Examining the response process of fifth grade students during social studies instruction by Victoria Kay (2011)

Abstract:
Over the last decade there has been an increased focus on high-stakes standardized tests in reading and math. Social studies has been devalued in the classroom as many teachers and administrators focus their attention on reading and math instruction to avoid the punitive consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act. (2001). Based on this observation, the researcher implemented the instructional strategy of dialogue journals, traditionally used during literacy instruction, as a method for integrating literacy instruction and social studies instruction. The purpose of this study was to investigate how fifth grade students respond to multiple historical texts in dialogue journals.

The participants were 26 fifth-grade students. Dialogue journals were the primary data source. Data collection also included the students' pretest and posttest scores and field notes written by the researcher during social studies instruction. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to develop a theoretical model explaining the fifth graders' response process in the dialogue journals.

The theoretical model contained the four different instructional strategies that impacted the students' responses. Classroom instruction and discussions, text selections, classroom activities, and the teacher's responses in the dialogue journals influenced the students' responses. Each student then combined these instructional influences with his or her own prior knowledge and experiences, and then demonstrated content knowledge and literal comprehensions, reading comprehension skills, and social studies thinking skills in their dialogue journals. Most written responses contained a combination of these three categories.

This study suggests that students can think critically about historical figures and events, and that dialogue journals may be an effective strategy for facilitating such high-level, critical thinking during social studies instruction.