social' and less 'studies' (Moroz, 1999). His findings highlight the need to acknowledge the importance of attitudes and prior experiences that students bring to social studies curriculum courses and the need to make deliberate moves to turn these around. Teachers, therefore, need to make learning in social studies more socially interactive. It is a challenge for teacher educators to help student teachers' overcome their negative experiences of solo seat work which contribute to negative attitudes towards social studies. One strategy to do this is the personal history where essential learning about our society is applied (Barr, 1995).

Responsibility for turning around negative attitudes towards social studies requires consideration of adult learners in a teacher education context. The following section explains how a personal history can be used as a way to relate to students in pre-service education.

2.4 Personal histories: Links to teacher education

A brief historical overview serves to understand the current trends relating to teacher education. Only a century ago teaching was mastered mainly by gaining experience without any formal training (Boyer, 1990). However, development of a knowledge-base in teacher education led to a need to apply this knowledge in training establishments. Many theories of 'good' teaching resulted, one of which is a theory-practice relationship. This relationship was encouraged in teachers colleges where students learnt about the theory of learning and teaching interspersed with placements in schools. During the 1980s a new approach to teacher education emphasised the importance of reflective practice (Calderhead & Gates, 1993). Other theories about good teaching focussed on and appreciated the individuality of the teacher (Korthagen & Russell, 1995), an ability to learn with students, and appreciate and include diversity (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rogers, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Theorists have different emphases on 'good' teacher education for the future. These include an inclusive approach where the focus is on knowledge of subject matter (Darling-Hammond, 2000), and the relationship of theory and practice. Other theories focus on teachers' beliefs and biographies and how they affect teacher development (Bullough, 1997, cited in Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2000; Russell & Korthagen, 1995). Still more theories focus on valuing people's personal life histories to influence the developmental process of teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Gitlin, 1992). The value of people's beliefs and histories can be culminated in Tickles' (2000) notion that 'personhood' as well as 'teacherhood' need to be considered in teacher education. Tickles' notion acknowledges the influence of the 'personal' that is their interest and philosophies, in the process of developing the teacher.

Some trends in teacher education have parallels with the varying views of what social studies is and how best to implement good social studies learning and teaching. Parallels exist with the tension between teaching content (new information) and developing the processes (skills to apply information and use it). To address the tension in teacher education, educators need to appreciate the characteristics of the adult learner whom they are working alongside.

2.4.1 Personal histories: a way of relating to adult learners

Adult learners can be difficult to describe due to a variety of interpretations of what constitutes an adult. For the purposes of this study, adult learners are people of varying age who have chosen to engage in post-compulsory teacher education. A term used to describe the art and science of helping adults to learn is called andragogy. Knowles, Holton III & Swanson (1998) highlight similarities and differences between the characteristics of adult and child learners. Adult learners tend to be more self-directing and intrinsically motivated than younger learners. In addition, adult learners want to have more control over their learning and they bring a wider range of experiences to learning. Task-centred learning where adults are motivated to learn due to the perception learning will help them in life

situations is an adult-learning preference. Teachers of adults are required to support adult learners to take increasing responsibility for their own learning (Knowles et al., 1998; Ramsden, 2001).

Teachers need to acknowledge adult learners' past experiences and assist adults to learn from and with them (Meriam & Caffarella, 1999). The key to this role is the relationship that teacher educators build with adult learners (Wlodkowski, 1998). Building relationships with adult learners which draw from previous experiences can be achieved through reflective practice. Such practices have become recognised as critical in the professional growth of teachers (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Meriam & Caffarella, 1999). The following section will discuss how personal histories reflect principles of social constructivist theory of learning and teaching.

2.5 Social Constructivist theory

Recognising key features of the adult learner and the importance of engaging in reflection and developing collaborative relationships are some of the principles underpinning social constructivist theory. Applying aspects of andragogy and social constructivist theory of learning within the context of teaching social studies in teacher education is the purpose of the following discussion.

2.5.1 What is social constructivist theory?

Constructivism is a theory with a variety of meanings. The meaning derived depends on the field in which constructivism is applied, such as philosophy, theory and learning and teaching (Chen, 2001; Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Thompson, 2001). In this study, social constructivist principles are about learning and teaching (Fosnot, 1996), and while seen in varying shades (Scheurman, 1998), they are generally based on the assumption that knowledge is constructed by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences in a social context (Chen, 2001). Prior knowledge that learners bring to a situation is very important (Sunal & Haas, 2002). Student's identity (Paris & Paris, 2001), motivation and

meaningful learning in social interaction (Chen, 2001) are all instrumental in social constructivist approaches to learning and teaching.

The common underlining features of social constructivist principles are that people develop knowledge when working together in a social context (Scheurman, 1998) and that learning is influenced by personal experiences which themselves have been influenced by values and culture. Teachers need to adopt learning strategies that allow for inquiry where students ask questions and develop their own explanations. Reflection on values, culture and personal experiences should also be encouraged and modelled by the teacher (Sunal & Haas, 2002). Pre- service teacher education is often the first place where student teachers develop an understanding of learning and teaching theory. It is by thinking about the pedagogical theories that support student teachers in their social studies learning that have led some teacher educators to advocate social constructivism as a favoured learning and teaching theory (Sewell, et al., 2002) If the theory of social constructivism is to be advocated, then a challenge exists to articulate and apply it in teacher education. The realities of this challenge are considered in the following section.

2.5.2 Relevance and implementation of social constructivism in teacher education

Teacher education is an area that teaches about social constructivism, but has not always been completely successful in modelling constructivist methods of learning and teaching (Arlidge, 2000). Fosnot (1996) believes that teacher education programmes need to offer a constructivist perspective in more than one course.

Teacher educators have a responsibility to model the virtues necessary for inquiry (central to social constructivist principles of learning and social studies) and therefore develop a special kind of learning community within a university (Darling, 2001; Richert, 1996, cited in Loughran & Russell, 1997). Practices of dialogue and discourse are advocated in teacher education programmes, so student teachers can become more critical and reflective in their practice. When student teachers participate in those practices at a College of Education they are better able to develop these skills in children (Tatoo, 1998). Other examples of

constructivist learning opportunities at Colleges of Education include problem solving activities (Bower & Lobell, 1998; Darling, 2001; Sewell, Fuller, Murphy & Funnell, 2002; Smith, 2000) collaboration (Cox & Barrow, 2000; Welch, 2000) and opportunities to reflect (Wade, 1997) and research (Darling, 2001; Smith, 2000).

Research, inquiry, critical reflection and understanding are the essential qualities that Hargreaves (1995, cited in Smith, 2000) argues can be achieved in a pre-service classroom to influence teacher learning and affect the way they relate to the children they will teach. The process of becoming a teacher is increasingly acknowledged as a multifaceted endeavour, which involves the person learning intellectually, socially, morally, emotionally and aesthetically (Beattie, 1995). Such elements need to be incorporated into pre-service programmes.

It is important for teacher educators who advocate constructivist principles of learning to carefully examine how their own curriculum and instructional practices involve students in relating concepts, facts and generalisations to themselves and also to the broader social context (Jadallah, 2000). The teacher educator can be implicated here as they too could share their struggles in applying principles of reflection, collaboration and using prior experiences. The willingness of teacher educators to practice advocated theory may vary (Bullough, 1997, cited in Loughran & Russell, 1997). It is worth noting that pre service teachers have limited experience in classrooms and to develop understanding of social constructivist principles they have limited experiences to connect to (Guilfoyle, 1997, cited in Loughran & Russell, 1997).

Some of the overlaps between constructivist theories and adult learning include personal relevance of the content, involvement of the learner in the process, and deeper understanding of underlying concepts. If concepts are abstract, yet come about through concrete examples (Sunal & Haas, 2002), then to gain meaningful understanding the teacher must provide examples of these concepts that students can relate to. Developing accessible concepts for students may involve connecting such concepts to what students know already in relation to every day contexts. Achieving this may involve engaging pre

service teachers in reflective activities on prior experiences as a valuable method in the learning process (Loughran & Russell, 1997) where the learner can build upon what they already know.

2.5.3 Social constructivism in social studies

A constructivist approach to teaching social studies allows students to participate in society as a citizen (Hope, 1996; Ministry of Education, 1997). However, the preparation of social studies teachers can reflect a chasm between theory and practice (Cox & Barrow, 2000). The notion of connecting theory and practice can be referred to as connecting knowledge and experience which is the foundation of constructivist teaching in social studies (Jadallah, 2000).

A constructivist approach to learning can empower students to ask their own questions and seek their own answers (Brooks & Brooks, 1999) and in doing so reflect on 'good' social studies (Hope, 1996). As students ask their own questions and seek answers with others, a 'connectedness' can develop, in which the personal and social significance of the social studies curriculum is realised. This connectedness enables students and teachers to work to co-construct understanding of social studies concepts.

Traditionally, the search for knowledge in social studies included the search for "truth", or the acquisition of knowledge. Social constructivist approaches, however, employ a more flexible approach where culture is considered and beliefs are probed (Hamilton, 1997, cited in Loughran & Russell, 1997). This search for tradition includes reflection, where knowledge is constructed, based on personal and social experience. With the consideration of personal and social experiences, the focus of social studies learning changes from one of a search for truth, to one of co-constructing understandings drawn from the interaction with others (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

Implementing social constructivist principles such as trusting students' ideas, valuing students' voice with the intention to support their own construction of meaning is one way

to empower students in a social studies programme. Empowering students is not only motivating, but the growth and survival of democracy depends on active and knowledgeable citizenry (Van Winkle, 2000), who can empower to reform and transform both self and community (Beattie, 1995). Beattie and Van Winkles' ideas link well with the social studies aim of citizenship where citizens are expected to participate in their community (Sunal & Haas, 2002).

Because social studies is about people, it seems sensible to adopt a learning theory that acknowledges and incorporates the social context. Social constructivists acknowledge the contributions of others in their learning. Developing a cohesive learning community where social interaction and a democratic classroom is fostered, direction and integrity in social studies can move forward (Brophy & Alleman, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Jadallah, 2000). If social interaction allows for honest and valid discussion of an experience or social issue, then the probability increases that ideas and perspectives will be examined, evaluated and translated into meaningful understanding (Jadallah, 2000). Participation in society is an aim of social studies. Therefore in our teaching we need to allow opportunities for students to participate, whether it is in solving problems or making learning decisions. The pedagogy of social studies needs to reveal the social significance of this subject.

Social Constructivist theory requires that teachers become facilitators of learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). The teacher is pivotal in good learning about social studies. Social studies needs to be transformative and encourage students to create meaning in and understanding of, their lives. Meaning can be derived from re-examining the diversity of their past experiences (Hope, 1996). The challenge is to decide which methods social constructivist philosophy uses so that learning in social studies can result in better communities and builds empowered citizens (Cuban, 2001, cited in Doolittle & Hicks, 2003). Personal histories are one way to provide meaningful learning opportunities that build on what students already know (Jadallah, 2000). Personal histories are a way to acknowledge what is personally and socially significant to the student; they provide the scope for participation between teacher and student to develop new understandings. The development of teacher student interaction also influences the nature of assessment.

2.6 Assessment

If social studies teacher educators believe in a social constructivist theory of learning, then to maintain credibility, consistency and trust in the eyes of the students, social constructivist principles must be used in assessment practices. Assessment activities are a key way for student teachers to express their understanding of learning. Assessments can give clear messages to student teachers about what is valued in learning and how theory and practice can be bridged (Cox & Barrow, 2000).

This section will define formative assessment and the social constructivist principles that need to be integrated in to assessment strategies. The assessment method chosen in this study is formative assessment because it provides next steps in learning, links assessment to learning and describes the process of teaching and learning (Clark, 2001). In addition, improving learning through formative assessment requires involvement of students in their own learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gipps, 1999). The 'participation' theme continues to reoccur. Interestingly, two key words from the citizenship aim relate to successful assessment; confidence and responsibility. Aspects of good assessment seek to improve confidence so students feel they can learn more and to take the responsibility for it.

2.6.1 Personal histories: a formative assessment strategy

Two key words can be gleaned from the Ministry of Education's definition of formative assessment (1994). These are the process of learning which is to be emphasised in assessment to enhance learning. The word 'process' suggests that formative assessment should be an ongoing activity (Weinstein, et al., 1999) and a means to check for understanding and look for gaps in knowledge integration (Leach, Neutze & Zepke, 2000). The word 'enhance' highlights how the assessment process can reinforce and strengthen learning with teachers providing support (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Costa & Leibmann, 1997; Covington, 1999).

The points below identify some of the characteristics and decisions required when implementing formative assessment within a social constructivist pedagogy, of which personal histories are one strategy:

- 1 Feedback that considers social constructivist principles allows learners to work towards monitoring their own progress (Sadler, 1998, cited in Brookhart, 2001).
- 2 The social and personal aspects of learning need to be considered when adopting formative assessment strategies (Brophy, 1999, cited in Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003; Johnston, 1995, cited in Black, 1998)
- 3 Student perception and perceived importance of the assessment task need to be considered as this affects motivation (Angelo & Cross, 1990; Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003)
- 4 Motivation to complete an assessment task relates to students' self efficacy and the perceived gap between what the learner knows and the desired goal of learning (Black, 1998; Pintrich & Schrauber, 1992, cited in Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003)

The teacher's role is highlighted above as affecting learner's perception of their learning. In addition, the teacher's role becomes significant when giving feedback on student progress; indeed it is regarded as one of the most important functions of assessment (Crooks, 1988). The influence of the feedback is important as it affects the way students approach their learning (Fuller, 1998).

The selection of assessment activities by the teacher is instrumental to success for learning. Social aspects of assessment need to be considered in relation to the environment the teacher provides. Stiggins and Conklin (1989, cited in Black, 2001), call this the "classroom assessment environment". The atmosphere in the classroom generated by teacher expectation and feedback have an impact on student perception of themselves as learners (Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003). The 'tone' of the classroom can change when a particular assessment task is introduced or modelled making the student feel uncomfortable, especially if the assignment is new. These moments are referred to as

“classroom assessment events” (Brookhart, 2001, p. 158).

If teacher educators are to take student perceptions seriously, then the environment and events need to be considered in preparation for assessment. The learning environment is about teaching in a way that reflects social constructivist principles and Vygotsky’s notion of ‘scaffolding’ so that students can appreciate that a new assignment is an opportunity to learn, change or be more open minded about a theory (Loughran & Russell, 1997). Teachers have a responsibility to consider what is relevant to their students as this affects their approach to assessment (Brookhart & Boronwicz, 2003). Articulating the purpose and intent of the assessment task may reassure students about their learning as they embark on the assessment activity (Loughran, 1996, cited in Loughran & Russell, 1997). Personal histories are one formative assessment strategy to link relevant learning and assessment to the lives of tertiary students.

2.7 Summary

The review of the literature suggests that the social studies aim of ‘citizenship’ continues to be interpreted in different ways. How to promote citizenship is still debated. Teachers still battle with what a balanced social studies curriculum should entail and how to build on students’ perceived interest and relevance. Teacher education is acknowledged as a learning field where social studies can be ‘enlivened’ and negative attitudes turned around.

In order for teacher education practice to have an effect, the characteristics of the adult learners and the way they learn needs to be considered. Adult learners value teacher/student relationships and have varying perceptions regarding the worth of assessment. In addition, adult learners learn best when they are encouraged to reflect on previous experiences.

Recent studies, primarily from North America, have provided evidence that social constructivist theories of learning and teaching are a preferred pedagogy to enhance

pre-service teachers' perceived relevance and understanding of social studies. There appears to be some consensus in New Zealand that good social studies pedagogy parallels or is consistent with principles of social constructivist theory. These principles include the value of social interaction when learning, building on students' views and interests, and what is already known.

Exemplifying social constructivist principles in a pre-service context can be a difficult task due to an assessment driven learning culture and lack of time to focus on the process of learning. Incentives to produce research outputs and tutors varying levels of enthusiasm and skill to demonstrate social constructivist principles when teaching are further reasons for this difficulty.

Formative assessment is acknowledged as a process that is inextricably linked to social constructivist teaching and learning. It focuses on the process of learning and reflects characteristics pertaining to adult learners. These characteristics include the use of social interaction and a desire to be valued and supported as a learner. Building upon prior knowledge, teacher feedback and enthusiasm are three ways to show this support.

Personal histories have been chosen as a formative assessment strategy reflecting social constructivist principles. Personal histories consider adult learner needs to develop social studies understanding. Personal histories have been primarily used as a way to assist the development of student teacher beliefs. Their use to assess learning in a social studies pre-service course is new and never studied previously. This thesis investigates its usefulness.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology: A theoretical background

“Case studies focus on one particular instance of educational experience and attempt to gain theoretical and professional insights from a full documentation of that instance” (Freebody, 2003, p.81).

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the research questions and why the researcher has adopted evaluative case study as the preferred methodology. It also outlines and discusses three techniques of data collection relevant to case study methodology. A brief summary of how the data are analysed is included. Issues and ethical considerations regarding this research will conclude the chapter.

3.2 Quantitative or qualitative research?

The quantitative mode of inquiry or research method is usually characterised by the assumption that 'truth' and 'knowledge' are fixed or have a singular outcome. This method is used to establish a principle that is objective, reliable, real and valid. To establish a principle, measurement, numerical or statistical quantification, quantitative procedures are used (Burns, 2000). Quantitative research is a statistical experience which exposes reality in a very measured and calculated way. In other words, a very direct answer to a question.

Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, are used to gain a different form of understanding or meaning. The differences between quantitative and qualitative lie in the simplification of reality. Qualitative research can be considered an approach which considers perspectives, sensitivities and often generates further questions of inquiry regarding reality. Because the human elements are so important in qualitative research a singular outcome on reality can be difficult to achieve as human behaviour, thoughts, opinions, feelings and perceptions differ on how people make sense of their lives (Bogdan

& Biklen, 1998; Burns, 2000).

Quantitative research has more to do with conclusions and consequences (Burns, 2000) or as Bogdan and Biklen (1998) claim, outcome and product. Qualitative is concerned with the process (Burns, 2000) and therefore the context with its complexities and qualities is important (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The context is a place where a researcher can record objectivity about what is happening but simultaneously examine its meaning (Stake, 1995; Wong, 1995).

Qualitative research methods focus primarily on the kind of evidence from people that will help the researcher to understand the meaning of what is going on (Gillham, 2000). In qualitative research the focus on people extends to trying to establish an empathetic understanding for the reader, through description of the experience, uniqueness of the individual case and contexts (Stake, 1995), to assist decision making (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2000). This is different from quantitative research where a meaning is searched using measurement or frequency and the researcher remains detached from participants (Yin, 1994).

It seems that a combination of qualitative and quantitative data can result in comprehensive research. However, three major differences in quantitative and qualitative research can be highlighted. The purposes of this case study clearly lean towards qualitative research:

1. Explanation versus understanding as a purpose of inquiry. This researcher wanted to understand how personal histories assist student teachers learning in social studies.
2. Personal versus impersonal researcher role. This researcher's role was more personal.
3. Knowledge discovered versus constructed. The researcher is interested in knowledge constructed by completing the assignment.

Hence, this project was predominantly qualitative research because it sought to understand, and to adopt a more personal role and to construct knowledge.

3.3 The research questions

The research investigates the following research questions:

1. How do personal histories assist student teachers to gain an understanding of the knowledge strands of *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997)?

These research questions are supplemented by:

2. How is it helpful to make a personal connection to the knowledge strands of the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum*?
3. What constraining and enabling factors were experienced by student teachers as they completed their personal history assignment?
4. How valuable do student teachers perceive personal histories to be in supporting their understanding of social studies?

The main aim of this study is to gauge the effectiveness of a personal history assignment. Good research questions are those which enable the researcher to achieve their aim, and which are capable of being answered in the research setting (Gillham, 2000). In this study the research setting involves students in pre-service education.

3.4 Case Study: A brief overview

The case study has had a long history in educational research and has been used extensively in areas such as clinical psychology and developmental psychology (Burns, 2000). Platt (1992, cited in Yin, 1994), traces the practice of case studies back to life histories, the work of the Chicago school of sociology, and casework in social work. Now life histories are a strategy that can be used in case studies to investigate a context and phenomenon. Life histories help explain a situation, highlighting complexities or allowing a decision to be investigated within case study methodology (Yin, 1994). Life histories are a unique way to hear peoples' stories. Case study research is dominant in education and social service as

people and programmes are important to understand (Stake, 1995). 'Scientific' methods are often not adequate as a way of understanding how people behave 'in context' (Gillham, 2000), an important factor in this study.

The positive features of doing a case study include a form of inquiry that exposes the context to see if it has an affect on the phenomenon. The case study can be used to evaluate a decision in a prescribed context (Yin, 1994). Regardless of the type of case study, investigators must exercise great care in designing and conducting case study to overcome the traditional criticisms of the methods.

3.5 Case study methodology

The case study methodology was chosen to understand if personal histories can make a difference to students' construction of knowledge in a context where the researcher is also a teacher. A case study is a method to investigate either individuals, groups, institutions or a community to answer specific questions pertaining to these groups (Gillham, 2000). Case studies are a preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are asked, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context (Yin, 1994). Case studies investigate, illuminate or challenge the existing order (Gillham, 2000). Acknowledging the context is a strength of case study design in that it enables a question to be asked and answered in a real-life situation. Case study can play an important role in advancing the knowledge base of a field. Educational processes, problems, and programmes can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can improve practice (Merriam, 1988; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). Case study methodology offered this researcher an insight into a tertiary learning context and pre-service teachers studying there. The situation under investigation was the use of personal histories in a social studies curriculum course.

Depending on the focus of the research questions or degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events three types of case study can be used where the end product is descriptive, interpretive or evaluative (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). A descriptive case study presents a detailed account of the phenomenon. This information or data can be used

at a later date for comparisons or theory building (Merriam, 1988), as aggregation of instances (Stake, 1995) or to *describe* an intervention and the real life context (Yin, 1994). Interpretative case studies use descriptive data to illustrate, explain, support or challenge theory (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Evaluative case studies involve description and interpretation, but also judgement (Merriam, 1988). In evaluative case studies the explanations link programme implementation with programme effects (Yin, 1994), or judgements and conclusions in order to rationalise making a generalisation (Stake, 1995).

3.5.1 Evaluative case study

Case studies which involve description, explanation and judgement are the best form of research method to evaluate a situation (Merriam, 1988). Evaluative case studies are useful to improve teaching practice. The evaluative case study moves away from illumination and puzzlement to critical enquiry to seek understanding and explanation (Stake, 1995).

Evaluative case studies are a method to explain why an innovation worked or failed and for whom. In this case it is envisaged both student and teacher will benefit from the innovation because the evaluative case study allows an opportunity to evaluate, summarise and make conclusions, thus increasing its potential applicability. Findings can be used to decide whether to recommend change (Bassegy, 1999); change that will direct the teacher with future innovations to benefit students and their learning.

Because evaluative case studies require data which *describe* a phenomenon, numerical information in the form of a questionnaire was gathered in this research. Focus group discussion data and document analysis was used to draw *inferences*, correlations, and differences between groups to determine the significance of change. These three techniques assure data validity through triangulation of the results.

3.6 Data collection methods

The first stage of data gathering began when the personal history assignment was

introduced to the students. The researcher listened to students' questions and responses to the assignment. These responses and early observations were used in a pilot study, described in chapter one, enabling data collection methods to be refined (Yin, 1994).

In a case study, the researcher must make explicit links between the questions asked, the data collected and the conclusions drawn. A range of data collection methods were used in this case study to ensure this link is maintained. Using multiple sources of data or evidence allows a process of triangulation (Yin, 1994). Triangulation occurs when findings from multiple sources can be validated and cross checked (Hopkins, 2002). However, there may also be observations and anecdotal records that could be used to provide detail. This openness to new data collection methods as the research progresses is noted by Merriam (1988). The methods used to gather a range of data included a questionnaire, focus group discussion and document analysis. Each method is discussed in the following sections.

3.6.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires provide a form in which the same questions are asked of each participant. Because the role of the researcher is reduced in this form of data collection the variation in meaning is entirely due to the respondents themselves. The questionnaire is a commonly used method in educational research and gathers data at a particular point of time where the questions asked can be descriptive and/or explanatory (Burns, 2000). A questionnaire is an efficient way to gather data. The questionnaire can be completed by individual participants and within a set time frame. The design of each question is therefore crucial (Gillham, 2000), so meaning and understanding can be drawn from the responses.

Questionnaires often have a minor place in case studies but they do have value as a way of getting straightforward, fairly factual information (Gillham, 2000) or opinions (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000) which can be used to confirm and validate findings from other data collection methods or to establish certain comparability (Stake,1995). In this case study a questionnaire was used to collect the initial data. The questions developed in this case study questionnaire include ones that are:

1. descriptive - to attain students' perspectives. Questions beginning with the word 'How' are used for this purpose (refer to Question 2 Appendix A).
2. structural - to gain some understanding of how participants think about what they do. The researcher can then ascertain relationships between context and student learning.
3. contrast – to further clarify participants' meaning (Yin, 1994).

A range of questions types have been used in this research to assist verification of data gathered. The three question types are clearly worded so they are 'open-ended', use language that is familiar to respondents, posed in a way that respects the knowledge of the participants and to elicit information that focuses on the study (Yin, 1994).

3.6.2 Focus group discussion

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a conversation that takes place over a short period of time with consenting participants from the research context. The discussion usually remains open ended and assumes a conversational manner, but key questions will direct this dialogue (Seidmann, 1991; Yin, 1994). Elaboration of questionnaire responses can take place in the discussion.

Not only will FGD allow for further explanation of responses to the questionnaire, but it can be a chance to repeat some of the questions in the questionnaire to confirm earlier responses (Burns, 2000; Stake, 1995). The listening skills of the researcher are vital during these discussions. The researcher is required to listen to key information, showing a genuine interest in what the participants are saying and deciding when elaboration, clarification or probing are required. The FGD in the pilot study provided a chance to refine these skills.

FGD have advantages for both the researcher and the participants. For instance, the advantage of FGD is being able to draw upon a range of views with the participants listening to each other. For the researcher, the discussion allows him/her to be part of the participants' talk. And for the participants, they can be stimulated by hearing each others' ideas and enjoy the dynamics of group dialogue (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In addition, the participants can feel empowered by the opportunity to be part of the research process (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, Robson, 2001).

Difficulties in FGD can arise with the need to gain permission for the discussion to be taped, a need for participants to respect confidentiality and the time involved when transcribing the taped discussion (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher must be skilled enabling all members of the group to share their thoughts, keeping the conversation on the topic and facilitating discussion when participants' ideas conflict (Bloor et al., 2001). Careful consideration of the focus group composition will go some way to addressing these challenges.

3.6.3 Document Analysis

Documents play an important role in case study methodology. Following the theme of corroboration, documents can be used to provide evidence that corroborates questionnaire and focus group discussion information (Yin, 1994). The documents, in this case the personal history assignment, enabled the researcher to make links with what was written in the questionnaire and what was said in the discussion. The documents can be used to assess the depth of understanding of the social studies strands.

3.6.4 Research diary

A diary was used during the 2002 pilot study and throughout the 2003 research. Anecdotal comments, conversations and observations were recorded. The diary provided a means to record the researcher's perceptions and student comments in an informal and immediate

way (Hopkins, 2002). Reflections on each aspect of the data gathering process were documented in the diary.

3.7 Triangulation

Triangulation is a validation procedure to ensure methodological rigour (Bloor, et al., 2001). Comparing data from a range of sources increases the credibility (Stake, 1995), and validation (Burns, 1997) of the results, serves to deepen and enrich the researcher's understanding (Bloor, et al., 2001) and is a vital method when using case study methodology (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

The main aim of the researcher was to verify emerging themes from more than one source. By reading and reviewing the personal history assignments the researcher could appreciate the problems students may have had in understanding *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Gillham, 2000). The researcher made use of the assignments to "track down leads" or carry out a form of content analysis (Merriam, 1988), in relation to data from other data collecting sources.

3.8 Ethical issues

Ethics is another central component to case study methodology. Overall, ethics provide guidelines for carrying out an investigation which safeguards both the researcher and the participants. Conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process, the researcher was mindful of the need to be aware of the ethics in conceptualizing the research topic (Merriam, 1988). With case study methodology there is greater opportunity than quantitative methods for gathering 'rich' and 'descriptive' data in illuminating or evaluating information. With this availability of information relating to both students and context there are demands on a person's intellect, ego and emotions (Yin, 1994). Intellect

and emotions are also noted by Merriam (1988). The researcher is the primary collector and analyst of data. This tension is also seen in the problem of bias. Bias can be in the form of selecting data that favours a desired outcome by the researcher (Merriam, 1988). In the present study, does the researcher want to highlight the success of an innovative personal history assignment or is it her "ego" that drives the need to show its merits, because she enjoys this form of writing? The section on triangulation will go some way to reassure readers that no ego or bias is intended with this research. To maintain an ethical integrity in the collection and analysis of the data, the researcher has made sincere efforts to attend to Bassey's (1999) 'three respects' - respect for democracy, truth and persons.

3.8.1 Respect for democracy Whilst the researcher has freedom to investigate and ask questions, there are certain responsibilities she must undertake:

- inform students of her interest in personal histories and the study to be undertaken prior to the assignment due date.
- ensure students have the right to decline to participate without penalty.

3.8.2 Respect for truth The researcher is expected to be truthful in data collection, analysis and the reporting of findings. She therefore sought to:

- verify focus group discussion transcripts.
- provide a summary of findings for students.

3.8.3 Respect for persons The researcher needs to respect the dignity and privacy of the participants. She undertook to ensure confidentiality and where this was not possible; agreed on confidentiality in focus group discussion to:

- ensure anonymity of students in the research report
- negotiate the timing of the focus group discussion.
- show sensitivity in discussing personal histories.

Many qualitative studies and most educational case study data gathering will involve a small element of the 'personal' as the case study involves humans in a context (Bassey, 1999). This study involved a significant element of 'personal' as personal histories recall

events in an individual's life (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The purpose of the personal history therefore needs to be fully explained and defined. However, the researcher undertook to honour the respect for democracy, truth and persons in the ways outlined above.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has provided the reader with an understanding of why the researcher chose to undertake an evaluative case study. Justification for the case study methodology arose as a way to answer the research questions that focussed on *how* a personal history strategy could assist social studies understanding. The evaluative case study methodology interested the researcher since seeing theory in context enabled a better understanding to evolve.

Data collection and analysis methods appropriate to such a qualitative methodology were outlined. The data collection and analysis methods chosen provided a sense of structure with sequential steps which the tutor/researcher could follow. A sense of security and discipline was therefore experienced. By explaining the case study approach and the planning required in its instrumentation, a fuller understanding of the ethical issues were identified. These ethical issues concluded this chapter. The following chapter reviews how the researcher put this methodology into practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology in Action

“The central purpose of a methodological section is to explain to readers how the research was accomplished” (Berg, 2001, p.275)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how aspects of case study methodology were applied in practice. It starts by explaining how access to the participants was negotiated and how data collection methods were exercised and adapted. From there the writer describes how the data were recorded, organised and analysed. Ethical considerations for case study methodology are explained and conclude this chapter.

4.2 Access to participants

The personal history assignment was completed by both second and third year students studying for a Bachelor of Education Degree. The second year students were completing a compulsory social studies 100 level paper. There were two groups of these second year students. One group was taught by the researcher on campus and the other group was taught by another lecturer on another campus via an Externally Delivered Option (EDO). The third year students in this study elected to complete a 200 level course of social studies curriculum and were taught by the researcher.

The researcher originally planned to introduce the study to internal students only. However due to a limited response to complete the questionnaire, it was decided to invite EDO students to a focus group discussion (FGD). Further, due to time frame limitations, the EDO students were invited to participate in a FGD only. Nevertheless, this face to face discussion with EDO students provided an opportunity to collect rich data.

4.3 Introducing the study to participants

When the assignment was originally introduced to the internal classes, the researcher informed the students that this assignment was of interest to her Masters study and that she would be grateful for feedback at a later date. Students were then invited to participate in the study *after* the assignments had been marked and handed back. The researcher, who also marked these assignments, did not want the students to feel added pressure when completing their work, or for this study to affect the approach students took in completing the assignment.

The invitation to participate in the research took place at the conclusion of one of the regular teaching sessions. The researcher outlined the purpose of the study referring to an information sheet which was given to all students (refer to Appendix B). The researcher explained that an invitation to be part of a FGD accompanied the questionnaire. An opportunity to ask the researcher questions was provided. She found that the students appreciated knowing why the questionnaire data was being gathered and what would happen to the data.

The researcher explained to the students the value of reflection. Reflection is a common theme throughout pre-service education. The researcher explained that she too needs to engage in reflection. She also explained that the value of their feedback was to evaluate the effectiveness of a new style of assignment to which teaching staff would listen and make changes if necessary. The researcher also shared with the students how the process of gathering information is part of the wider research process, which would be something they would embark on in their ongoing studies. The third year students had already completed a small scale research project prior to this.

To reduce any likelihood of perceptions of compulsion, the researcher absented herself from this class when a formal approach was made. A third party or "neutral person" came into the classroom whilst the researcher left the room, and read written instructions (refer to Appendix C) to explain the purpose of this research and where to return completed

questionnaires. Students were given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire *in class* or during the following week, returning the questionnaire to a designated place on campus. These two measures of having a neutral person distribute the questionnaire and extra time to complete the questionnaire, ensured that students were able to participate without peer or tutor pressure.

4.4 Data collection in the field

Data were collected through a questionnaire, focus group discussion and document analysis. In addition, the FGD as part of the pilot study provided practice with interview methods in which the researcher was a relative novice. Details as to how data were collected, the considerations required when collecting data and how that was managed and the changes made to the original plan are explained in the following section.

4.4.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaire included ten questions (refer to Appendix A). The questions were open ended inviting explanation, except for the final question which included a 1-4 rating scale. The researcher was conscious that the questionnaire would take 10-15 minutes to complete and would rely on students' goodwill to do so. The questions ascertained how students felt about what they had learnt in completing the personal history assignment. The information sought linked to the four main research questions. The questions ascertained students' experiences with the personal history assignment and the effects of the assignment on both a personal and professional level. The researcher/tutor was trying to find out how students perceived their social studies understanding had developed through this personal history and if they were clear about its purpose. Questions were also aimed at understanding their feelings when completing the assignment. The questionnaire provided an opportunity to provide both fact and opinion responses by themselves and anonymously (Gillham, 2000). On a separate sheet accompanying the questionnaire was an invitation to be part of a FGD (refer to Appendix D). Participants' names and consent for their assignments to be used for document analysis were also requested on this separate sheet.

4.4.2 Focus Group Discussion

Internal students

Communication with students who consented to be part of the FGD took place after a class session. A mutually convenient time to meet was arranged. Some negotiation was required as students had different classes to attend. The students were very obliging in juggling child care arrangements, assignments and classes to allow time for us to meet. To show appreciation for the participants' time and to help with the ambiance, refreshments were provided.

Prior to the FGD, the researcher informed participants about their rights to turn the tape off, the purpose of the discussion, the need for confidentiality, and the desire to hold an informative, honest, and courteous discussion. The researcher wanted to highlight the value the participants had to the research study, as well as the value they could gain from being part of such a group.

The focus group questions to be asked were given to the participants at the meeting, allowing them to follow the sequence and content of the discussion (refer to Appendix E). To gather more informative data, "what" questions dominated the discussion (Merriam, 1988). Using the word "what" had the effect of promoting thought and elaboration. Further prompting and probing by the researcher could then clarify participants' responses.

Externally Delivered Option

Due to the limited responses to the completion of the questionnaire by internal students, 10 students from an off site campus were invited to participate in FGD via email communication from their lecturer. Of the 10 students invited to participate six accepted, the names of whom were provided to the researcher who gave background information by phone to each participant. A scheduled time to meet for the FGD was arranged. The information sheet was given to the EDO students by the researcher prior to the discussion, with an opportunity to ask questions.

The researcher was extremely grateful to these EDO students for two reasons. Firstly, the students consented to be part of the discussion, despite no relationship having been developed. Secondly, the only convenient time to meet was on the last day of the semester; due to the timing of their teaching experience and the forthcoming exams. Again, refreshments were provided for the students, who appreciated this welcoming gesture. The researcher informed these participants about the background to the study, including her teaching background and her collegial friendship with their lecturer. In these ways, a convivial relationship between the researcher/interviewer and participants began to develop. It was clear this group of EDO participants were juggling their study and personal lives, as two participants had to collect children and, therefore, left early. Another one had a work commitment, and a further one apologetically arrived late with the wrong time noted in her diary.

The researcher felt that she talked more with the EDO participants than she had in the previous taped discussions with the internal participants, possibly due to not knowing them. After the discussion, the opportunity was taken to inform the EDO students of how internal students had found the assignments or aspects of social studies learning and teaching. The researcher felt it important to honour the principles of 'reciprocity' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Documents

Students who consented to the FGD also consented to their assignments being used for document analysis. By the time the FGD took place, the assignments had been marked and returned to the participants. Student's handed their marked assignments to the researcher after the FGD. The researcher photocopied them and returned the originals to each participant.

4.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is about organising data that has been observed, heard and read to make sense of it. As such, data analysis was a meaning making process where the researcher moves back and forth between all three forms of data. By doing so, the data was able to be described and interpreted. The following section explains the organisational process that this researcher used to assist analysis.

4.5.1 Questionnaires

Responses to each question were documented and coded to enable the researcher to identify the year group of each response. The second year questionnaires were numbered 1-11, with a standard font type adopted, while the third year students were numbered *12-19*, with an italic type. Three steps were taken to collate and analyse the data.

Step1 - All second year and third year student responses were recorded under relevant questions. 1 and 12 refer to the participant's individual code and the Q represents Questionnaire data. For example:

Question 2: How was the personal history different from other assignments, for example a 1500 word essay?

Response: Because it was my own experience. Q:1 (Questionnaire data, second year student). *Had personal and opinion aspect. Q:12 (Questionnaire data, third year student)*

Step 2 – For each question, participants' responses were collated and deduced into themes. Frequency counts were recorded, as well as codes referring to specific student responses.

Step 3 - Themes as well as sub-themes were then identified and listed under each question. For example, theme: a chance to reflect; with associated sub-themes of x and x, and frequency count of x/y.

4.5.2 Focus group discussion data

The transcription of the three audio-taped FGDs was completed by the researcher. Whilst time consuming, it enabled the researcher to immerse herself in the data. The researcher was able to recall the flow of discussion and identify the nature of feedback and dynamics engendered within the group. Uncertain responses such as “mmm” and “yeah” were transcribed in as much detail as possible so the agreements/disagreements of the discussion could be interpreted.

A similar analysis process to the questionnaire was adopted to collate and analyse FGD data. However, letters of the alphabet and italics were used when recording responses to FGD questions. In this respect, A-D were second year students, E-H were third year students and I-M were EDO students. Relevant transcribed responses were documented as follows:

Question 11: What have you learned as a result of writing your personal history?

Response: *'Personal knowledge and experience mean a lot when doing anything'* FGD: G (focus group data, third year student)

Response: *'That there is so much that is everyday that is social studies'* FGD:L (focus group data, EDO student)

Responses were read repeatedly to ensure accuracy and meaning (Gillham, 2000). Themes were deduced and the associated participants' responses were listed. Responses were clustered for convergence and divergence. The themes were then refined so they became more generic and reflected key aspects of social studies learning and teaching. Rewording the themes assisted the focus when answering the research questions. Stake calls this maintaining 'vigorous interpretation' (1995, p.9). During this process of interpretation the researcher simultaneously organised the data and examined its meaning.

An analysis grid (refer to Appendix G i) was designed, where each theme from the questionnaires, FGD and document analysis listed vertically and the three forms of data collection methods were listed horizontally. The analysis grid highlighted themes common

to all three forms of data thus giving triangulation. The visual representation of theme frequency proved helpful in identifying dominant themes. Presenting the data in a grid form, served to cross reference the range of themes and the source they came from. This kind of cross-referencing is part of internal validity of a case study (Gillham, 2000). A further analysis grid was constructed to ascertain the depth of evidence for each research question. Thus the research questions were recorded vertically and the data sources horizontally (Refer to Appendix Gii). Themes identified from the data were recorded in the appropriate cell. The grid was then examined to determine depth of response for each research question.

4.5.3 Documents

The documents which were the students' personal history assignments, were carefully analysed. Analysis was expected to correspond with the themes identified in questionnaire and FGD data. The personal history assignment could not be clearly analysed in relation to these themes. The researcher then used a highlighter pen to identify examples where students showed key understanding of the three social studies processes, inquiry, values and social decision making (SSNZC, Ministry of Education). In addition, examples of the three key aspects of learning taken from the recently developed National Curriculum Social Studies Exemplars (2004) were identified. These themes included: ideas about society, participation in society and personal and social significance.

Examples of the six ideas were identified and recorded using a frequency chart. The frequency of the six ideas identified from the documents (assignments) was then recorded. It was at this stage the researcher decided the documents were not adding additional insight into the value of personal histories in a social studies assignment. The documents were intended to be used to compare student understanding with how students perceived their understanding in the questionnaire and FGD data. Using the documents for the verification of emerging hypotheses gained from the questionnaire and FGD data (Merriam, 1988) was intended but the document analysis did not contribute to this process.

To ensure methodological rigour, data were collected using three techniques. The researcher likens triangulation to answering a question in three different ways. By combining three viewpoints (techniques) a richer or more comprehensive answer can be derived (Berg, 2004). Techniques used in this study are a questionnaire, FGD and document analysis. Triangulation makes the evaluative case study more believable and therefore the research is more likely to have credibility in reviewing the use of personal histories in future social studies teaching and learning.

4.6 Ethics

The researcher had responsibilities to herself, the teaching profession, the student participants and the 'safe' use of personal histories in social studies teaching and learning (Berg, 2001). The researcher followed ethical guidelines to ensure these four responsibilities were met. In addition, ethical issues also relate to obtaining informed consent of all participants, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. How these three ethical practices were applied in this study is explained in the following section.

4.6.1 Informed Consent

Participants were each given Information Sheets before being invited to complete the questionnaire or being part of FGD (refer to Appendix B). The researcher allowed time to answer questions that the students had about the study or the data gathering process during the introduction to the study. Questions asked of the researcher related to the FGD. The students were curious about how FGD data would be gathered and analysed. It became apparent that students had not previously encountered the FGD data gathering technique. The researcher took this opportunity to, again, describe the purpose of the study and the role of FGD data.

4.6.2 Confidentiality

The tutor/researcher assured students when introducing the study and prior to FGD that information they provided regardless of its form would remain confidential. With respect to sensitive topics, such as family relationships involving conflict in the past that were brought up by one individual, an atmosphere of trust was fostered by the researcher and participants. The tutor/researcher emphasized that the content of the personal history was not part of the research rather the understanding that transpired by completing it was the focus of the study. This point was also included on the consent form.

4.6.3 Anonymity

Participants' names were not asked for when completing the questionnaire. An invitation to be part of the focus group was made on a separate sheet. The researcher introduced the questionnaire after the students received their marked assignments. In this way, no bias could be made in marking. At the start of the FGD a confidentiality agreement was given to participants and signed in front of each other before discussion occurred (refer to Appendix H). Signing the agreement altogether developed a feeling of mutual trust where participants could contribute to a free-flowing discussion without fear of somehow being exposed (Berg, 2001).

4.7 Summary

This chapter has described the practical application of the methodology of case study research. Methodological difficulties such as limited questionnaire response were explained, with the researcher's adaptations described. The researcher's experience of implementing the methodology with decisions made was also outlined. The richness of the focus group data and the meaning that can be derived became apparent to the researcher. Benefits of the FGD also extended to the student participants, as not only did they respond to research questions but, in doing so, they clarified their own teacher beliefs and identity. The focus group discussions enabled the researcher to better understand, through listening

and observing facial expressions, student teachers' 'lines of thinking' regarding how social studies learning evolves through the use of the personal history. The process taken to collate, sort and analyse three forms of data was explained. The chapter concluded with the obligations experienced by the tutor/researcher. The following chapter presents the results that emerged from this data.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results

“The job involves deciding which evidence to use to illustrate your points; it is a balancing act between the particular and the general” (Merriam, 1988, p.204).

5.1 Introduction

Throughout the data analysis process of this evaluative case study the researcher immersed herself in the data to evaluate and interpret meaning (Yin, 1994). The social studies tertiary classroom context was familiar as she balanced the dual roles of researcher and teacher that are common in case study research (Stake, 1995). The researcher/teacher not only described and interpreted the data, but also made judgements as students talked and wrote about their learning. In doing so, the effects of a new form of social studies assignment have been evaluated. Interpreting participant questionnaire and FGD responses in order to understand and explain the findings led to themes which were organised under the following four research questions.

1. How do personal histories assist student teachers to gain an understanding of the knowledge strands of *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997) supplemented by:
2. How is it helpful to make a personal connection to the knowledge strands of the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum*?
3. What constraining and enabling factors were experienced by student teachers as they completed their personal history assignment?
4. The original question was “How valuable do student teachers perceive personal histories to be in supporting their understanding of social studies?” However, the value perceived by the students seemed to be answered under the previous questions. Therefore, a newer version of the question was in response to some of the unexpected findings from the data.

Emerging themes in relation to each question are described below.

5.2 Personal histories and social studies understanding

Question 1: How do personal histories assist student teachers gain an understanding of the knowledge strands of the social studies curriculum?

Participants' responses to question one were clustered into themes relating to learning strategies or learning principles in action, as well as to the emotional effect of the assignment. Five broad themes were identified as follows: linking a personal experience to the curriculum, reflecting on personal identity, significance of the past, personal significance of the curriculum and the relevance of social studies. Each theme is presented separately.

5.2.1 Linking a personal experience to the curriculum

From the 17 questionnaire responses, 10 students identified that their social studies understanding was developed by making links between the social studies concepts and their own past experience (refer to Appendix I). The assignment asked students to show how the strands and concepts related to their own lives. Ten students felt they gained an understanding of SSNZC by being able to make these links between their personal experiences and key concepts embedded in the knowledge strands.

The students acknowledged that by drawing upon the known (i.e. their lives) with the new (i.e. SSNZC), they began to develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum. By engaging in this linking process the students noted the value of this learning principle. For instance, one wrote, *'I had to make the links otherwise I could just write and it would make no sense'* (Q.4). Another student identified how, making links between the curriculum and an experience helped her learning, *'it made me critically examine'* (Q.11). Focus group data seemed to go a step further than the questionnaire data when highlighting the enjoyment, satisfaction and ease when making links between social studies and their personal experiences. For example: *'...it's amazing how you think that links with that...'*

(FGD.D). The process of linking a personal history with social studies, was described by students when they used the following terms such as: 'apply', 'fit', 'relate', 'connections', 'use' and 'put it altogether' (refer Appendix J). However, questionnaire data indicated that 9/17 had to look closely at the document in order to make the links (refer to Appendix K).

5.2.2 Reflecting on personal identity

A second theme identified in the FGD data to address the question of how a personal history assists learning about social studies was personal identity; itself one of the key features of the social studies curriculum. The personal history assignment supported students' personal growth, enhancing their understanding of themselves. Participants shared openly and honestly, how the assignment had helped them to learn more about themselves and how certain experiences shaped their lives. The personal history helped students reflect upon and reassess their present and past experiences. Some students were even motivated to take action. Table 5.1, over the page, shows the impact of the assignment on students' personal identity.

Table 5.1: Effect of the personal history on personal identity

Effect on personal identity	Sample quotes
Motivated to take action	<p><i>'I look back on my personal history assignment again ...showing my kids that you can do something if you want it bad enough and that ..., I need to walk the walk and not just talk the talk' (FGD:A)</i></p> <p><i>'Learnt enough that I could write a book. Something I might have done has affected history....' (FGD:F)</i></p>
Shaping - character development	<p><i>' You know, you could go back in your mind and think what actually happened at that time and how it has shaped your life' (FGD:H).</i></p>
Growth - personal development	<p><i>'...so I could go, just like yeah, I had actually grown through that experience. Like before I had thought about it but just not to the same extent. I'd just like to say for me, it [personal history] basically, it sent me off on a period of professional growth. What you learnt about yourself' (FGD:E)</i></p> <p><i>'...so I learnt a bit more about myself' (FGD:A)</i></p> <p><i>'I learnt about myself more' (FGD:E)</i></p> <p><i>'It's just that it didn't stop after doing the assignment. Well, not for me. Definitely not' (FGD:D).</i></p>
Reflection and personal identity - who I am?	<p><i>' To actually think, hang on a minute, and to read back through it and think this is my life. This is part of who I am' (FGD:B)</i></p> <p><i>'I think the assignment did the same for me. It made me revisit something that I just always took for granted and realised how important it has been in my formation as a person' (FGD:C)</i></p> <p><i>'Yes this assignment really set a value on recording your own history, you know as if it is important, because it is important. At times like this is showed I'm lucky enough to have a place that still exists and I would have rung my brother and parents and asked them to send a stack of photos for me...' (FGD:G)</i></p> <p><i>'Good to look back on actually, especially since I've moved on a bit' (FGD:H)</i></p>

Three of the second year internal students contributed to the following dialogue in the FGD which summarises the impact of the personal history on personal identity:

Student A: 'It's about that consciousness thing, that conscious awareness, strip away the bark, the hardwood, to reveal the heart of things'.

Student D: 'So much more than what you see'

Student C: 'It's a richness that can't be seen on the surface. It's what J came home and said this morning, and yeah, it's about children understanding that concept about each other'

As identified in the above dialogue the personal history acted as a reflective narrative requiring students to 'draw upon' their past and link it to the social studies curriculum. By engaging in this reflective process students felt their social studies understanding developed. Students came to see 'reflection' as a process that helped develop social studies understanding and in particular, personal identity. Some students continued to reflect on the assignment for sometime after its completion.

Reflecting upon and understanding the significance of their past had an impact on learning in social studies. Not only did the personal history have personal benefits or significance for the students, the assignment itself became a vehicle for them to engage in conversation with people mentioned in their assignment such as family members. For two participants in the second year focus group, the assignment was used as a way for family members to discuss the significance of one past event and identify changes that had occurred over time. One example of change was in the scouting movement and the other was cultural attitudes to death. The significance of a past event was discussed frequently, leading to the development of a third theme, presented next.

5.2.3 Significance of the past

The personal history highlighted for students the significance of the past as reflected in the following quote. *'Yes, I found that the lack of artefacts I had, photos, you know...that was something I learned from this, the value of keeping things, photos'* (FGD:G) The

significance of the past and perspectives are key concepts in the social studies curriculum. One participant highlighted these concepts as she completed this assignment,

'...by going back to thinking that was the past, that was how I was brought up, that was how I was treated, but I'm now an adult and get to make my own choices, so, it [the assignment] really made me stop and make that decision...' (FGD:L)

Participants seemed to develop a sense of history where they saw their part in this history. For one third year participant the journey into his past was so motivating that he now wonders if he will write a book. The following conversation between this same student and his wife highlights some of the time, energy and enthusiasm he felt during the writing of his personal history assignment and how he viewed his personal history as an 'historical record'.

*'My wife had to come and say, come to bed, it's 2am
I'm doing social studies I said
Haven't you finished that she replied
Oh, I'm going back and changing it!, yeah because I really did enjoy it, so
the children have, some day, can read it and say, well this is where I came
from' (FGD:F)*

One participant openly expressed how identifying the significance of the past was motivating: she reflected that *'by going through the concepts and reflecting back [personal history], was quite inspiring. It's quite an awakening. I can see how it came in [the relevance]...' (FGD:J)*. As students reflected upon their past experiences in the process of completing their personal history assignment, interest was generated and the significance of it considered. The significance of these experiences related to key features of the social studies curriculum.

5.2.4 Personal significance of the curriculum

Benefits of the personal history assignment on a personal scale were shared particularly by internal students. Features of the social studies curriculum were identified and application or examples of social studies perspectives, values and strands were noted by the students

when reflecting upon their assignment. The students applied features of the curriculum to their own lives and, for some; it was like a revelation or surprise to see the personal significance of social studies. The following table shows examples of students making reference to how their lives were reflected in the social studies curriculum:

Table 5.2: Personal significance of the curriculum

Features of the social studies curriculum	Quotes that reflect application of social studies
Strands	<i>'A dominant strand for me, I think, was basically time, continuity and change, as well as social organisation, like in terms of family. Families and how they have changed and developed. And then decisions based on resources and economic activities. Wanting to do better and that sort of thing. But it was the gender perspective, putting my stuff aside and being at home with kids and that role I decided to do. That those resources about people and about what's important and the decisions you made based on what those beliefs are' (FGD:A)</i>
Time, continuity and change	<i>And that it [social studies] is so interrelated, it's happening around us all the time and when you take a personal experience and really analyse it, you think, wow, this is social studies going on all the time and this happening, and oh, wow, I can see how that fits in with time, continuity and change or whatever and it's really good, time, continuity and change stands out because. I can see how that fits in with time, continuity and change. Something I might have done has affected history, you know. You become part of this history of social studies. (FGD:F)</i>
Social Organisation	<i>'Social organisation was another interesting one ... I was like, it's up to me. You could talk about social organisation, cooperation, family groups and they could write about' (FGD: M)</i> <i>' Whether they [children] being in sports teams, music groups or drama or whatever, then they could apply' (FGD:I)</i>
Culture and Heritage	<i>'What you learnt about yourself. I think it, for the first time you were actually thinking, well, I was thinking about making those decisions and why you make those decisions based on those sort of strands and really questioning and looking at yourself about, that come from culture and heritage. What I believe is valuable'</i>

	<i>(FGD:A) 'I can see how it comes in, especially with culture and heritage, when I was growing up we lived right next door to a Maori family' (FGD:K)</i>
Resources and Economic Activities	<i>'So I go to this is part of resources and economic activities ...and decisions based on resources and your resources and economic activities' (FGD:B)</i>
Perspectives	<i>'I found that I was looking at myself in a different perspective' (FGD:D) 'But it was the gender perspective, putting my stuff aside and be at home with kids and that role I decided to do' (FGD:A). 'You were saying your perspectives had changed now...that children understand from their own perspective' (FGD:G).</i>
Biculturalism	<i>'I think the bombshell part for me was the bicultural aspect. How our community treats death differently' (FGD:D)</i>
Values	<i>'It's about people's values and differences. It's about being different and it's okay to be different' (FGD:F)</i>
Value of people	<i>'This assignment gave me the opportunity to see people as resources ...like to consider children in my class as resources themselves' (FGD:G).</i>
Concepts	<i>'And it's about children's understanding concepts about each others' (FGD:C) 'Concepts jump over [i.e. interconnectedness of strands]' (FGD:D)</i>

The delight and enthusiasm as student participants spoke of their experiences and connections with the social studies curriculum was observed by the tutor/researcher during each of the focus discussion groups. Not only did the participants identify the significance of the curriculum to their lives, but they also identified the relevance to children's lives.

5.2.5 Relevance of social studies to students as learners and emerging teachers

Not only did students feel their experiences were being valued in this assignment, but they could perceive the value of children's prior experiences for social studies learning. During focus group discussion excitement grew about the fact that prior experiences could be used as a learning *and* teaching strategy. Student teachers became animated with the relevance of social studies to their own lives and the lives of children. The students realised that

teachers' have an important role to play in helping children develop their personal identity. The table below represents the relevance of social studies for students as well as children's lives.

Table 5.3 Relevance of social studies

A. Relevance of social studies curriculum to College of Education students	B. Relevance of social studies curriculum to children's lives
<p><i>'And it surprised me ...and it shows you how everyday life is brought through this whole thing (social studies) It is a forum to discuss real world issues, things that are relevant' (FGD:J).</i></p> <p><i>'Concepts, beliefs, stereotypes, memories, looking at the community support, and what went on at the time which was quite unusual and there was a lot. And it surprised me how many' (FGD:C).</i></p> <p><i>' By linking my personal history with strands, I was able to see the relevance of the associated concepts, and when wording my personal history in linking it to the strands, I was able to use concept words to clarify my understanding' (FGD:E)</i></p> <p><i>'Like teaching for effective learning, it makes it relevant' (FGD:H).</i></p>	<p><i>'If this is one experience, how many others could you bring with social studies and kids?' (FGD:C)</i></p> <p><i>'Awakened you to the fact that, well actually, there is a lot of things you can do that are a lot nearer to you - kids can see the relevance' (FGD:I)</i></p> <p><i>'That everyone has access to social studies...it's looking at something specific you can relate back to the child' (FGD:L).</i></p> <p><i>'And it's relevant to kids, where there is social order, that's relevant. You don't have to go and find some wonderful context. They are the context already. They've got the surroundings that ...social studies is a way to see that' (FGD:G)</i></p>

The views expressed in Table 5.3 show that when students make links between their lives and the curriculum, the accessibility and relevance of social studies to their everyday lives was highlighted. As part of the questionnaire, quantitative data was also sought. The questionnaire participants completed a rating scale indicating their understandings before and after the assignment. All participants perceived an improvement in their understanding of social studies, which provides support and validation for the qualitative responses identified in the focus groups. The rating scale completed as part of the questionnaire identifies how students perceived their understanding of social studies before the assignment and their perceived improvement after the assignment (refer to Appendix L).

Although the student participants identified how they learnt about social studies during the process of preparing a personal history assignment, there were factors that constrained their learning and these will be discussed under the next question. These constraining features need to be considered and addressed so that suggestions for improvements can be made and the study evaluates both the positives and negatives of the personal history assignment.

5.3 Constraining factors when completing a personal history

Question 2: What were the constraining factors for student teachers as they completed their personal history assignment?

Completing a personal history assignment in a social studies context allowed some powerful and positive learning to develop. However, feedback from the students highlighted factors that got in the way of their learning. Themes to emerge from the analysis are: the assignments newness; misunderstanding; perceptions of personal and beliefs about lacking life experiences; its innovativeness; relying on self and preoccupation with marks. These themes are discussed separately.

5.3.1 This is new!

Completing a personal history as an assignment was a new experience for this group of pre-service students. When attempting something new there will be a little apprehension. The students were able to make choices regarding the experience and the structuring of the assignment. Data from 17 questionnaire responses indicated that 15 students had not previously completed an assignment such as a personal history (refer to Appendix M). However, two third year students qualified their 'new' response with reference to assignments completed in another curriculum.

Similarities between this personal history assignment and other assignments included, people's past experiences being researched and analysed. For one participant, reference

was made to assignment similarities in that they '*have often reflected on prior knowledge and previous experiences to help them complete assignments*' (Q: 17). Another student who confirmed she had encountered a personal history as an assignment, and gave an example from a Health and Physical Education paper where they were required to reflect upon their prior *school* experiences of Health and Physical Education. Two other students likened the personal history to a diary and journal.

The common emerging theme was that these narrative type assignments were new and required reflection upon a prior experience. One student felt reflecting on the past was draining especially as the personal history assignment was due at a similar time to the Physical Education and Health assignment (refer to Appendix N). Feelings of uncertainty due to the 'newness' were found in both the FGD and questionnaire data (refer to Appendix O).

Despite the tutor/researcher exemplifying a personal history assignment by linking her travel experiences to SSNZC (Ministry of Education, 1997), there were some misunderstandings about what the assignment required, and the reason for doing this. The main misunderstanding relating to the assignment requirement, was that the students thought they 'didn't need to research'. At no time did the tutor say this and in the course outline, under the assignment prescription, a suggested reading was listed (refer to Appendix P).

5.3.2 No need to search the literature!

Student perception that this assignment required little or no research came through in both questionnaire and FGD data. For 5/17 questionnaire responses, students felt one of the easier aspects of the assignment was that 'they didn't need to rely on library resources'. FGD participants also responded to the question 'how was the assignment different?' with comments that reflected the notion that no search of the literature was required. Assignments at a tertiary level usually require reference to research and theoretical literature, but FGD and questionnaire data highlighted their belief that searching for other

sources of information was required. Table 5.4 provides evidence.

Table 5.4: Limited or no research required

Questionnaire data	FGD data
<p>I found it easier to reach the word limit talking about a personal experience. Not 'researched information' as such (Q:3)</p> <p>No research, more exciting, more interesting (Q:6).</p> <p>It was based on knowledge I had, rather than sourcing information about it (Q:15).</p> <p>Drew on experiences rather than text books" (Q:17).</p> <p>I enjoyed writing in the 1st person! I didn't need to research my 'theory' of what I experienced (Q:18).</p>	<p><i>'It's usually about always referring back to someone else who said something, a theorist, a curriculum' (FGD:A)</i></p> <p><i>'Not having to go and look up the information, having the information and then it was a matter of adapting that to what was required...'(FGD:H)</i></p> <p><i>'If you did let your 'personal' sometimes in, you always had to back it up with someone else's theory' (FGD:A).</i></p>

Across questionnaire and FGD data all students noted that the assignment was a chance to reflect on their own thoughts. This seemed to occur to the exclusion of "others" ideas in the form of published literature. The students did not seem to understand that the personal history was to link with both the *SSNZC* and theoretical literature about the nature of social studies. Perhaps students are more familiar with searching literature first and then applying the literature to practice as is suggested in the following focus group dialogue.

- Student A: 'We usually, always refer back to someone else who said something, a theorist, a curriculum!'*
- Student B: 'Or, if you did let your 'personal' in sometimes, you always had to back it up...'*
- Student D: 'With someone else's theory'*
- Student J: 'You think gosh, yes, I'm not supposed to have my own opinion'*

Despite participants being taught to refer back to other authors in supporting their ideas, this did not appear to be taken up in the personal history assignment. Participants became so immersed in the personal aspects of their analysis to the exclusion of other literature. This personal nature of the assignment was a theme in all of the focus groups.

5.3.3 Up close and personal

Most students welcomed the opportunity to reflect upon their personal experiences and felt comfortable to do so, but two students were sensitive about the word 'personal'. For instance, one participant said, *'You kind of felt, if you weren't that way inclined [reflecting on things personal], you needed to be, otherwise, you wouldn't get the marks' (FGD:K)*. Not only did the participant feel they would not get the marks if the assignment was not really personal, but for two participants, the idea of sharing something personal meant negative aspects of their past had to be "dredged" up.

Some tension arose within some students when choosing their personal experience to write about in an assignment (refer to Appendix Q). Some found it *'cathartic' (FGD:A)* to share something personal, others found *'more came out' (FGD:K)* and others felt it was necessary to *'delete' (FGD:K)* some of their writing for fear the assignment was becoming too personal.

These same participants asked themselves *'how much do I want to share?'* For one second year student, a need to acknowledge *'things personal'* seemed to be *'part of life'* or within the experience in other curriculum as shown in the following quote. *'I don't think it's any more personal than change and grief in Physical Education, people moving away and dying, all that sort of thing' (FGD:C)*. When reflecting upon a personal experience as part of an assignment, choices were made as to which experiences were chosen.

5.3.4 Do I have experiences to draw upon?

Some participants revealed that they experienced tension when deciding which personal experience to draw upon for the assignment. The younger students felt they did not have many life experiences to talk about. This was also evident when the tutor/researcher introduced the assignment in class. The younger students genuinely felt they did not have the breadth of personal experiences to draw upon, as shown in the following quotes:

'I don't think I've got those experiences to talk about' (FGD:J).

'I think because I'm younger, maybe I didn't have a big choice' (FGD:E).

The age of students was mentioned in all of three FGDs, but it was during the FGD at another campus that the mature students responded to the younger students claims that they did not have a particular type of personal experience. They suggested to the younger students that you could look back on experiences when you were 13 years old. Two mature students had to make a choice from a number of possible experiences. Not only was there a dilemma for younger students choosing an experience for the personal history assignment, a mature student stated, *'maybe because I was older and had a lot more to choose from, it was a case of which one!'* (FGD: F).

5.3.5 An 'out there' and 'on your own' assignment

The theme of the assignment being an *'on your own'* one was evident during the second year FGD. Students claimed that there was limited discussion on the assignment structure, but once they were underway they *'didn't talk to each other about it'* (FGD:C). There was freer choice in the structuring of the assignment which some students enjoyed and reflected in the following quote: *'It's nice to be able to choose a structure that you'd like to work with'* (FGD:D). However, with wider choice in assessment students can feel uneasy about making individual decisions as show here: *'but it does mean, you don't have that framework to build on'* (FGD:C). Students felt because their personal experiences were all so different and they were structuring their assignments differently there *'wasn't much discussion'* (FGD:B).

Students in the focus groups noted how they would do things differently next time. The researcher interpreted this to mean they were now more aware of the assessment criteria and of the possible links between an experience and the social studies curriculum. The innovativeness of the assignment seemed to affect the learning process and expose the necessity for the role of the tutor to scaffold the student's understanding and address the feelings expressed by two participants:

Student C: 'It's a case of trusting yourself and if you weren't confident to do that, you'd find this hard'.

Student B: 'And you have to say, I'm going for it. Well, that's the point I got to. I thought, well, I haven't been too off track so far (with assignments), so I can't be too off track now'.

In response to the comments above one student honestly admitted she had '*trusted herself and didn't do very well*' (FGD: A). Students needed to build confidence in themselves as authors of their own personal history and trust the tutor who would be marking it. The tutor who marked to a set criterion needed to be trusted, but the students felt they also needed to trust themselves when writing the personal history. The theme of trust is discussed further in the next section

5.3.7 It is hard to rely on yourself!

Because the assignment was new and there was some misunderstanding about what constituted a personal history, it became apparent that students did not trust themselves or have confidence to embark on this different style of assignment. Students talked about the importance of trust in the tutor who would read and mark the assignment as personal experiences were being shared. The tutor/researcher clearly highlighted that she would be the only person reading the assignment and that the assignment would remain confidential. All participants noted the need for a sense of trust in the professionalism of their tutor, as noted in the following quote: '*...and because you act in such a professional manner in class, it made me not feel apprehensive about sharing something of myself because I was confident in you*' (FGD:A).

The tutor also had a role to play in developing confidence in the students themselves and for them to be open to a different type of assignment. The purposes of presenting a different style of assignment therefore need to be clearly explained to reduce the anguish felt. These are key considerations when planning and introducing students to assignment tasks.

5.3.8 But what's my mark?

The tutor clearly explained that the actual personal content of the assignment could not, and would not, be assessed. The students seemed to appreciate this point but 'other' issues relating to assessment were shared by second year students. One participant (in jest) noted that the least valuable part of the assignment was that it was assessed, a comment that brought about laughter. Students did highlight that whilst the process of learning was to be enjoyed and that learning evolved through this process, the final mark was still very important. One mature participant felt strongly as she shared her perception.

'We are very assessment based too. You do need to realise this. What's my mark and how will I achieve my best mark for myself and I mean it sounds awful to say it like, we should be enjoying and learning from the process but we're not' (FGD:C)

Assessment therefore affects student's lives and the approaches they take to learning. Issues of assessment extended to the marking criteria (refer Appendix R) and tutors' expectations as illustrated by one participant, *'...and then there's the marking criteria and it's difficult not knowing exactly what was wanted' (FGD:B)*.

Feedback also affects learning. The previous quote highlighted that the teacher can explain assignments as clearly as possible including definitions, examples, justification and criteria, but each student perceives the requirements of an assignment differently and with varying aspirations regarding the mark they would like to receive. Providing written feedback was an area the tutor/researcher felt sensitive and uneasy about. Because you were reading something that included a student's past experience you felt a certain privilege and responsibility that feedback had to be worded sensitively with encouraging and clear guidance. The assessment criteria became important in helping the tutor/marker to remain objective while writing comments to support student learning. Fostering the enabling factors also need to be acknowledged and continued in the future use of personal histories. The following section discusses these factors.

5.4 Enabling factors when completing a personal history

Question 3: What were the enabling factors for student teachers as they completed their personal history assignment?

'How' understanding was developed was part of research question one. 'What' the students' perceived as being essential in helping them understand how to do the assignment was the tutor/researcher's example. The following section expands this enabling factor to show how modelling her own relationship between personal experience and social studies supported student's ability to do so.

5.4.1 Tutor/Researcher's personal history

The tutor/researcher used aspects of her personal history to introduce the assignment to students. This model provided the opportunity to show how travel experiences could be used to draw out the social studies concepts. The tutor described how a significant experience from her past evolved and how the concepts such as "significance of the past" and "belonging to place" impacted on her decision to travel. The effects of this experience on her personal identity and culture and heritage were then linked to social studies and illustrated on a concept map (Refer to Appendix R). The tutor/researcher used a range of artefacts, photos and books to supplement the concept map as it was drawn and explained. Key features of the social studies curriculum were highlighted as the concept map was revealed to the students. The tutor/researcher observed the interest of the students as her experiences and concept map was shared. The students seemed to be interested in the tutor/researcher's background, and they were asked to respect the idea that she was sharing an experience from her past.

Data from both questionnaire and FGD show clearly that the example was instrumental in reducing some initial anxiety about the personal history assignment. The table below highlights the contrast in feelings before and after the tutor/researcher shared an experience. The example did not alleviate all the apprehension as deliberation over the choice of experience in Question Two showed. Table 5.5 shows the contrast in feelings before and

after the tutor/researcher shared her personal history.

Table 5.5 Questionnaire responses *before* and *after* the example.

Before	After
<p>I thought it would be ok, but wasn't 100% sure how to tackle it (Q:1) Unsure of expectations or what was appropriate. But not uneasy about the concept (Q:4) A bit nervous because it was so different to anything I had done before(Q:3) no response (Q:5) Argh!!! Uuh? Too vague (Q:6) I was a bit sceptical in terms of sharing my personal history (Q:7)</p>	<p>It made things clearer [the example] (Q:1) In sharing an experience views of what is appropriate can be clarified (Q:4) It gave me a clearer idea of what I could do (Q:3) Structure. Understanding (Q:5) Click. It made sense. It all fell into place (Q:6) I felt more relaxed & with clarification could see the benefit of doing the assignment(Q:7)</p>
<p>no response (Q:8) Unsure of what was expected (Q: 9) I thought it would be quite difficult (Q:10) I knew that I wouldn't have to struggle for stuff to write about (Q:11) I didn't really understand how the links could be made (Q:12) What part of my personal history would I use and what am I supposed to write about (Q:13) I saw it as an opportunity to express my current learning: to make sense of the ideas, theories, principles of the social studies curriculum and assess my own point of view (Q:14) Uncertain (Q:15) Unsure of what to write and what was needed (Q:16) Unclear - what is needed here? (Q:17) What the heck are we doing? I think I had a good idea of what to do but wasn't 100% sure (Q:18)</p>	<p>Thought it was going to be really good, fun and exciting (Q:8) Made it clearer in terms of link-up it to the social studies curriculum (Q:9) (no response) (Q:10) I had a clearer picture of where I would like to take my assessment (Q:11) Seemed easier to understand that links could be made in your own way (Q:12) no response (Q:13) no response (Q:14) Worries were clarified (Q:15) More clear about what form the personal history was to take (Q:16) Clear (Q:17) I had a much better understanding of the assessment and looked forward to doing it, it was a nice change (Q:18)</p>

The tutor/researcher example highlights the importance of modelling and providing examples on how to approach a new assignment. Scaffolding student learning developed motivation for the assignment. It was during this introductory session that features of a personal history were identified with a clear explanation regarding the purpose of the assignment as a learning, teaching and assessment strategy. To summarise, the tutor/researcher's example acted as a key turning point in developing student's efficacy beliefs to complete the personal history assignment. The example motivated students to consider the relevance of the curriculum to their own lives.

5.5 Unexpected outcomes when completing a personal history

Revised question4: What were some of the unexpected outcomes of completing a personal history?

During each of the FGDs participants reflected upon the personal history assignment and made reference to their teaching roles and/or teaching and learning philosophies. Discussion about teaching and learning philosophy and preferred teaching strategies was an unexpected outcome of the personal history assignment.

5.5.1 Teaching and learning philosophy

The personal history highlighted the significance of social studies concepts for the students not only in terms of understanding the social studies curriculum but also in terms of becoming a teacher. Social studies concepts that were identified in the students' assignments included resource, community, family, group, perception, beliefs and past, present and future. Whilst the concept of 'identity', was considered as part of Question One, the term is discussed here in relation to i) children's identity and ii) students' teacher identity and their developing teaching and learning philosophy. Table 5.5 shows examples of the concept identity explored by FGD participants. Additional social studies concepts are underlined.

Table 5.6 Children and teacher identity in focus groups

Children's Identity	Teacher Identity
<i>'And just back to that empty vessel stuff, that blank slate, that every child comes with their own set of experiences and things' (FGD:A)</i>	<i>'So you're teaching them the processes aren't you? The processes of being active through life (<u>citizenship</u>)' (FGD:C)</i>
<i>'It made me think a lot about identity of everyone, children, like just really think about it, like, I don't know it's there, to think about it for kids' (FGD:B)</i>	<i>'Because at the end of the day, <u>life skills</u> are so much more important than anything else' (FGD:B)</i>
	<i>'...and you sort of think back on what you've done and think, I've got all these ideas that I really want to give a crack, let's get out there and do it. I did a learning and motivation paper last year and a lot of that is what really motivates kids to work and do things, having a <u>real life</u>, doing the experiences. That's a big, how I would like to teach. Having the kids really motivated' (FGD:H)</i>
	<i>'For me, I welcomed it, because I actually think that this should be doing all the time, relating directly' (FGD:G)</i>
	<i>'Makes you realise you can actually be your whole person and be in that teaching <u>environment</u>, not just the teacher person. It's not just that limited role' (FGD:C)</i>
	<i>'I would love to go out there and be open and to just be <u>honest</u> with the kids and have the same thing back. Like and even when I was going through school you still, it wasn't like what I wanted it to be. You weren't so open about things and it wasn't, I didn't feel <u>valued</u> for who you were as an <u>individual</u> and <u>where you come from</u> and all those things that are so important and I just think it's cool we're doing this, and that we can go out there and have kids who can now <u>experience that</u>' (FGD:B)</i>
	<i>'...I quite like the idea of an integrated classroom' (FGD:G)</i>

The learning process was associated with the word 'journey' (FGD:A) or when 'we get in the car' (FGD:L). But this 'journey', or process of learning revealed a tension that can arise between the importance of the process of learning and the product of learning. The quote: 'you have got to realise we are assessment driven' (FGD:C) reflects this tension. Whilst students admitted being 'assessment driven' they also knew when a course was assessment or product driven as shown by one student: 'I have just been in a class that is totally product' (FGD:I). Another student considered how the process/product tension could be perceived by parents in the school community. One student commented:

'Unfortunately a lot of parents do not see it (process important) that way. They see the product & they see the writing in the book. That their child knows what the capital of France is rather than they worked cooperatively in a group' (FGD:M).

It was after this response that the tutor/researcher asked the focus group if and how the students would use personal histories when teaching? Their responses are explained in the following section.

5.5.2 Teaching strategies for the future

The FGD questions prompted students to consider not only the use of personal histories as a strategy to use in their classroom, but also 'other' social studies learning activities that valued personal experiences. Participants saw the value of using a personal history in the classroom as a tool:

- to develop rapport between students and teacher;
- to draw upon experiences to develop further learning;
- for reflection.

The use of the personal history strategy is summarised in Table 5.7. The students' enthusiasm to 'give ideas a crack' (FGD:H) and their aspirations as a teacher can be inferred from their quotes. Students observed their tertiary tutor introducing a "new" learning strategy and this inspired them to consider other forms of innovative practice. The students were again transferring their knowledge and experiences at university to the school classroom.

Table 5.7 Value of using personal histories in the classroom

Develop Rapport	Strategy	Strategy for reflection	Value of experiences
<p><i>'You know you can talk about all this sort of thing, if you have got an experience you can share with children, then it would be like us, sharing it with you. You relate better to it. Make sense and understand their own experience better'(FGD:C)</i></p>	<p><i>'I see it as another strategy. Social Studies is number 1, I love it ... This is another strategy children can use'(FGD:F)</i> <i>'I'd call it a strategy'(FGD:G)</i> <i>'You can create a scene in your classroom of what it would be like in a Roman village inside your classroom, and they would have to write about it from a personal point of view. You could write about it as a servant. You have to go away and find out what a servant did in those days. They've got to do their research and got to write about it. Yes, it's another strategy' (FGD:F)</i></p>	<p><i>'For me they're [personal histories] a reflecting thing. It's more of a, not to be ticking the assessment box but just giving them a chance to sit down and think. I think that's how something I'd put into my classroom' (FGD:E)</i> <i>'Yes I agree with A. I'd like to use personal history but more in the area of reflection. Engagement. I think it is, It is engagement with what you are learning' (FGD:H)</i> <i>'Certainly helps with that reflection process P was talking about. Kids to think about what they've done and how it's affected them and going to affect them in the future'(FGD:H)</i></p>	<p><i>'I just thought of one whilst I was doing this assignment 3 presentation, talking about the Nomads of the Desert. Building a tent in the classroom and having the children sleep in the tent on the floor. And then, go away and experience what it's like to experience sleeping on the floor... you could do it in the classroom. Get a tent and put it up in the classroom' (FGD:F).</i> <i>'..the actual doing the experience created the, you could write so much more...something I'd be doing in my classroom' (FGD:H)</i> <i>'you need to have the experience yourself its ok to tell them' [children] what you've experienced but there is such a difference to experiencing things yourself. And that's what I got from the assignment [personal history]'(FGD:E)</i></p>

Not only did participants share ideas about how they would use personal histories in their classroom to develop rapport and for reflection purposes, but they were also prompted to critically reflect upon their future teaching practice. As one participant identified, *'It depends on your purpose of a personal history and what you're using it for'* (FGD:C).

When the tutor/researcher introduced the personal history assignment she deliberately explained the rationale behind the assignment. She also modelled critical reflection in her justification for using a personal history to develop social studies understanding. Hearing students articulate their developing reflective skills about social studies in particular, and learning and teaching in general, was a surprising yet pleasing outcome.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has addressed the four research questions by presenting and explaining the themes that emerged from the data. To summarise responses to Question One, students felt social studies understanding developed through the opportunity to make links between a personal experience and the social studies curriculum as well as to reflect upon personal identity and to identify the significance of their past. In doing so, the students realized the relevance of social studies in their lives.

However, responses to Question Two highlighted factors that students found constraining as they completed a personal history assignment. This type of assignment had not been encountered before and, as a consequence, there was some misunderstanding as to what a personal history was and its purpose in assessment. Subsequently, some students felt anxious when choosing an experience and lacked confidence to embark on a different form of assessment. Students who appreciated the justification for the assignment still felt the tension associated with assessment issues. For some, the use of 'personal' in an assignment was made to the exclusion of using published literature.

Students found the tutor/researcher's example was the key enabling factor as they completed the personal history assignment (Question Three). Adopting modelling and

'scaffolding' teaching techniques were instrumental in increasing student motivation for the assignment. It was an unexpected outcome of the assignment that resulted in the formulation of Question Four. The personal history assisted not only social studies understanding but also teacher and self understanding.

The next chapter draws the emerging themes and the literature together, resulting in an evaluation of the use of personal histories in social studies.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

“The process is one of flexible interaction between phenomenon and theory” (Merriam, 1988, p.60).

6.1 Introduction

This research set out to evaluate whether a personal history assignment assisted student teachers to develop understanding of social studies. This discussion chapter revisits the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, the data presented in the methodological chapter and the emerging themes of the previous results chapter. Drawn together, the research is presented as a case study. The discussion that follows is structured under four key themes. The first theme focuses on how social studies understanding developed by writing a personal history. The second theme considers the use of a personal history in teacher education. The third theme identifies how the personal history reflects social constructivist theories of learning. Finally, the role of a personal history assignment in the practice of assessment in teacher education is explored.

6.2 How social studies understanding developed

This section discusses four sub-themes in relation to how social studies understanding developed. These themes include:

- connecting a personal experience with the curriculum
- significance of the past
- personal identity
- personal and social significance of social studies

6.2.1 Connecting a personal experience with the curriculum

Evidence from focus group discussions (FGD) and questionnaires (Q) suggest that student's social studies understanding developed in the process of writing the personal history assignment; more specifically in the process of connecting their life experiences to the social studies curriculum. Despite some students feeling tension with the 'newness' of the assignment most enjoyed the process of identifying similarities between their lives and the social studies curriculum. Connecting student's experiences to acquire social studies knowledge was the justification behind the assignment. These findings are consistent with a range of studies published in the teacher education literature that show utilising the experiences of students and connecting these experiences develops curriculum knowledge relevant to teaching (Friend & Grant, 2001; Gitlin, 1994; Noddings, 1991).

The process of students' constructing knowledge by making sense of their experiences is a social constructivist learning principle. The 'connections' between student's experiences and the curriculum deepened as they identified new insights, such as the concepts embedded in the strands and the interconnectedness between them. The ease with which students understood such interconnectedness highlighted the 'naturalness' of their learning. Such learning was enabled through the use of the personal history assignment by providing a structure for students to order their prior experiences in line with social studies concepts, a process Grumets (1988, cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991) refers to as order and form. Features of the personal experience could be identified as social studies concepts and this identification process contributed to a sense of security. The students' experience and social studies concepts were perceived to "fit together" and by doing so social studies understanding developed (Lemke, 1990, cited in Wells & Caxton, 2002, p.36). It was through the process of making connections between social studies concepts and their experiences that student appreciated the significance of their past.

6.2.2 Significance of the past

Witherell and Noddings (1991) argue that sharing past experiences can be hard due to their

complexity but, by sharing them, meaning can be derived. This was born out in findings from the study. The assignment evoked an emotional investment for students as both positive and negative memories were recalled. Either way, the students recognised the social studies concepts as being embedded in their past histories and thus were significant. The social studies concepts proved to be an important guide and focus for completing the assignment. For instance, students reflected on themselves as people, the roles they played in society, decisions they made and perspectives they took, which are all key features of the social studies curriculum. Students came to realise that these social studies features were also part of, and relevant to, their life. This realisation contributed to students' valuing the assignment, and for someone a '*cathartic*' (FGD:A) experience. Relevance of the social studies concepts to students' own lives was a fundamental finding gained from this study.

Because the students recognised the significance of their past, completing the assignment involved an emotional investment of themselves. Therefore scaffolding was required by the tutor to guide student reflection on relevant experiences in order to make connections between their experiences and the social studies curriculum (Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003). Given this concern the assignment could be renamed from personal history to past 'life' history. Such renaming could reduce any personal threat and focus on developing understanding of the fundamental concepts in social studies.

6.2.3 Social studies and personal identity

It was through reviewing the concepts that students considered their values, beliefs and attitudes as changing people. Students appreciated the opportunity to explore their past and came to see its significance in 'shaping' their identity. It was through this opportunity, presented by the personal history assignment, that students recognised their personal growth. Even though the assignment challenged reflection on 'self', the tutor/researcher had not anticipated the concept of 'identity' featuring so strongly in the results. Potential to explore the concept 'identity' through a personal history has also been found by Witherell & Noddings (1991). Their research investigation also revealed that a personal history enabled the development of personal identity.

This thesis investigation added a new dimension. The personal history assignment enabled students to show understanding of social studies concepts by *applying* them to an experience rather than being *told* about the concepts. Students constructed understanding of the social studies concepts, and recognised the relevance of them by making links with an experience of their own. Relevance and constructing personal understandings are both social constructivist principles (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Jadallah; 2000). By engaging in the learning process, challenged by the personal history not only did personal identity develop but an understanding of diversity occurred. Depth of learning was evident as these students considered how their future teaching could be transformed or changed.

Bruffee (1995) argues that conversation “initiates us into thought” (p.113). Examining identity as part of the personal history assignment was an individual experience but for some students, contact and talk with family also took place. The task of writing a personal history was so engaging; that they sought contact with family. Contact and dialogue with family centred on collecting artefacts, asking questions and sharing the purpose of the personal history assignment. Social constructivist views of learning promote these forms of collaboration and conversation as an integral part of the learning process.

Developing a classroom culture, where discourse and a community of learners could develop, became apparent as a necessary lead-in and follow-up to the completion of the personal history assignment. During the FGDs students appeared to enjoy sharing their learning that transpired through exploring their personal histories and making explicit, the links with social studies. To further develop the use of personal histories in social studies, dialogue and social interaction could be an integral part of teaching prior to students writing their personal histories. Collaboration after writing a personal history, was a key focus for Brody and Witherell (1991, cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991), which involved the strong sense of community that developed in a class. Deeper learning connections can expand an appreciation of diverse experiences and contribute to the development of a caring person. Moroz (1999) argues that social studies needs to be “enlivened with more social and less studies” (p.4). The reflection on the 'self' through the

personal history assignment contributes to students' identification of the personal and social significance of social studies and the thread of continuity between people in our past and our lives today. Re-establishing the thread of continuity can result in discovering the following sub theme.

6.2.4 Personal and social significance of social studies

As students applied features of the curriculum to their own lives, they realised that social studies does have a focus on things personal and social. Students realised the significance of 'their' people at key times in their lives and the changes that occurred due to significant events and decisions. Whilst the original purpose of the assignment was to understand social studies concepts, by relating these concepts to themselves, students began to appreciate diversity and social and cultural similarities and differences. Appreciating diversity has the potential for students to participate in society (Aitken, 2004). It is by students examining real issues and the significance of them to themselves and to others that there is a greater chance of them participating in responsible action. Constructive and informed social participation is a key focus of social studies in New Zealand today.

The tutor/researcher was privy to student perspectives and associated beliefs, and thus better able to understand her students and their perspectives. In this way, personal and social connections inherent in good social studies were able to be modelled in class. The dilemma remains, however, would all faculty staff *want* to consider student perspectives as a consequence of a personal history? Might some staff not appreciate the learning that can come about in a personal history and the personal struggles therein? Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004) found this dilemma when using a form of personal histories in tertiary education courses. It may be less problematic for some teachers to remain focussed on the links students make between an experience and the social studies concepts, and to not examine the perspectives that are shared by using a personal history.

Retaining the original focus of the assignment and to extend the use of personal histories into exploring issues associated with learning and teaching requires skill and commitment.

Helping students to cope with the impact of change in society is a challenge for social studies teachers and the personal history highlights changes in student's lives. The overarching challenge and historical debate in the teaching and learning of social studies, is balancing content, pedagogy and/or social dimensions. By using a personal history assignment which valued student's experiences, teacher educators modelled the centrality of people (the students themselves) when learning and teaching social studies. As a consequence, students understood that people's participation in society is the focus of social studies. The focus on people came through in FGDs where students considered how to involve people in their future teaching. The personal history was therefore a vehicle to help students understand features of the curriculum, and resulted in an awareness of change in practice. Using the personal history for this purpose is how Clandinin and Connelly (1998) valued personal histories, and has implications for teacher education.

6.3 Impact on teacher education

The original purpose of the personal history assignment was to develop social studies understanding. The assignment illuminated 'other' understandings that related to teacher education. These understandings include a philosophy of learning and teaching, a sense of teacher identity and an appreciation of being valued in a learning environment. Each of these themes will be explored in the following section. The strategy that was instrumental in developing the identified themes was reflection.

6.3.1 Reflection

Students identified that their pre-assignment reflection was different from usual assignment preparation. The students interpreted the personal history assignment as a chance to not reflect upon, analyse and critique research literature, but to reflect primarily on themselves and their lives. This imbalance of theory and personal aspects was a misinterpreted by students. The assignment prescription asked students to refer to readings relating to social studies. These references were rarely made by the students. The most common teaching practice in higher education is to delve into the writings of others as a

basis for understanding curriculum (Sessions, 1995, cited in Friend & Grant, 2001), but the personal history delved into the experiences of students as a basis for understanding the curriculum.

Delving into personal experiences was enthusiastically embraced by the students at the expense of research literature. Whilst all students in the case study felt the personal history assisted social studies understanding, some found the assignment more beneficial than others. Engaging in reflective practice can take different forms and alternative assignments using reflection may be more effective for different students (Knowles, 1991, cited in Calderhead & Gates, 1993). The personal history assignment was one avenue to use reflection which then had an influence on subsequent social studies assignments. The personal history assignment provided a strong social studies foundation from which to build further understandings in the two assignments that followed. By appreciating the relevance of the social studies concepts to the students' own experience they could identify concepts in new social studies learning.

Students attached importance to the value of personal reflection. By actually experiencing the process of completing a personal history assignment to make connections with social studies concepts, students also came to consider reflection for their own teaching. One student said, *'you need to look at children in your class and not see them as empty vessels'* (FGD:C) thus the valuing of reflection and children's past experiences and seeing these as learning strategies. The more students learn about social studies the more students are likely not only to appreciate the knowledge gained, but also appreciate the process by which their knowledge was attained (Covington, 1999). By appreciating the learning process students reflected upon their own teaching philosophies; a process reviewed in the following section.

6.3.2 Orientations that affect teaching and learning philosophy and practice

By drawing upon a personal experience, students seemed to develop their own theories or thoughts regarding good practice in learning and teaching (Coles & Knowles, 1995, cited

in Russell & Korthagen, 1995). This experience was in contrast to the more traditional tertiary approach of considering others' theory in order to develop your own (Friend & Grant, 2001). The focus on 'self' in order to articulate ideas relating to learning and teaching is advocated by La Boskey (1994, cited in Loughran & Russell, 1997) who suggests using portfolios. She argues that when articulating the rationale for including artefacts in a portfolio students are prompted to understand themselves as emerging teachers.

What teachers do as professionals is influenced by their past experiences. It is in analysing a past experience that students can confirm, affirm, reappraise or challenge a theory (Knowles, 1991, cited in Calderhead and Gates, 1993). Completing a personal history not only developed understanding of social studies but also informed students about philosophies underpinning their future practice, which valued past experiences as part of the learning process. For instance one third year FGD participant said, *'I am a constructivist, this is how I learn, this is how I'd like to teach with children'* (FGD: F). This was an unexpected outcome in this case study, which Loughran (2003) promotes in the preparation of teachers, so students can confidently justify why they use particular pedagogical strategies.

The reflection process was a vehicle for emerging teachers to appreciate the perspectives of other students involved in the experience and also to realize the potential impact for the children they would teach in the future. Engaging in the reflection process, and students achieving both curriculum knowledge and pedagogical strategies, was an enjoyable and empowering process (Van Winkle, 2000). Feelings of empowerment resulted from analysis of an experience. By reflecting upon an experience and interpreting its significance in light of the social studies concepts, the students were 'connecting' with philosophies of teaching and learning. Such 'connection' helped them feel more confident and competent to teach social studies. In so doing, not only did social studies understanding develop but a desire to act upon this understanding. The development of student understanding as well as their motivation to act upon it is one such example of feeling empowerment to act. Such action fits well with the aim of social studies; to develop

“informed and confident and responsible citizens” (Ministry of Education, 1997, p.8).

A positive outcome of completing the personal history combines in the development of social studies understanding, the continued formation of personal and professional identity and the willingness to take responsibility to change practices to benefit the learner (Wells & Caxton, 2002). These outcomes are important in teacher education where personal growth forms the major objective of educational programmes (Rogers, 1996). The notion of personal identity in teacher education, as defined by Rogers, is discussed next.

6.3.3 Teacher identity

Witherell and Noddings (1991), argue that an important component in clarifying views on learning and teaching for student teachers is the opportunity for them to understand more about themselves. Students come into teacher education with their own teacher beliefs and are exposed to theories which may or may not be re-examined in relation to their own beliefs. Findings from this study suggest that student teacher beliefs were re-examined in the personal history. Students' prior knowledge and experiences contributed to their identity, which helped them develop their beliefs about teaching. Goldstein and Freedman (2003) promote this focus on self as an important step in developing the emotional relationships required in teaching. Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004) also argue the importance of reflecting on personal identity before teaching children from diverse backgrounds. By reflecting on personal identity teachers questioned their own biases and values, resulting in more culturally responsive teachers.

The self can be a valuable tool to connect theoretical knowledge of practice. Self awareness or knowledge of one's own personal identity contributes to teacher identity (Friend & Grant, 2001; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Self awareness that developed through a personal history assignment shaped what Bullough (1995, cited in Loughran & Russell, 1997) calls 'personal pedagogical identity'.

The personal history assignment highlighted important aspects in the student's life such as

family relationships. These self revelations can influence who they are as teachers (La Boskey, 1994, cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991). The fact that people and family relationships featured so prominently in the students' assignments reflects their values and beliefs which in turn will affect their teaching and learning philosophy.

Students bring experiences of life into teacher education and in their preparation for teaching, become informed about theory in practice and curriculum knowledge. It is the merging of all three, life experiences, theory in practice and curriculum knowledge that students grapple with in the process of becoming a teacher. The process of linking concepts with past experiences helped students to understand the concepts and to reflect upon decisions made on both a personal level and as an emerging teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The social studies concepts provided a guide for students to question how they related to their lives. Student success in applying concepts, for example, roles and kinship in their personal history assignment contributed to the development of teacher identity. As the students developed this sense of teacher identity, they also felt valued as highlighted in the following section.

6.3.4 Valuing student teachers

Students' prior experiences were being sought in the context of social studies learning. The majority of students felt their experiences mattered to their tutor and were going to be instrumental in their social studies learning. Students in FGDs felt valued by being asked to "*speak from the 'I's*" (A), a term that refers to writing in the 'first' person. The students also felt valued in terms of what they brought into the classroom. As the students experienced this feeling of rapport with their tutor, they considered the impact this type of experience might have when working with children in their classrooms.

Acknowledging and valuing students' experiences is a key principle of social constructivism as noted in the adapted spiral of knowledge (refer to Figure 6.1) from Wells (1999, cited in Wells, 2001). These prior experiences are not usually valued in teacher education (Arlidge, 2000) and can result in students feeling rejected as persons (Knowles,

Holton III, & Swanson, 1998). Whilst students felt valued in sharing their personal history with its richness and evidence of culture and history, the students needed to feel comfortable with this mode of meaning making and to trust the purposes for sharing the experience in their teacher education. Again, the purpose of using a personal history in order to develop social studies understanding needs to be made clear to students. Explaining the purpose of the personal history as assisting social studies understanding will help students to see the value of this form of assessment.

If student teachers are expected to share their experiences to develop social studies understanding, then teacher educators need to develop a sensitivity to the personal histories they read. A classroom tone which respects and values students such as in a democratic classroom (Wells, 2001) is a key goal for pre-service educators. Developing a classroom where students know their ideas are valued supports them in developing a deep personal concern for, and respectful connection with, their students. Such is the hallmark of an effective teacher (Carson, 1999). The personal history assignment was designed to show that teacher educators do value what students bring to the university learning environment, and that these previous experiences can be built upon to develop new knowledge.

Apart from gaining understanding of social studies, students perceived the following as outcomes of the personal history assignment: critical reflection; a philosophy of learning and teaching; a stronger teacher identity; and a sense of being valued. These outcomes all impacted on the effectiveness of their education to be a teacher. If deeper learning transpired through a personal history, it seems prudent to examine the factors which contributed to this desired learning outcome. The features pertain to social constructivist theory of learning and will be discussed in the following section.

6.4 Social constructivist theory of learning

Reflecting on personal and teacher identity through a personal history assignment, and seeing the implications of it for their future teaching practice, is a favourable outcome for a

teacher education assignment. If social studies is to be meaningful for students, then social studies education should be modelled after a social constructivist approach which emphasises collaborating, modelling, reflecting and valuing students experiences. A personal history incorporates all these principles. This section discusses student teacher' feelings whilst completing their personal history assignment and their beliefs about the effectiveness of learning strategies derived from a social constructivist theory of learning. Principles pertaining to social constructivist theories were identified by students as being significant to their learning. These principles included motivation through innovation, using previous experiences and social interaction. Transforming participation when teaching, and in every day life by reflecting upon past decisions, was also a motivating factor. There were however, factors that inhibited motivation and these will also be discussed.

6.4.1 Motivation to learn

If students are motivated to participate in an activity, then they are more likely to learn (Brophy & Alleman, 1998). Most students enjoyed the opportunity to reflect and draw upon their past experiences in the personal history. The innovation of this strategy motivated many students to make relevant links between their experience and the social studies curriculum. Learning about social studies was embedded in this linking process. Developing understanding by drawing upon an experience is motivating and relates to Wells' (1999) "spiral of knowing". The three factors students identified as contributing to their motivation for the personal history assignment and subsequent understanding can be reflected in an adaptation this researcher made of Well's (1999) spiral of knowledge.

Fig 6.1

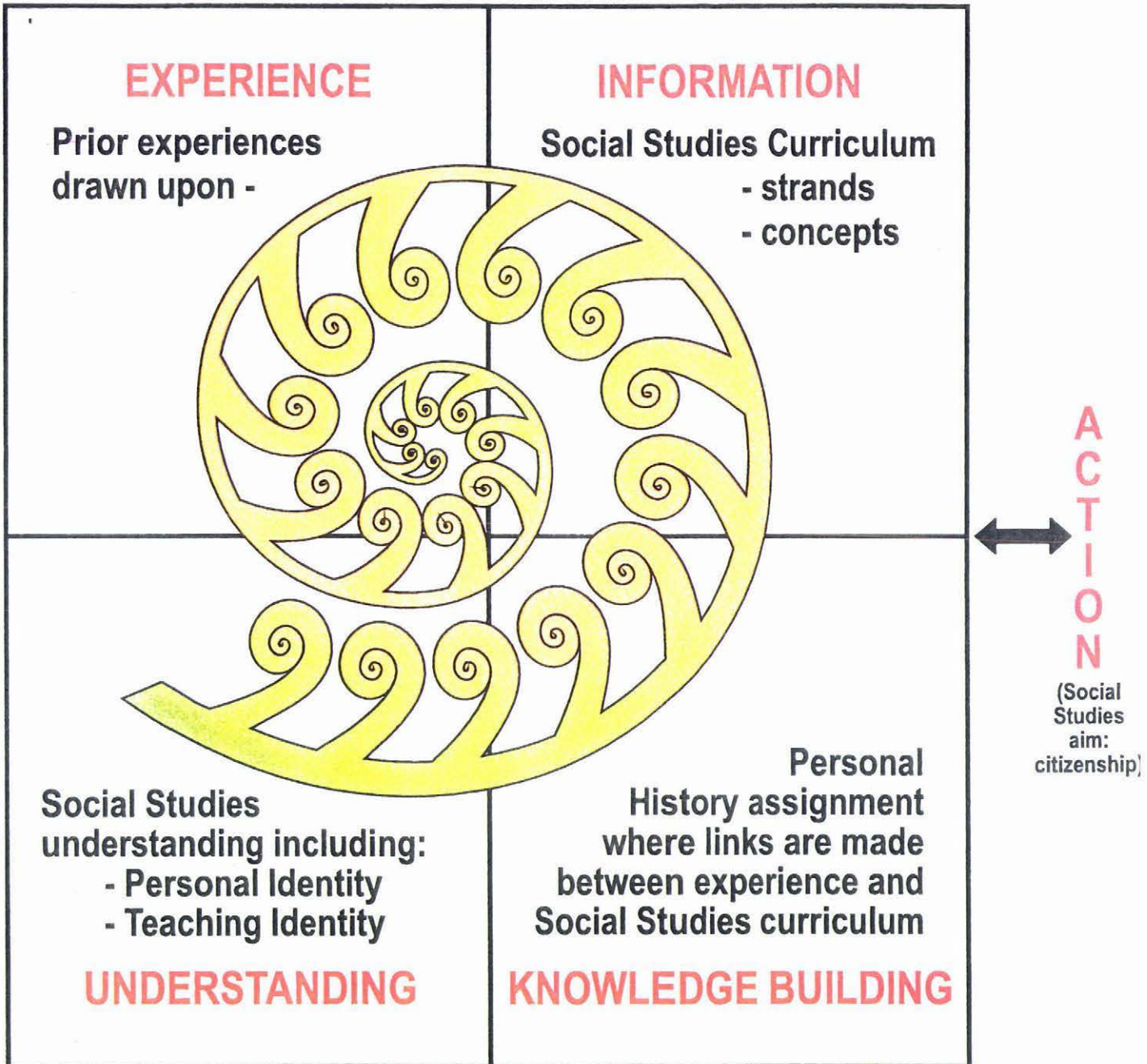


Fig 3.1 Wells (1999) adapted Spiral of Knowledge integrating personal histories in Social Studies

Figure 6.1 shows how understanding of social studies develops in spirals from prior life experiences. The personal history is referred to by Wells as an '*experience*'. The information in this case study is the social studies curriculum. It was through the process of reflection and making links between their experience and the social studies curriculum, required by the personal history that *knowledge* was constructed, which supported new identities and *understanding* of social studies. It is hoped that the ultimate result of such social studies understanding is social action where students are able to participate responsibly as citizens in society.

Arlidge (2000) identifies motivation as a central concept in Vygotsky's interpretation of social constructivism. The power of the personal history assignment was evident by the level of interest it generated among students and for some, their families. It was this collaboration, listening, sharing insights and conversations with others that gave greater meaning to, and motivation for, the experience. Arlidge (2000) and Vygotsky (cited in Wink & Putney, 2001) claim that it is the social interaction in the community, that is central to making meaning.

The search to construct one's own social studies understanding by accessing people in a social context is a key social constructivist principle. This 'social' component of social constructivist theory was not developed greatly by the tutor/researcher before, during or after the assignment. When introducing the assignment the tutor/researcher did not encourage dialogue with other students, as it seemed appropriate to allow time for private reflection in considering their choice of past experience. Nor did she encourage social interaction as students worked on the assignment. The tutor/researcher chose to leave space for the students to initiate talk with either fellow students or family members. However, data analysed in this study, and later reflection highlights the value of social interaction to enhance motivation for an assignment (Arlidge, 2000).

Whilst some students accessed family members, other students primarily completed the assignment by themselves and did not talk with other students making it a 'self centred exercise' (Jadallah, 2000). For them, the assignment was more of a 'cognitive exercise'

(Dolittle & Hicks, 2003) where encoding an experience and making links to social studies concepts developed understanding. Implications for future use of the personal history assignment can be derived: students whose disposition is to work alone could be supported to work with at least one other person to open up the potential that comes from social interaction. The benefits of social interaction and its importance in learning theories could be explained to assist motivation.

Whilst students noted in both FGD and questionnaire data that they were motivated by a different form of assignment, especially the chance to use prior experiences (and engage in social interaction), they also felt motivated by the 'newness' of the assignment. Motivation increased after the tutor/researcher shared her own personal history example. A number of reasons have been attributed to this early lack of motivation. The students were wary of the newness of the assignment, its personal aspect and feelings that they did not have the experiences or know how to draw upon them. Among andragogical principles (adult learning) Conner (2000, cited in Thompson, 2001) claims adults will not learn until they are ready and motivated to do so. Some students were not ready for this type of assignment and this affected their initial motivation. However, motivation levels rose when the tutor/researcher provided her personal history example. Providing an example was a means of scaffolding student learning, helping them to become thinkers who could grasp and apply social studies concepts (Thompson, 2001).

Factors such as inhibitions and anxiety became evident as the students first identified the innovative nature of the assignment. A grand opportunity for the tutors' future practice lay here. Inhibitions and anxiety could be responded to when introducing the assignment by highlighting these as typical responses to first encountering social constructivist learning theory. It became an opportunity to talk about how social constructivist strategies could make you feel as a learner and a teacher. The cause of anxiety was the tutor who *facilitated* learning rather than *transmitting* information to passive students. White (2001) argues that teachers and students alike, are so used to social studies education being dominated by transmission of factual information that encouraging reflection on a personal experience requires justification and modelling. This facilitation process included highlighting the

value of personal experiences in learning.

It became apparent that the tutor/researcher played a role in modelling these social constructivist learning principles in the classroom, with an opportunity to communicate the difficulties of applying this theory. In this way students might come to appreciate the value of social constructivist learning principles in action. In addition, the anxious feelings shown by students could be allayed and seen to be a normal reaction to living social constructivist principles for the first time. These feelings of discomfort result from perspectives being disturbed, but it is in this change of perspective that motivation is heightened and valuable learning can result when working with pre/and in service teachers (Chen, 2001). Chen found implementing social constructivist approaches in a teacher education context was a challenge because “educational practices are culture and context bounded” (p.289). Constructivist approaches to teaching and learning focus on culture and context; building upon prior experiences was thus difficult for the students who perceived they lacked these contextual factors.

The motivation for the personal history assignment revealed to students that teaching strategies affected their motivation to learn. It is, therefore, important to adopt a range of teaching strategies in a pre-service education as a way to motivate future social studies teachers, who might then adopt a full range of strategies when working with their children (Kizlik, 2002). However, the adoption of ‘new’ assessment practices which focus on students’ past can be too difficult for some educators who may prefer to stay with the status quo of transmission (Leach et al., 2000). The personal history is a novel way to motivate students to demonstrate their new understanding, and transform their teaching which is discussed in the next section

6.4.2 Student teachers' transformation of teacher participation

By reflecting on their own experiences, student teachers realised the importance of involving children in reflecting on their experiences as part of learning. Such reflection would help children convert these experiences into social studies understandings. However,

whilst these social constructivist practices were encouraging to hear, they may not successfully translate into action or be valued by their colleagues (Cole & Knowles, 1995, cited in Russell & Korthagen, 1995). Teacher educators may differ in their perceived value of social constructivist theory and the development of interpersonal relationships in a teacher education context. Expectations of teacher performance in some university teacher education courses focus on products/outputs which can affect the time spent on effective learning processes (Covington, 1999).

Principles of social constructivism relevant to the personal history assignment have been highlighted. Because the personal history assignment was an assessment strategy implications of this for student learning are discussed in the following section.

6.5 Assessment

This case study set out to evaluate whether social studies understanding developed as a result of using a personal history assignment. Reflection upon key principles highlighted not only features of the learning process but also features relevant to assessment. The following section addresses these features in relation to the personal history as an assessment strategy. This section first discusses the significance of the students' perceptions of a personal history assignment as an assessment strategy. Secondly, the tensions and complexities associated with this social constructivist form of assessment are addressed.

6.5.1 Significance of assessment practice

The impact of assessment tasks on how students felt about and approached their learning was a significant finding in this study. The comment, *'you have got to realise we are assessment based'* (FGD:C) reflected the view of most students. Such a tension is inevitable in tertiary learning environment where sacrifices often personally and financially have been made. Grades attained, can also be used to identify students who should be invited to complete post graduate study. Whilst students can perceive the merits

and necessity of an assessment practice, it is the emotions that are evoked when the assessments are introduced that can 'affect learner's lives' (Leach, Neutze & Zepke, 2000, p.107). When emotions are at stake, it is important to make explicit the assessment criteria from which judgements will be made. Explicit criteria were given to the students to explain what the essence of social studies meant to them and to make links between prior experiences and the curriculum (refer to Appendix R). Clarke (2001) advocates learning intentions and success criteria to support learning. All questionnaire responses indicated that students knew why a personal history was being used as an assessment strategy.

Biggs (1999) argues that assessment needs to align with learning and teaching. The personal history assignment reflected the essence of social studies as being informed, responsible and confident participants in society. The assignment valued students' views, and in so doing increased student confidence. For some students, a sense of responsibility and aspects of citizenship were considered as they reflected upon their past experience in relation to key social studies concepts. One student considered how she had to take a leadership role in her community when one of the community members died. She stated, *'It's up to me!' (FGD:D)*, and identified her learning associated with this bicultural perspective and social studies concepts of challenge, change and time.

If formative assessment is to be fully utilised then information from the assignment must inform future teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The personal history did exactly that on two levels. The personal history showed how well students could apply social studies concepts and the tutor/researcher became more informed about students' values, beliefs and aspirations which informed her future teaching and learning. During subsequent microteaching sessions the tutor / researcher observed students drawing upon children's experiences, prior knowledge and interests to develop learning about New Zealand society.

Students noted that the assignment provided an effective social studies knowledge base which proved useful when completing further assignments. One final aspect of formative assessment is the way teachers give feedback on assignments and its crucial role in learning (Conner, 2000; Sadler; 2000). Some students noted how they were disappointed

with their mark but could see from feedback given where they had not fully met the success criteria. By reflecting on the feedback, students were able to see gaps in their learning. The nature of the feedback can play a key role in the formation of identity and can be analysed in terms of power relationships between teacher and student (Gipps, 1999). The tutor/researcher made a conscious effort to use language that evaluated achievement in accordance with the success criteria but also to signal next learning steps. Not only can feedback alleviate any feelings of disappointment but teachers showing enthusiasm for their subject can reinforce the relevance and purpose of content for students (Covington, 1999).

The assignment placed students in a central learning role as they worked on their personal history. The cultural experiences were their own and links were made from their current understandings and perspectives. McMaster (1998, cited in Benson & Openshaw, 1998) sees this as a vital part of assessment in social studies. Students also had to take responsibility for the way they presented the assignment. The personal history assignment was an opportunity to delve into the student's own culture and take an active role in their learning. Whilst these social constructivist principles are good in theory aligning them in assessment can be a challenge.

6.5.2 Complexities of applying social constructivism in assessment

Because few students had encountered a personal history assignment before the tutor/researcher spent time defining it and explaining its rationale as a social studies assessment strategy. She was also trying to assist students to understand the assessment process and how a range of methods can be used to create dynamic assessment rather than static assessment (Gipps, 1999). In so doing the tutor/researcher was subtly showing that despite powerful cultural and institutional forces that work to shape assessment practice in tertiary education, she was keen to actively change that culture (Ross, 1997) and build an assessment environment built on mutual trust (Brookhart, 2001).

Gipps (1999) argues that if assessment is dynamic and collaborative, it is often time

consuming and demands particular skills of the teacher. The tutor/researcher experienced this as she tried to alleviate feelings of tension generated by the 'newness' of the assignment generated. Social constructivist principles of learning were encouraged, so students could become self-monitoring learners who saw 'assessment as a process' (Brookhart, 2001, p.164). Most participants in the study recognised that the assessment practice reflected these social constructivist principles of learning. However, for a few students the application of social constructivist theory in assessment was not well understood.

6.6 Summary

This research used an evaluative case study approach in an attempt to establish how using a personal history could develop social studies understanding. Through questionnaires and focus group discussion data, four major themes were recognised as being instrumental in the learning as a result of the personal history assignment. The following learning themes were discussed in the chapter: development of social studies understanding, development of the emerging teacher, social constructivist theory, and the role of formative assessment in student learning. By 'making links' between a personal experience and the social studies curriculum, key understandings about the personal and social significance of the past and its affect on personal identity were identified.

Implications for implementing a personal history in a 100 level tertiary assignment in a teaching education degree have been shown to have an impact on student learning. Learning has focused not only on social studies but on students' sense of self and their place in society which are essential elements for becoming a teacher. Allowing students to make connections between their past and the present social studies curriculum, they were able to appreciate learning and teaching processes that have a social constructivist theory base.

The role of the teacher transferred from being the 'source of all knowledge' to coaching the students' to construct their knowledge from their past experiences. This change of role was made possible through a learning environment built on trust and valuing student

experiences. The tutor did not perform a 'lecturing' role, rather a role of supporter and facilitator, encouraging a range of experiences to be drawn upon to then connect with social studies concepts. The tutor's example became an 'exemplar' of good social studies practice.

In addition to helping social studies content knowledge, the personal history as a 'new' assessment strategy also helped develop knowledge about learning and teaching. By using a case study method, the tutor/researcher identified issues relating to assessment. The process of using a personal history was reflected upon and new directions for its use have culminated in conclusions and recommendations in the final chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and Recommendations

“An evaluation can, like classroom research, provide a means for translating an educational idea into practice as well as monitoring and enhancing curriculum development” (Hopkins, 2002, p.62)

7.1 Introduction

This case study has been an opportunity to answer research questions describing the effectiveness of using a personal history assignment to support understanding of social studies in a pre-service education context. Conclusions in relation to the research questions have been categorised under:

- personal histories and social studies understanding
- personal histories and student teacher relationships
- personal histories and teacher beliefs and identity
- personal histories and assessment

7.2 Conclusions

The following four conclusions are derived from this study:

1. Personal histories help students understand social studies in the 'connections' they make to their own lives.

By considering a past experience, and its personal and social significance then students were able to make connections with key social studies concepts. The relevance of the social studies curriculum was able to be identified by students. By recognising this relevance, students were able to understand the nature of social studies.

2. Personal histories help develop teacher/student relationships fundamental for social studies learning.

The students were motivated by the idea that their past experiences were considered important resources in their social studies learning. The students felt valued and validated by the teacher who cared about what they brought to their social studies learning. The teacher's willingness to share something of her past was also important in building this caring and trusting relationship. Such a relationship built mutual respect and a one to one teacher/ student relationship, in which diversity and perspectives were better understood. These laid the foundation for having the courage to be constructivist. The tutor was modelling principles of social constructivist theory enabling effective understanding of it in action.

3. Personal histories in a pre-service teacher education context illuminate teacher beliefs and teacher identity.

When reflecting upon a past experience, students were able to understand more about themselves as emerging teachers. Teacher beliefs, including what they most valued in a teacher and effective teaching strategies, were identified. The teacher's role of encouraging children to draw upon prior experiences when presented with new information was a common teaching strategy that students valued. In addition, students communicated their commitment to motivating children to learn through the provision of meaningful and relevant activities that required active participation.

4. Personal histories assist the understanding of effective formative assessment.

Personal histories require feedback that is formative in nature. Most effective feedback focussed on the 'connections' students made between their experiences and the social studies concepts. In doing so, the tutor/ researcher could ascertain the depth of social studies understanding and adjust future teaching. Similarly, the students were able to build on the feedback to refine their learning of social studies. Personal histories were also

shown to model to students that good assessment links to new learning.

7.3 Recommendations

Consideration of the emergent themes from the data and the tutor/researchers perspectives in its interpretation have converged in the above conclusions. From these four conclusions, recommendations are identified for the enhancement of pre-service education in social studies.

Recommendations for using personal histories in pre-service education about social studies

- 1. Personal histories are a valuable assessment tool in social studies curriculum courses**

Personal histories do support understanding in social studies and are a valuable assessment strategy. To enhance the use of personal histories the following recommendations are made.

- 2. Use a range of teaching strategies to introduce and explain the use of a personal history.**

For students to exert time and effort into a learning activity they must understand the purpose for doing so. The rationale for using a personal history as a strategy in social studies must be clearly explained. To explain the purpose and rationale the teacher should access examples of how personal histories have been used in social studies and how it is in the 'connections' made that social studies learning will be evident.

3. Allow time for social interaction during the introduction and at the completion of the personal history.

During this social interaction (in either pairs or small groups where topics can be shared) the success criteria (key features to demonstrate understanding) need to be discussed. It is essential to highlight that personal experiences are not being assessed or judged. It is also important to explain principles such as drawing upon prior knowledge and making connections with past experiences and new information. Such collaboration allows students the time and opportunity to share personal experiences and make connections with new information.

4. Model a personal history to motivate student learning.

Tutors need to model their own personal history by considering the following five factors:

- i) be willing to share an experience from *his/her* past and demonstrate *how* new learning developed by making 'connections' and 'links' ;
- ii) discuss or brainstorm a range of possible concepts or experiences to trigger ideas for a personal history;
- iii) enhance student self efficacy and an 'I can do' feeling by verbal encouragement and vicarious experiences such as an 'example prompt';
- iv) develop a class tone where students and teachers learn with and from each other in a supportive environment;
- v) uphold the integrity of the personal history by explaining the benefits and purpose of the personal history strategy.

5. Give feedback about the 'connections' made to the essence of social studies

A personal history acknowledges what the learner brings to the learning situation and the connections they are able to make between social studies and their personal experiences.

Feedback needs to focus on the learner's ability to make these connections and to motivate further links to increase understanding. An opportunity for students to comment on their feedback should be given. Askew and Lodge (2001) call this a time to play 'ping pong' where dialogue regarding feedback can go back and forth between teacher and student. This requires the tutor to be willing to justify feedback and to listen to students' responses. The beginnings of a conversation about the student transitioning in to his/her future teacher role could develop including issues of assessment, feedback and learning.

6. Consider the renaming of personal history to 'past life history' when used in an assignment.

Because some students misunderstood the definition of a personal history, the researcher advocates using the words 'past life history' when explaining its purpose or when used in the assignment prescription. In doing so, students will feel less threatened with the word 'personal' while also appreciating that they all have past experiences that can be used to build upon in an assignment.

7.4 Limitations of the study and future research

Case study research is limited by the boundaries placed on it. In this research, the case study was bounded by its location to one College of Education, in one context (social studies curriculum), in one time period (2003 data), and one researcher researching effects of her own practice on student learning. Finally, the personal history was instigated by the researcher and some inherent bias may be incorporated into the research findings. If the results are to be generalised, then further research is recommended to overcome these limitations.

7.4.1 Future research ideas that acknowledge the limitations

- 1. The effectiveness of a personal history assignment could be researched in another College of Education**

2. The effectiveness of a personal history assignment for pre-service education could be researched in another curriculum context.

7.4.2 Future research ideas

The following ideas are research possibilities that could be investigated utilizing personal histories:

1. The development of teacher beliefs and teacher identity after completing a personal history in a New Zealand teacher education context could be researched. Witherell and Noddings (1991) use personal histories for this purpose, but there is no research in New Zealand using personal histories and teacher education.
2. The effectiveness of a personal history could be researched in a New Zealand primary classroom in developing understanding of self and social studies.
3. The value of a personal history could be researched in a teacher in-service professional development.

7.5 Summary

Recommendations have been made in this chapter as a result of evaluating student responses to a personal history assignment. The personality and attitude of the teacher educator will have an influence on the effectiveness of the use of personal histories as an assessment strategy: with respect to making connections between social studies and students' lives; allowing time to facilitate collaboration; and developing teacher/student relationships so emerging teacher beliefs and identity can be identified.

Teacher education is a complex profession, yet this case study highlights how one form of assessment has the potential to influence teacher education. Specifically, this thesis argues for integrating social studies subject matter, social studies pedagogy, and emerging teacher identity and beliefs. The future challenge lies in continuing to develop the use of a personal history in social studies and in a range of other teacher education contexts.

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Appendices

b) as a student teacher of social studies?

c) as a prospective teacher?

5. a) What do you think was easy about completing this assignment?

b) Which aspects of the Personal History assignment challenged you more deeply about social studies concepts?

6. In what ways did the Personal History assignment help you understand the Social Studies concepts and strands?

7. Compared to other assignments you have done, how valuable was the Personal History assignment? Why?/Why not?

8. a) What do think was the key purpose behind setting this Personal History assignment?

b) Learning from a Social constructivist perspective, emphasises linking past experiences to new learning, building on student interest, and reflecting on learning.

How successful was the Personal History assignment in applying these aspects of learning?

9. What changes (if any) would you like to see made to this Personal History assignment to improve student teachers' learning in Social Studies Curriculum?

10. On a scale of 1 to 4, please indicate where you would put yourself *before* completing the Personal History?

1	2	3	4	(<i>Before</i>)
(no knowledge of social studies)			(very knowledgeable of social studies concepts)	

and *after* personal history?

1
(not effective)

2

3

4 (After)
(very knowledgeable of
social studies concepts)

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Please indicate on the attached sheet if you would be happy to participate in a focus group discussion with me and four other students, where we'll talk further about the Personal History assignment. This will take approximately 30 minutes of your time.

Thank you for your comments and time in completing this Questionnaire.

Sue Blackwood

Information Sheet

Dear Student

I wish to invite you to participate in my research project about the effect of using Personal Histories to gain an understanding of the knowledge strands of the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum*, (Ministry of Education, 1997). This study has developed from my interest in motivating students to want to learn about social studies by using social constructivist principles. A Personal History is defined as 'stories or narratives recalling events in an individual's life (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). These stories or narratives can be denoted by terms such as life stories, life histories, life narratives, self stories, "my stories", autobiographies, oral histories, personal testaments or life documents (Plummer, 2001). The Personal History is a strategy to help student teachers understand the value of their past and that meaning can be found when they connect new information to past experiences.

The primary purpose of this research is to examine whether Personal Histories can make a difference to students understanding of social studies. Secondly, I am interested in whether Personal Histories can be used to develop positive attitudes toward social studies. I will also examine whether Personal Histories can help shape teaching beliefs. There are two stages to this research. The first stage is the completion of a questionnaire. At the conclusion of one of our social studies curriculum classes you will be invited to take away a questionnaire. The questionnaire can be completed in your own time and returned anonymously to a box at Reception in the Tower Block of the College of Education.

The second stage of the research is participation in an audio taped focus group interview. Participation is entirely voluntary. Declining to participate will have no effect whatsoever on your course grades. Attached to the questionnaire is a Consent Form where you are asked if you would like to participate in this interview, and if you are happy for your Personal History assignment to be used for analysis. The questionnaire is separate from the interview, ensuring anonymity of your response to the questionnaire. If you are willing to be part of the focus group interview, you will, need to complete the consent form giving me your name so that I can contact you about a possible interview time. The interview will provide qualitative data which is more detailed and broad ranging. If there is a sufficient response rate to the invitation for an interview a sample, five will be selected from consenting students. The sample will attempt to ensure a diversity of age, gender and culture. The interview will use key focus questions to initiate discussion, and will take approximately 30-40 minutes. You will of course have the right to decline to respond to any questions.

Themes will focus on the effectiveness of using personal histories not on the content of your personal histories.

If you choose to participate in this research you have the right to:

- have your responses remain confidential;
- decline to answer any particular question;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used on any research reports unless you give permission;
- to receive a succinct report with final conclusions at the end of the study if you so wish.

Data will be disposed of at the conclusion of the study in a locked confidential bin at College of Education for shredding.

If you choose to complete the questionnaire, please fold it and place in a sealed box at reception, Ground Floor Tower Block. The box will remain at reception for a week after the questionnaire has become available.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sue Blackwood
Tutor
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You may contact my supervisors at any time if you have further questions about the research.

Supervisors

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Third Party Participants Instructions

Written Instructions for Rosie

The primary purpose of this research is to examine whether Personal Histories can make a difference to students understanding of Social Studies.

If you are willing to participate in this research project please:

1. Return your completed Questionnaire and deliver to Reception at the Tower Block where your responses will be kept in a sealed box. The box will remain at Reception for a week.
2. In addition, if you are willing to be part of a Focus Group Discussion, please complete the attached sheet.

The purpose of a Focus Group is to share your thoughts about the use of Personal Histories in Social Studies. It will be a chance to talk about what you found useful and what you found difficult when completing the assignment. On the Focus Group Discussion sheet there is a request to allow your assignment to be used for Document Analysis. The researcher will be the only person analyzing the document (the assignment). The purpose of Document Analysis is to assess the level of understanding of the Social Studies strands NOT your personal history.

The researcher will not open the box held at Reception until assignments have been returned. This ensures no bias towards participants and their responses.

Thank you very much. Your assistance is very much appreciated.

Invitation to be part of focus group discussion

Please indicate below if you would be willing to be part of a focus group discussion.

The focus group will be a group of students who are willing to share their ideas regarding the use of Personal Histories in Social Studies. The discussion will take approximately 30 minutes and if you agree, it will be audio- taped.

Name:

College Box:

Please note convenient days and times between 3.00pm and

4.00pm on the timetable below and I will contact you regarding the final time via your college box.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
3.00pm					
4.00pm					

Please indicate if you are willing for your assignment to be used for document analysis.

Yes No

If yes, please include your name and college box number.

Name:

College Box number:

Thank you

Sue Blackwood

Focus Group Semi - Structured Discussion Questions

Before we share our thoughts as a group, are you happy if I turn on the tape? Thank you for your time and willingness to share your thoughts as a group regarding your most recent assignment in social studies curriculum- the Personal History. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your thoughts about the Personal History and to talk honestly about what you found useful, what you found difficult. I'm interested in finding out the effectiveness of using Personal Histories as a means to help you develop deep understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of social studies.

How was the Personal Histories different from other assignments, for example a 1500 word essay?

Can you tell me some thing you learned about the concepts and strands?

Were you surprised how much you learnt about yourself? About social studies?

How motivated were you to do a Personal History?

What really excited you about doing this Personal History? Why? What scared you?

What was hard/easy? Why?

What helped you most in doing the assignment?

What else could I have done to support you in doing this assignment?

In terms of Social Studies, how effective did you think it was in terms of developing understanding of strands? (Probe responses)

What, in your view, was it about this Personal History assignment that really supported your learning about conceptual strands of *Social Studies in New Zealand Curriculum*?

What have you learned as a result of writing your Personal History?

Would you use Personal Histories in your own classroom? Why?/How?

Has the Personal Histories assignment changed your views about teaching and learning in Social Studies?

What were the most valuable things about doing this Personal History? Why?



COPY

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Appendix F

CONSENT FORM FOR ASSIGNMENTS USED IN DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Personal Histories in Social Studies

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I have the right to withdraw from any part of the study at any time and with no dialogue or disadvantage to my studies.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name – printed:

Research questions	Themes	Notes
How does the personal history assignment assist students' understanding of social studies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to reflect • Make links between personal experience and social studies knowledge strands • Closer look at social studies document • Motivated by approach and focus on self • Relevant context • Interconnectedness of strands • Value of people in social studies • Transformation of perspectives 	Key words: how, assist, gain understanding.
How valuable do student teachers perceive personal histories to be in supporting their social studies learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of social studies identified • Motivated through reflection and approach • Self identity reflected upon • Strategy • Personal and social significance of social studies • Felt valued • Personal growth • Value of the past 	Value Support
What were the constraining factors for student teachers as they completed their personal history assignment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misunderstanding • No need to research • 'Personal' • Assessed • Age • Tutor expectations • Trusting self • Limited collaboration • Memories (positive and negative) 	Limiting factors

Themes	Questionnaire	Focus group data	Document
Relevance of social studies	IIII	I	I
Perspectives transformed		III	
Personal significance	I	IIIII	I
Personal identity	I	IIIII	
Reflection	I	IIIII	
Value of past experiences	IIIII		
Social participation		II	I
Teacher identity	I	IIIII	
Prior experiences	II	III	
Depth of social studies understanding	IIIII	IIIII	
Motivated due to links	IIIII	IIIII	
Understanding due to links	IIIII	IIIII	
Constraining factors		IIIII Age, misunderstanding, assessment issues	
Interconnectedness of social studies strands		III	
Strategy		III	
Values			I
Inquiry			I
Social decision making		II	I
Favoured approach	III	I	
Unsure about personal history prior to example	IIIII	III	
Clear about personal history after example	IIIII	III	
Did not need to research	III	III	
Reluctance to share personal history	I	II	
Applying social constructivist principles	I	III	



Appendix H

Personal Histories in Social Studies

(2003-2004 Study by Sue Blackwood)

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
For Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

I, _____, agree not to reveal the names of the participants
in this Focus Group Discussion.

I also agree not to discuss aspects of this Focus Group Discussion outside of the
discussion time.

I understand I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time
during the interview.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix I

Questionnaire data: Social studies understanding by making links to a personal history

Questionnaire Data

- 2 - How it all interconnected, relevant, real.
- 3 - The personal experience and linking it in with the strands
- 4 - Linking to the curriculum document
- 5 - Relating it to me made it easier. It gave me a personal concept of the strands
- 4 - Linking to the curriculum document
- 7 - Linking it to personal experience
- 8 - Relating it constantly to my life was a challenge
- 9 - Fitting the perspectives and strands into my own life
- 12 - Being able to relate them was hard at times
- 13 - The linking to the curriculum
- 19 - It has made me more critically examine how I can make links between the curriculum and my own experience

Appendix J

Focus group data: linking personal histories to social studies

E: Seemed easier to understand, that links could be made in your own way

E: I think I learnt how relevant social studies can be, and how it can be linked to a number of things we do in life

C: Realised how much can be brought about of an experience when it is broken down - suddenly make the links to class work

D: I know I can decipher and absorb new information better when I link it with me

B: The personal experience linking in with the strands

C: Relating it to me made it easier. It gave me a personal concept of the strands.

F: Once the concept was understood it became easier to make connections

G: Linking some of my experiences to social studies concepts.

F: And that was it for me, the link. I could make the link and made the rest of it quite easy. Once the link was made and I could see what the concepts was that you wanted, the it was easy and I enjoyed it...

I: IT WAS A GOOD WAY TO LINK YOUR LIFE STORY

J: ANY SOCIAL ISSUE COULD BE LINKED TO A STRAND. DEPENDING ON WHAT WAY YOU LOOKED AT IT. WE DID CURRENT ISSUES FOR OUR 2ND AND 3RD ASSIGNMENT - CURRENT ISSUES. WE FOUND THEY COULD BE LINKED TO ANY STRAND OF THE CURRICULUM. JUST DEPENDING ON WHAT/WHY YOU LOOK AT IT.

F: I had the concepts stuck up the side of the computer. Oh, that's what I'm talking about, and I know that's Time Continuity and Change strand and there's a link. And it became very easy to write, very easy, once, you know, the concepts and the strands were there, focussed on them and you link them to your personal life because, I can't find the word for it.

B: we don't usually look at it making personal links or anything like that. Probably the big strand for me was Social Organisation and Culture and Heritage, but also as I was doing it I found I linked into all of the strands

F: But then I, once you started to write it, then the links were made, you think ah, something I might have done has affected history, you know.

I: YEAH, SO THAT DID HELP. ONCE YOU GET STARTED IT'S AMAZING HOW YOU THINK THAT LINKS WITH THAT AND OH, YES THAT LINKS WITH THAT.

E: I chose three that I could link with and the most I could talk about

C: Because I had to for me, otherwise I could just write and it would make no sense at all, unless I linked it back to what they were expecting.

B: Something that, I don't know about anyone else, but for me personally, I felt like I was linking my personal experience to the strands and stuff. But, I don't know, whether there's a way that you'd prefer for that to be done. Like, I don't know. Normally we're told this is the way you are to do it.

D: Part of that is probably because it is so linked to our personal experiences

C: What it did was develop our ability to relate to the document, which was what it was meant to do wasn't it?

C: I did pick out quotes from each strand, put them under what I said and I linked it back to what it said in the document

D: It awakened you to the fact that, well actually there's a lot of things you can do that are a lot nearer to you but will apply and the kids can see the relevance in that

I: ABLE TO APPLY TO YOUR LIFE. SO, YOU'VE GOT ALL THE STRANDS AND EVERYTHING AND YOU WOULD FIT THEM INTO YOUR LIFE IN SOMEWAY. APPLY THEM IN SOME WAY THAT GAVE YOU AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THEY WORKED.

G: It's quite a nice experience to say, on this is, I fit in, I fit into a big picture. Great. I enjoyed that. Relating aspects of my life to a big idea or set of big ideas and concepts. I actually enjoyed that

D: And that it is so interrelated, it's happening around us all the time and when you take a personal experience and really analyse it, you think wow, this is social studies going on all the time and this happening, and, oh wow, I can see how that fits in with Time Continuity and Change or whatever and it's really good.

D: Pull the whole thing to bits and fit it to make it all work. I thought it was a great way to come to grips with the document really quickly

E: The next thing would be about the document and how it fits together and just how, I felt was quite a lot about just me

G: I enjoyed. Because I had a different curriculum document to.. Te Whariki. I enjoyed looking at the connections between the two documents, also having my major in Maori Education. I enjoyed the connection between Maori Education achievement, the Early Years document and Social Studies curriculum. And I thought they really worked well in together

A: I don't know, making meaningful connections says something different to me, make direct links back to each strand of the document that you're using, make meaningful connections. See I thought I did that.

H:- It helped me to put it all together for me

Questionnaire data: closer look at the social studies document

2 - Using the document, finding Achievement Objectives that fit

6 - Look more in depth in ones that I chose

8 - ...helped me to trigger more in depth knowledge of the essence of social studies

9 - I was able to look closely at some of these in a relevant context

10 - It challenged me to link life and focus on how the concepts fitted my life

12 - Firstly, it reinforced actual strands and concepts, gave me a chance to have a think about what they were about and why they are important

13 - It gave me a more deeper understanding of the processes

18 - I had to thoroughly look at the AO's for each strand so I realised how they tie in together

19 - It made me look closer than I have probably looked previously

Students perceived social studies understanding before and after completing the personal history assignment

Rating Scale Results (Questionnaire)

1 2 3 4
 ----->

Questionnaire Code Number	Understanding Before Personal History	Understanding After Personal History
3 (L)	1 ----->	3 ----->
9	1 ----->	3 ----->
12	1 ----->	3 ----->
8	1.5 ----->	3.5 ----->
1(D)	2 ----->	4 ----->
4	2 ----->	3 ----->
5	2 ----->	3 ----->
6	2 ----->	3.5 ----->
7	2 ----->	4 ----->
10	2 ----->	4 ----->
11	2 ----->	3 ----->
16	2 ----->	3 ----->
17	2 ----->	3 ----->
19	2 ----->	3 ----->
18	2.5 ----->	3.5 ----->
2(A)	3 ----->	4 ----->
13(G)	3 ----->	4 ----->
14(M)	3 ----->	4 ----->
15(N)	3 ----->	3.5 ----->

Questionnaire Data: Previous use of personal histories

Q.1; Have you ever completed an assignment such as a personal history before?

Responses:

No: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9,10,11,12,13, 15, 17, 18, 19

5: similar, an assignment on Eketahuna, a family line

Focus group discussion data: Previous use of personal histories

C: At school ages ago

A: Not to this extent, actually in depth thinking about one aspect

G: Only Personal Philosophy in PIP 3

Focus group discussion data: Negativity towards the personal history

L: I LIKE FINDING THE INFORMATION IN A BOOK AND GET ON WITH THE ASSIGNMENT. THAT'S EASY....WE WERE DOING ANOTHER ONE AT THE SAME TIME IN ANOTHER PAPER, SO, THE TWO AT THE SAME TIME, IT WAS JUST LIKE OH MY GOODNESS, I DON'T WANT TO GO THERE. IT WAS SIMILAR TO A HEALTH AND PE ONE.

L: THE ONE THING WHERE I HAVE GOT CONCERN. I FOUND IT QUITE DIFFICULT. I DID. BECAUSE I SAT DOWN AND DREDGED UP ALL THE NEGATIVE THINGS THAT HAD HAPPENED IN MY LIFE. AND I THOUGHT IF YOU WERE SOMEBODY ABUSED OR IF YOU HAD A REALLY SCUMMY BACKGROUND, TO HAVE TO SIT DOWN AND TRY AND LINK IT TO A DOCUMENT. I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A NIGHTMARE. LIKE I DID FIND IT QUITE HARD, SORT OF LIKE I HAD BEEN IN MY FAMILY. HOW THEY'D TREATED ME AND...SO, I FOUND IT QUITE HARD, SO I HAD NO MOTIVATION TO WRITE IT AT ALL. I DIDN'T WANT TO KEEP GOING THERE ALL THE TIME.

B: A bit nervous because it was so different to anything I had done

E: Something new

Questionnaire data

7: I was a bit sceptical in terms of sharing my Personal History

6: Argh!!!uuh? too vague

10: I thought it would be quite difficult

Questionnaire data: 'newness' of a personal history assignment

- 1: I thought it would be ok but wasn't 100% sure of how to tackle it
- 4: Unsure of expectation or what was appropriate
- 9: Unsure about what was expected
- 11: I was unsure about how to present it and if the experience needs to tie together
- 15: Uncertain
- 16: Unsure of what to write and what was needed
- 17: Unclear, what is needed
- 18: What the heck are we doing?

Focus group data: 'newness' of a personal history assignment

- E: I didn't really understand how the links could be made*
- F: What part of my personal history would I use and what I am suppose to write about*
- C: Less structured format, harder to define, but once I defined boundaries I felt comfortable with, I really enjoyed it*
- B: A bit nervous because it was so different to anything I had done*
- E: Something new*
- I: Probably because it was so different*
- J: I drew a blank and thought what do you want? It is probably just me, I needed a bit of time to look at it*
- C: Once I decided how I was going to structure it, I was okay about it. Everyone was different*

Assignment One

A Personal Response to the Social Studies Curriculum

Due date: March 14 2003

Weighting: 30%

Children do not come to the classroom as empty vessels to be filled. They process experiences, skills, knowledge and preconceived ideas of what learning and schooling are all about. Unfortunately, these personal experiences and the existing knowledge of students is often ignored. The consequence is that students go through the motions of mastering separate knowledge without ever making the connections that would help make this knowledge their own (Belenky et al, 1986). Personal histories are one way in which the learners can re-experience the events, persons and forces in their past (Gitlin, et al., 1992, p.172).

This assignment challenges you to write your *personal history* where you will reflect on your past experiences and significant events. Based on your own established cultural traditions, social and environmental interactions, and significant events you are to explain how these link to *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum*. A personal history such as this will enable you to make deeper connections with the main ideas of the curriculum document, as well as help others develop knowledge of themselves and their world - a key focus in social studies education.

1. Identify your cultural traditions, significant events, and social and environmental interactions.
2. Choose **three** Strands and identify the essence of these.
3. Show the connections between your life events and traditions and main ideas in these three strands.

For instance, if you chose Social Organisation, Place and Environment and Time Continuity and Change, you might reflect on the roles and responsibilities you have today, how you interact with groups, and how these interactions have changed over time and in different places special

to you. Then you can make links between this and the main ideas of the three strands. Reading One (Barr, 1998) will be helpful here.

Learning Intention. To identify your personal history and make key links with *Social Studies in The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Success Criteria (5 marks)

1. Explores past experiences and significant events
2. Explores personal values
3. Makes connections between personal history and three social studies strands
4. Defines the main idea in three strands
5. Introduction and conclusion clarifies and supports work
6. **You may choose *this* success criteria and justify why it should be included in assessing your work.**

You can decide *how* to present your work. You may:

Write in narrative style

Write and draw your response

Create a photographic and written response

Appendix Q

Focus group discussion data: Conscious decisions

H: I felt there would be some things in parts of my life that I wouldn't want to talk about or write about. You had choices as to where you wanted to go and what you wanted to do with it.

F: I left one of the most important parts out of this, which I still won't write about. I will talk, a one to one basis with somebody but I don't know whether I could, I would share it with anybody

F: being a mature student, I had a lot more resources to go through in my mind. Picking the right one

F:- It did take me quite a while to think about which one I would write about, where I could link the curriculum to Time, and even, when I wrote it, as we know, with time, as we know, S, I didn't get the link until you pointed it out to me. When we sat down and talked about it

J: THERE'S ALOT OF SCOPE FOR YOU TO DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

I: YOU COULD HAVE CHOICE. YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO WRITE SOMETHING IF YOU DIDN'T WANT TO. SO, YOU KNOW, IF YOU DIDN'T WANT TO MENTION IT, YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO WRITE IT. YOU JUST LEFT IT OUT AND YOU FOUND SOMETHING ELSE THAT WOULD FIT IN.

M: I would often write something and then I'd delete it. And I would sit there and think about what would A think if she read this? Or do I really put this in?

Tutors/Researchers Concept Map used when introducing personal history assignment

Place and Environment

Why particular places are important for people

Concepts
Perceptions – before/after visit

(share experiences, stories, artefacts etc)

How people’s activities influence places & environment and are influenced by them

- Gondolas
- San Mario Square
- Food/Restaurants
- Festivals

Provide Masks

Concepts

- Location
- Environment
- Patterns
- Perceptions
- Scale
- Interaction
- Change
- Natural & cultural features



Place visited & influence

TRAVEL

Resources & Economic Activities

Eg: Different resources that people use
underground train
bus
commuter train from Hertfordshire

Changing nature of work
- didn’t teach!

Concepts

- money System
- needs/ wants
- work
- management
- opportunities lost

Why?

Culture and Heritage

How people interact within their cultural groups & with other cultural groups

- Customs & traditions
- letter writing to Grandparents
- ph calls (international)
- Photo Albums
- Birthday/Christmas exchanges

Concepts

- Identity - Born in UK
- English Mother
- Scottish Father
- Kinship
- Cultural Interaction
- Change - Decision by parents to migrate to NZ
- Beliefs
- Perception

Additional Resources

Mask, Books, Map, Photos, Fabric