

Hong Kong Grade Five Students' Experience of a Unit on the American Civil War

by

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B.A., University of Western Ontario, 1993

B.Ed., University of Victoria, 1997

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Curriculum Studies

Faculty of Education

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University of Victoria

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## Abstract

This phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of grade five students of a social studies unit on the American Civil War taught in an international school setting. Specific aims were: (1) to examine and explore the content learned and student experiences of the various activities during the unit and (2) to comment on the current state of the unit in order to make specific recommendations to improve student learning. This study reveals that student experience of the American Civil War Unit is varied, complex and often surprising. Additionally, the role of the teacher remains highly influential in terms of how a student perceives the experience, even during the most exciting events and activities. This study also suggests that information about students' experiences should be sought in determining those aspects of learning not typically measured by traditional means in order to make informed decisions about how to improve student learning experiences.

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## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank a number of people who provided invaluable support to me, this project and its completion.

First, to the students who so generously shared their lived experience of school life with me. Thank you for your trust and willingness to share your stories.

I am indebted to my friend and advisor, Dr. David Blades, a dedicated and inspirational scholar whose guiding hand was calm, focused and probing, allowing me to discover my own voice and direction. Thank you for your encouraging words and unfaltering faith in me.

To my committee members: Dr. Carole Ford, an individual whose voice revealed grace, wisdom and humility. Thank you for sharing your insights, critical thinking perspective and kindness. Dr. Ted Riecken, a gentle soul and podcasting celebrity. Thank you for encouraging me not to eliminate controversial topics and embrace the opportunity to deal with them positively. Dr. Darlene Clover, a thoughtful and critical thinker. Thank you for reminding me about the potential pitfalls of teaching such a unit and the contemporary and ongoing struggles in the world today. Dr. Rick Bell, a calming presence. Thank you for chairing my defense and establishing a professional yet relaxed and supportive environment.

To Dr. Max van Manen, a thoughtful professor and kind friend who introduced me to the world of phenomenology. As a student in his class, as a friend over tea, or as correspondents across the miles through email, his generosity of spirit was unwavering and supportive. Thank you sincerely.

To the administrative team and colleagues at my school, notably Bruce Kelsh and JohnEric Advento for providing me with the support and time to develop and complete my thesis. Your genuine concern and words of encouragement are deeply appreciated.

To my family and friends, Calvina Seow, Erik Kwok, Vincent Kwok, Ben Robertaccio, Leanna Madill, Lisa and Kin Tam, and Herman Ho for their roles, big and small, throughout the years in contributing to an environment that allowed me to undertake and complete my journey. Whether it was providing transportation, frozen meals, access to literature, reading drafts, computer expertise or a supportive conversation, your care and generosity allowed me to focus and complete my studies.

## Dedication

To my dear Amanda, who provides unconditional love, support and motivation, and for her instrumental role in every success I achieve. You are always in my heart and soul.

To Trevor and Alex, who are a constant source of joy and inspiration. I love you dearly.

To my parents June and Ken, who have provided endless love, guidance and support in any and every endeavour I begin. I would not be here without you.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

A former student (now in middle school) recently approached me and began a pleasant conversation, reminiscing about old times. Inevitably, like many conversations with former students, the topic of one particular social studies unit seems to surface. "Do you still teach the (American) Civil War? Do you still get to dress up and march?" These two questions are regularly asked, despite whether one, two or even three years have passed.

As a fifth grade teacher who is completing his fifth year at China International School (CIS)<sup>1</sup>, the Civil War has remained an integral part of the curriculum. In fact, it has remained a constant in the Grade 5 curriculum since most people can remember, despite changes to other social studies and science units throughout the years.

CIS is one of the many international schools situated in Hong Kong, originally intended to provide an American-style education to expatriate families. The demographic profile of the school has changed dramatically over the years as American families comprise a decreasing percentage (50% U.S. passport holders) and non-American families, including local Hong Kong and mainland Chinese (as well as South East Asian nationalities) have dramatically increased in numbers. Even the term 'local Hong Kong families/children' is not a simple term to define as 95% of the Hong Kong population is Chinese (Census 2001). Students living in Hong Kong may include:

- Expatriate children who happen to be in Hong Kong for the short or long term
- Ethnic Chinese children born in a country outside Hong Kong but of Hong Kong ethnic origin
- Non-Chinese groups who were born and brought up in Hong Kong but who hold foreign passports.

The school reflects and is influenced by the greater expatriate and local Hong Kong community as most students come from high socio-economic families and a transient teacher and student population. The school operates within the governance of the Hong Kong Education Department but as an international school, is free to develop and implement its own curricula. According to the Hong Kong Education Department (2001), international schools are:

schools which follow a non-local curriculum and whose students do not sit for the local exams (e.g. Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations). They are operated with curricula designed for the needs of a particular cultural, racial or linguistic group or for students wishing to pursue their studies overseas. (p.11)

Curricula at CIS are developed by various teachers, administrators and related staff (instructional technology facilitator, librarians, etc.) and undergo a formal review by a curriculum committee once every 6 years.

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<sup>1</sup> China International School is a pseudonym for the actual school

Usually in late January of each year, all grade five classes begin a seven-week social studies unit of the American Civil War. Social studies is taught for approximately one hour per day, although teachers regularly integrate their instruction with other subjects such as language arts, music and visual arts. In addition to learning important dates, battles and generals, a major activity in the unit involves giving each student an assigned role as a Union or Confederate soldier and a matching military uniform. Suffice to say, this is an exciting event that generates great anticipation throughout the first half of the year and the excitement is maintained for the duration of the unit. Another memorable event involves the scheduling of U.S. Marines to work with classes for a number of sessions to teach basic marching drills. The unit culminates with every fifth grade student, in military uniform, performing together in a parade in front of parents. Families are usually thrilled about the event and the performance receives many accolades. Despite the variety of other learning activities that students experience throughout the unit, fifth grade teachers comment that these two events (receiving a uniform and marching) are mentioned most frequently when encountering former students.

As much as I enjoy the students' motivation, enthusiasm and teaching the unit, there appears to be a number of important issues that need to be addressed. Perhaps the most important questions involve why this unit is taught at all? Even though much of the curricula comprise a mix of American and other influences, why was this unit first adopted and why has this unit remained? These questions will be explored in chapter 2. Further, the student profile

consists of growing diversity in the nationalities of students, most notably away from the traditional American expatriate family. Even within the American families, there is great diversity in terms of the 'American' experiences of students, ranging from recently located to Hong Kong to some who have been born and raised solely in the city and never been to the U.S.. With this trend, what is the value in still teaching the American Civil War? More importantly, what is it that students come away with after the completion of the unit? Is it the marching and the uniform, like many of my former students? The intended outcomes of the unit are designed for teachers to transcend mere facts and dates and aimed at teaching towards important, perhaps universal and generalizable concepts. However, it is difficult to be certain what students are actually learning. Further, are there learnings that students express that were not intended by teachers? What is the actual and lived experience of students as they experience the Civil War unit?

## Chapter 2: Background and Context

Tact means being sensitive to the child's understanding, the child's state of mind. Only when a teacher has a grasp of a child's understanding can the teacher know how to get the new concepts to the child, rather than leaving it up to the child to somehow figure out the teacher's meaning and how to scramble to reach it. Only when the teacher stands beside the child, as it were, can he or she know where together they should go and how to get there.

(van Manen, 1991, p.194)

Upon completion of each social studies or science unit, teachers complete an end-of-unit review, listing the strengths and weaknesses of the unit and suggested areas to improve. This feedback is then used by curriculum leaders to improve the unit the following year. In the past, this process was often rushed, superficial and inadequate to future curriculum planners. The 2005 review of the Civil War unit (see Appendix A) is characteristic of these reviews. The strengths listed in the review are predominantly instructional ideas (types of activities); areas to improve upon were few and the review focuses more on logistics ("uniform caps were too small") and resources ("need more age appropriate reading material"). Unfortunately, little is said about the deeper, more philosophical questions involving the unit as a whole, the value or relevance of

the essential questions, or even if the unit should remain as part of the social studies program.

In December 2005, four weeks prior to the commencement of the unit, a group of teachers and other relevant educators (e.g. instructional facilitator, library specialist, special needs co-ordinator, etc.) met to discuss and prepare the unit for the coming year. Looking at previous years' work, this group worked to find ways to enhance the unit and strengthen weaknesses in content and instruction. Although this process allows for some individuals to make improvements, perhaps the most important voice in reflecting upon the unit has largely been ignored: the student's. Rarely are students afforded the opportunities to comment, criticize, commend or evaluate the program or activities in which they have been subject to for the past six weeks (or any length of time for that matter). Although some classes complete a student reflection, the purpose is for students to summarize the unit and the information does not reach the eyes and ears of other teachers or developers of the units. This lack of student voice presents a large and crucial omission in the process of not only improving the unit but also ascertaining whether students have experienced.

Even at an early age, students have a keen interest and good developmentally appropriate grasp of historical facts. In fact, by grade 4, children have learned about the past from a variety of sources outside school (Barton, 1995), have actively begun to seek out historical information and consciously think of themselves as historically interested and aware individuals (Levstik & Barton in Barton, 2001; Brophy, VanSledright, & Bredin, 1984). My experiences

with students at this age level confirms this observation as students often reveal an increasingly sophisticated grasp of their understandings of history and are enthusiastic to share their thoughts and concerns when invited in a meaningful and engaging way. However, how have teachers determined what students have actually learned? Although many teachers provide end-of-unit tests, the purpose is for reporting or grading and not for unit reflection. Yet even when paper-and-pencil tests are administered, the results do not necessarily provide information beyond knowledge of content—dates, names and battles—rather than understanding of major concepts and issues. Furthermore, little if anything was done in seeking affective outcomes or student experiences of the unit. What do students like? What do they dislike? Why are some events more memorable than others? Why do students like these events and activities? Do all students enjoy the same activities? Instead, students—even those most vocal in discussions, skilled at test-taking or assertive in their learning—are not afforded a voice in providing meaningful or evaluative feedback about their understandings, learnings or experience of the unit. Aoki (2005a) states that rather than what we think the students may or may not have learned or experienced, “the question of curriculum-as-lived experiences is the heart and core as to why we exist as teachers, parents, superintendents, curriculum consultants, and teacher educators” (p.165). Therefore, I believe it important to address this vital issue: what are the students’ experiences of the unit? The evidence that students may not perceive what teachers intend has numerous important implications for evaluating and improving teacher effectiveness (Weinstein, 1983, p.302). I argue

that too much attention and relevance is given to curriculum as taught, rather than lived and experienced by students. Aoki poignantly defines the concept of a “lived curriculum” as “not the curriculum laid out in a plan, but a plan more or less lived out” (2005c, p.201). From this perspective, curriculum is a dynamic and organic process that is always changing with respect to the needs of the class. Additionally, Hyun (2002) argues that the “pre-planned, scope-and-sequence oriented curriculum representing a set of intended learning outcomes produced by others can never be a lived curriculum for young children living in a multidirectional, multidimensional, and multiethnic socio-cultural world” (p.21). However, it is less a function of what needs to be taught (i.e. mandated curriculum) than how it is taught and more importantly, how it is experienced by students. Teachers cannot simply attend to their learning objectives as if nothing else of consequence happens in the classrooms; at the end of a school day they must also “worry about whether they were just or unjust in their distribution of praise and reproof, sensitive or insensitive to the nuances of the events that transpired, consistent or inconsistent in the standards and regulations they enforce” (Jackson in Hamilton, 1983, p.325). By looking at the students’ perspective, learning is much more than what is done formally. Intentionally or by accident, students acquire attitudes and behaviours from their classroom experiences (Hamilton, p.316).

Upon completion of a lesson, teachers often reflect to assess the extent to which objectives were met. This assessment is often used to inform further instruction. It is important to remember that teaching is as much (or even more

so) about the learner as the teacher, and the dynamics or relationship between. Therefore, what appears crucial to student learning is to look at students' experience of a lesson or unit of study. By placing the emphasis on students, the teacher is better informed about the actual learnings of students.

Specifically, what is the experience of a grade five student in Hong Kong who is engaged in the study of the U.S. Civil War? What understandings and attitudes are developed during and at the completion of the unit? More than the results on unit tests, what do the students actually learn, how do they feel and how do they experience the unit before (expectations, pre-conceived notions), during and after the completion of the unit. Are there major themes or experiences that are present or contradictory in students? Perhaps the most important question is if this unit should be taught at all?

### Unit Background

As an independent school in Hong Kong, CIS is free to select and build its curricula from any or various school programs. As part of its mission statement, the school offers "an American style-education" and teachers adhere to U.S. standards in all areas of study. Ten years ago, teachers, working from standards adopted mostly from various states and specific concepts that teachers wished to address (e.g. democracy, freedom), chose the American Civil War as the means in which to teach these themes. The unit was focused around the years of and surrounding the Civil War to upper elementary students. One major component involved breaking the class into Union and Confederate soldiers as they engaged

in various competitive and co-operative activities. Content was delivered by a variety of methods including reading from different texts, dramatic presentations and card games. Since its adoption many years ago, the unit has changed considerably although some of the original elements remain. Notably, a school-wide social studies K-12 committee was established and formally adopted standards set by the U.S. National Council for the Social Studies. This was largely in response to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation recommendations for the school to honour its mission in offering American curricula. These standards changed the focus of units from teacher-initiated to formal school-wide standards for K-12. Secondly, the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework by J. Higgins and W. McTighe was adopted by the school to align curricula more clearly with the national standards. The unit's focus has evolved towards what Wiggins and McTighe (1998) describe as "enduring understandings," understandings that promote abstracting from specific content and that have lasting value beyond the classroom (p.23). These understandings involve concepts that the authors propose to be largely universal, generalizable and that may be part of the content. Essential questions phrase the enduring understandings in child-friendly language so that students can build on their existing knowledge of these concepts. These enduring understandings and essential questions are designed by teachers according to the goals of the unit. Although an outside agency (i.e. The National Council for the Social Studies) sets the standards, it is an internal process (i.e. teachers and other curriculum planners) that elaborates and realizes these goals for students.

As decided upon by the Civil War unit committee, the essential questions for the unit for the past year were:

- a. How do different cultures live together?
- b. What does it mean to be free?
- c. What should citizens do when they disagree with their government?
- d. What is worth fighting/dying for?

In determining the enduring understandings and essential questions, teachers were able to focus their planning and instruction in determining a scope and sequence of lessons to address these questions. The operating assumption by teachers was that students would engage in a variety of planned lessons and activities, and use their learnings to address and make meaning of the enduring understandings.

Two other social studies units are taught in grade five: Cultural Encounters and Hong Kong. Cultural Encounters involves the settling of the colonies and the interactions between various groups (i.e. native Americans, founding fathers, Puritans, etc.). From the start of the unit, students assume the identity of one of the groups (role play) in constructing arguments on various issues. Activities include readings from texts, videos to present content and frequent discussions on major issues. To culminate the unit, students take part in a 'Living Museum' by dressing up as a chosen individual and presenting a speech on his/her beliefs. The Hong Kong unit begins by briefly delving into the history of the former British colony. The students then look at the various stakeholders involved in making decisions regarding important contemporary issues that affect the city and its

citizens. Activities include a number of field trips, readings and discussions and parent presentations. For the final project, students assume the role of a reporter/journalist in researching, investigating and visiting various locations around the city in writing a newspaper report on a topical issue (e.g. pollution, traffic, urban decay, etc.). In both units, the overarching concepts—different cultures, freedom, government and citizenship—drive the focus and selection of the various activities. Also, an attempt is made to involve students in taking differing perspectives in exploring issues and making meaning.

Although the overarching concepts and variety of activities are similar to the other units, the main difference between the Civil War and the other units is the use of role play (with uniforms) and the involvement of guests. However, students' wearing of military uniforms and respect and awe of the Marines adds a significant degree of excitement.

### Recent Research

In the last twenty years, research on student perceptions and experiences has been scarce. There has been some research on student perceptions of the process of school and schooling, and teaching methodologies. However, these studies have primarily focused on student preferences rather than on the experiences of individuals. One needs to return to the 1980s for a number of articles published on student perceptions of peace and the re-emergence of peace education. Although efforts at promoting peace education have varied in emphases and success since the early 1900s (Osborne, 1985), the proliferation

of nuclear weapons and the arms race propelled much work in the area of peace education and students' notions about war and peace in the 1980s. Like most concepts, students develop a more sophisticated understanding of concepts such as peace as they mature. According to Selman (in Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1980, p.65), children advance through three stages of understanding that develops a more complex concept of peace. Early on, notions of peace are largely stated in terms of an absence of war. Only as children reach adolescence do they begin to understand the more complex issues of peace as a state of being, involving divergent views of conflict resolution, and multiple perspectives. An age-related change was expected from "egocentric, self-oriented perspectives (those related to the immediate environment) to decentered, outward-oriented perspectives (a global perspective related to interactive processes within national and international contexts)" (p.75). In terms of historical knowledge and understanding, Barton (1993) notes that "fifth-graders were able to do much more than reproduce the details or structure of stories about the past...They easily engaged in many important aspects of historical interpretation" (p.14).

Until recently, most studies of student perceptions found that students did not like the study of history. Researchers such as Weible (1984) found that high school students often did not care much for social studies, but were agreeable to the subject if they liked the teacher (p.247). Worse, some studies revealed that junior and senior high students hated history, found no personal connection with the subject, and thought of it as not relevant and boring (Cervone 1983).

In the last ten years, there has been a change in the focus from peace education research to the teaching of social studies and history. A large part of the research has focused on the improvement of methods and how the subject is taught. VanSledright (1995) argues that for too long, history has been taught through the "archival tradition" which posits that

history can be viewed as a collection of putative historical facts, which in turn can be taught chronologically to students in school; the source of the archive of facts is associated with a research tradition in the discipline of history that holds an objectivist orientation concerning the nature of historical knowledge. That is, it holds that rigorous research based on a scientific model can produce a large set of immutable facts, followed by universal generalizations connecting them. (p.320)

Without a sense of purpose or connection to their own lives, it becomes obvious why students dislike studying history. Instead, recent reconceptualizations of the 'new history' involve a pool of facts that is much smaller:

the claim to a smaller archive is based on the realization that historians, despite their objectivist sentiments, can never escape the task of interpreting evidence and making decisions about what is significant and what is not. These decisions reflect the commitments and frames of

reference of historians, with the result that many so-called facts are actually in dispute. History becomes less fact and more interpretation. (p.320)

This interpretative version of teaching history involving multiple perspectives allows for the individual to play a much more active role in constructing meaning. Being aware of students as active interpreters of classroom events, Weinstein (1982) argues, forces teachers to examine more closely the effects of their own behaviour on the recipients of these interventions. (p.302)

Research into the student experience of particular units of study is needed for a number of reasons. Locally, little research has been conducted on international schools as a whole, either in Hong Kong or in other parts of the world. Although this type of school remains a minority in Hong Kong, the growing number of students educated outside of public schools in the local system and world-wide continues to increase and has impact on a significant and growing number of individuals. Secondly, there appears to be a wealth of information and work on teaching methodologies. Student perceptions of units of study at the secondary and tertiary level can be found but research on elementary students is largely scarce. However, it is surprising that there is apparently no literature that explores the pedagogical significance of students experiencing a unit of study at the elementary level. This lack of literature and knowledge about student experience of a unit of study suggests that we know little, not only about what

students are actually learning but also their perceptions on what and how they are learning in the elementary grades. What are students learning from this particular unit of study?

More precisely, this study aims to explore the following research question:  
How is the American Civil War unit experienced by fifth graders pedagogically interpreted and understood?

### Chapter 3: Methodology

According to Rogers (1984), the task of qualitative researchers is “to look at what we ordinarily take for granted with fresh eyes; to see events, with all of their subtleties and nuances, as they really are” (p.88). The purpose of this study is to pay close attention to and describe what students tell us about their experience, so that curriculum specialists, policymakers, teachers, administrators, and others can be better informed about possible options they could take in addressing the strengths and weaknesses of this and other units and to provide data on student learning that can be employed as a potential guide for making decisions.

Pedagogy, according to van Manen (1997), is “the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations” (p.2). As adults, we often fail to consider how particular situations appear from the child’s point of view, how the child experiences his or her world at home, school or in the community. At school, teachers are often concerned with content delivery, test preparation and curriculum coverage and in this focus the particular experiences and interests of the child may be missed. In our school and perhaps many others, designing and implementing a coherent curriculum that is referenced to standards and adhering to a particular curriculum framework is of fundamental importance and focus. However, van Manen (1991) comments that the term curriculum “tends to orient us away from the young person toward the structure and phases of study” by a

school whereas the term pedagogy by contrast, “tends to bring out the human or personalistic elements of education and childrearing” (p.29). Pedagogy implies the focus toward the child and the teacher to act *in loco parentis*. Further, pedagogy requires “a phenomenological sensitivity to the lived experience (children’s realities and lifeworlds)” (van Manen, 1997, p.2). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), the phenomenological perspective is “committed to understanding the social phenomena from the actor’s own perspective....He or she examines how the world is experienced....The important reality is what people perceive it to be.” (p.2)

Pinar (1996) writes that phenomenology is “a disciplined rigorous effort to understand experience profoundly and authentically” (p.405). A phenomenological orientation to this study allows the researcher to access various insights. The aim of phenomenology is “to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (van Manen, 1991, p.36). Lived experience involves “our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself” (Dilthey in van Manen, p.35). Insight into the lived experience of the student allows us access to his/her learning, understanding and making of meaning for “not only do we understand things intellectually or conceptually, we also experience things in corporeal, relational, enactive, and situational modalities” (van Manen, 1997, p.xiv). Phenomenological research is “the conscious practice of ‘thoughtfulness’, where thoughtfulness is defined as

'minding', a 'heeding,' for Heidegger an 'attunement' to what it feels like and means to be alive" (van Manen in Pinar, p.406). Phenomenological pedagogy becomes an expression of thoughtfulness (ibid).

More importantly, the methodology gives us tactful thoughtfulness: situational perceptiveness, discernment, and depth-full understanding (ibid). Pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact are essential elements of pedagogic competence (van Manen 1997, p.156). In general, tact implies informed sensitivity and kindness. Dictionery.com defines tact as an "acute sensitivity to what is proper and appropriate in dealing with others, including the ability to speak or act without offending." Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin word *tactus*, from the past participle *tangere* meaning "to touch." Pedagogical tact manifests itself primarily as a mindful orientation in our being and acting with children. It is an orientation that seeks to avoid seeing and treating situations in a standard way; at its best, it seeks to see past a teacher's perspective on the child's experience. Ultimately, the point of this research is to attune or orient ourselves to children and teaching. In this respect, a phenomenological study of the unit through individual conversations with students would inform a deeper understanding of the unit and provide insight into student perceptions.

### Conversational Interviews

In obtaining experiential descriptions from the students, a number of methods may be used. For this research project, the method resembled most closely what van Manen (1997) classifies as 'conversational interviews' (p. 62).

The interview serves two very specific purposes: 1) for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and 2) to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (p.66). In this particular case with the students, the conversational interview served to gather experiential material. In addition to some personal life stories (e.g. anecdotes, stories, experiences, incidents, etc.), students were asked direct questions based on their preferences and learnings regarding the unit. This was intended to reveal student understanding of essential questions and affective aspects of the experience of the Civil War unit.

#### Pool of Potential Interviewees

As the American Civil War is presented and experienced at only one grade level, the pool of potential interviewees was the grade 5 students at CIS. Presently in the school, there are nine grade 5 classes, each consisting of 22-23 students. In fifth grade, there are a number of students with special needs that would warrant special consideration about their participation and quality of responses. Firstly, there are three established cases of students identified as exhibiting selective mutism. If conversations are the primary form of data gathering, working with such students would prove limiting in its quantity and quality of information. Secondly, there are students in almost every fifth grade classroom labelled as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and receive support from the reading specialist, ESOL teacher and/or learning needs

support staff. As this group of students represents a portion of the selected sample, only those with the most challenging needs (i.e. needs that hinder his/her understanding of the questions and/or greatly affecting his/her responses) were excluded from the pool of potential interviewees. For those ESOL speakers without such severe limitations, every opportunity was given to them, if chosen, to participate and share their insights. For if Aoki's (2005b) contention that "language is a way that humans live humanly in the world" (p.181), then all students who are able to communicate their ideas, in any language, qualify as potential interviewees with valuable and useful information.

Of the approximately 200 students, I excluded my class (22 students) to minimize conflict of interest. From the remaining potential participants, I sought 6 students to take part in my study. The very nature of phenomenology makes representation and generalizability of findings difficult as the focus on any one particular individual comments specifically on only one aspect of the phenomenon—in this case, only on one child's experience of the unit of study. To that end, even holding conversations and analyzing data on all 200 students would still not provide a complete understanding of the phenomenon as lived experience is always personal and unique. However, the constraints of this research limited my work to a small group, which still provided insight into fifth grade students in Hong Kong experiencing the unit on the American Civil War. Furthermore, I sought to obtain students from both genders, not for achieving consensus on any findings or themes but rather because boys and girls at this age approach social studies and history topics differently. Brophy, VanSledright

and Bredin (1993) suggest gender differences: the girls tended to mention more generic categories of historical topics and to express more interest in the everyday lives of ordinary people whereas the boys expressed more interest in particular events and in learning about the accomplishments of famous (male) presidents, explorers, and inventors (p.448). Boys and girls will be sought merely to hear different voices.

### Minimizing My Influence on the Findings

Like any school, there are opportunities for teachers to interact with students outside their homeroom or instructional responsibility. In our school, I am indirectly responsible for all students throughout the school day and in common areas (e.g. stairwells, cafeteria duty, field trips, special events, etc.) and directly to those who I work with in after-school activities. However, as I did not influence their academic work, performance results or progress reports in any way, I did not anticipate nor engage in any conflict of interest issues. Secondly, I was mindful of my own preconceptions, prejudices and expectations of the study as it would have distorted the findings and/or interpretation of the findings. I attempted to bracket and minimize my biases by asking others to comment on my suggested questions for students (see Appendix E), reviewing the audio recordings of conversations to note leading questions, and asking others to assist in reviewing transcriptions of conversations to point out suggestive or questionable comments I had missed. Nevertheless, there are likely influences/biases that were overlooked. All qualitative researchers "recognize that while it is possible to limit observer bias, it is not possible to eliminate it. The

results of such research inevitably consist of both what is out there and what is in the observer” (Rogers, p. 92).

### Seeking Permission and Selecting Interviewees

I spoke to each homeroom teacher to introduce my topic and explained my purpose of study and received permission to speak to each class about my study to solicit potential interviewees. After speaking to each homeroom class, I then sent a note to parents electronically and in paper detailing my presentation to students to ask for volunteers to my study. Despite strong initial interest from students, very few students returned signed permission forms from their parents expressing interest in participating in the project. As common in schools throughout Hong Kong, students lead extraordinarily hectic and highly-scheduled lives outside the classroom. It is not uncommon for students in Hong Kong to take tuition (language, math, calligraphy, piano, etc.) in various subjects multiple times throughout the week in addition to sporting activities. In numerous cases, potential participants responded personally that prior commitments would not allow for them to join the project. Of the few positive responses, I was able to secure the help of three boys and three girls for my research. Only three girls responded and fortunately, they were thoughtful, eloquent and enthusiastic about the opportunity and subsequent conversations. Three boys responded willingly and were included simply because they returned their forms in the time requested. Two other respondents returned permission slips well after the requested date but were not included on the basis that their presence did not

greatly enhance the differentiated and heterogeneous mixture of the group. The six students who were included represented a good variety of ethnicities, years of study at the school, academic abilities, homerooms and personalities<sup>2</sup>.

Fortunately, the six students participated wonderfully and grew in their freedom to share their thoughts throughout the sessions.

Ideally for this study, students needed to be able to easily communicate verbally their thoughts, views, impressions and reflections of the unit's experiences. Students must have been able to communicate their thoughts for the researcher to gather meaningful data. Therein lies an important limitation to this particular methodology and study: the reliance of participants who can communicate effectively through speaking (or writing for gathering lived experience descriptions). For those who are unable to communicate with others, through voluntary or non-voluntary means, their lack of 'voice' and ultimately their experience of the unit is unheard and underrepresented. However, due to the nature of this study—phenomenological conversations—it was essential to work with students who were expressive and open to sharing their thoughts and experiences.

### Gathering Data

The "data" of human science research is human experience (van Manen, 1997, p.63). The research data collected includes the interview transcripts collected from the conversational interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> A representative sample was not selected as the nature of phenomenological research cannot offer generalizations. Further discussion of this issue will be later in the paper.

Upon determining the student group, a meeting was held prior to the start of the unit. An orientation session was conducted with the entire group of six students to establish rapport, build trust and to minimize (as much as possible) anxiety about the study. Each student then participated in 5-6 individual sessions, lasting up to 30 minutes each. The first meeting took place before the start of the Civil War unit to discuss expectations and establish prior knowledge, understandings and feelings about the upcoming unit. Then, once a week, conversations were held with students individually to discuss how the unit was progressing and to comment on any facet of the unit. In subsequent weeks, transcripts of the previous session were reviewed with students in order to ensure that the content was consistent with the interviewee's intentions, transcriptions of recorded interviews were accurately presented and for further comments in related areas. Furthermore, students and parents had the opportunity after each session to continue or withdraw from the research at any time. Data collected up to that point would be used only with explicit permission from the student and/or his/her family. Fortunately, no students withdrew from the study. Finally, a concluding group session took place to provide closure for the study and thank the individual participants. A total of 3-5 hours of each student's non-instructional time was used to prepare and conduct the conversations. Once the research project was completed, all audio-tape recordings were destroyed.

## Conducting and Recording Conversations

A set of standard questions (see Appendix E) was asked before the start of the unit involving the students' prior knowledge and expectations of the unit. Upon completion of the unit, these questions were asked again. Throughout the rest of the sessions, students were asked standard questions but were encouraged to comment on any aspect of the unit. Probing questions were also used during conversations, questions to provide guidance for responses. Particularly at this age group, students required prompting to activate their thoughts, remind them of activities and lessons, reflect on ideas and share their opinions beyond simplistic, reflexive responses. Often, students would answer the questions directly (sometimes with a simple yes or no answer) and required prompting (see Appendix E) to further explain or elaborate their ideas.

Although specific questions provided the framework for each session, topics emerged naturally and conversations were allowed to flow according to each individual's preferences and inclinations. Van Manen comments that, "a certain openness is required in human science research that allows for choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project" (p.162). Particularly that we are involved with a child's lifeworld, this is an understandable direction.

Interview tapes were transcribed for analysis using pseudonyms to identify the students. In developing questions for the interviews, I focused on two sets of ideas:

1. The academic aspects of the unit: intended goals and content emphases
2. The affective aspects of the experience: what students liked, disliked, etc.

### Analyzing Data

The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience.

(van Manen, 1997, p.77)

In analyzing the data from the conversation transcripts, there is no simple and straightforward method to conduct a thematic analysis. Phenomenology seeks to find the essence of a lived experience, and the nature of human science research is “more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure” (van Manen, 1997, p.79). This search for meaning involves an attempt to grasp the essential meaning of something. The intent is to look at the experiential accounts and try to unearth something “‘telling,’ something ‘meaningful’” to open up a deepened and reflective understanding of the phenomenon (p.86). A phenomenological theme is “much less a singular statement...than a fuller description of the structure of the lived experience (p.92). In isolating thematic statements, I have selected two approaches outlined by van Manen (1997) in *Researching Lived Experience*. The *wholistic or sentientious* approach involves attending to the text as a whole and asking what particular phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or significance of the

text (p.93). For example, if a student describes (in a paragraph or using a number of sentences) her excitement and pride in sharing her Civil War journal with her parents, the fundamental meaning could be, "An authentic audience to share work is important for celebrating student achievement." Of course this fundamental meaning is a judgement and other meanings may be derived. Secondly, the *selective* or *highlighting* approach involves picking the statement(s) or phrase(s) that are particularly revealing about the phenomenon (p.93). Again, using the earlier example of the student's excitement in sharing work, particular sentences or phrases may capture various meanings such as: "A parent's presence and participation is cherished and valued in an elementary classroom" or "A child exhibits a sense of pride in reading his/her own work to a parent." Using these two approaches, themes from conversation transcripts were unearthed and interpreted.

#### Limitations of Study

A given phenomenon is infinitely complex and subtle and any attempt at representing and understanding such an experience is limited. Numerous variables exist and each "whole exists by itself, with all its nuances" (Rogers, p.92). Due to the default nature of the group of students (from the relatively few respondents who expressed an interest in the study), the findings from students are resulting themes are hardly representative or generalizable to the grade level or elementary division (grades 3-5) of the school. In fact, the group of students who participated are unusual and are characteristic of a small minority of

students. Of all fifth graders, 15% are English Speaker of a Foreign Language (ESOL) and 8-9% receive assistance from Student Services (e.g. for learning difficulties in various subjects, remedial work, etc.) yet none participated in the study. Although this lack of representation does not diminish their voices, we cannot assume that the participants' views are similar to the others.

Rogers further notes that, "observers and/or interviewers, no matter how skilled, cannot record everything that is experienced" (p.92). As an interviewer of students outside my current class, I am subject only to the conversation times I have with the individual students. Even with greater access and time observing and conversing with each student, one cannot obtain and understand complete student experience. Students' range of emotions experienced during the interview—enthusiasm, apathy, fatigue, boredom, joy—were nearly impossible to document or transcribe fully in any meaningful way. Excitement and laughter, pauses by students when considering their next response, although noted, could not be captured. Obvious and communicable details (e.g. raising of voice, assuming a given character accent, sarcasm, etc.) were duly noted whenever possible. The next chapter provides summary of the major themes that emerged from my conversations with the students.

## Chapter 4: Individual and Common Themes

In this chapter I will present information regarding each student individually who participated in the research process before discussing common themes. I will begin by briefly giving some relevant background on each student as it may provide context for better understanding his or her comments. Secondly, at the end of the unit, students were asked to choose and write about one particular event that was memorable concerning the Civil War. Like the conversation transcripts, I have analyzed and created themes from the student's writing or lived experience descriptions. Each student's lived experience description will be presented to highlight and support other relevant themes. Finally, I will note and discuss a few of the most telling, poignant and/or dominant themes from the numerous conversations held over the course of the unit. The claim is not that these are the only themes or even the most central themes. Rather, the attempt is made to constantly ask: What does this conversation reveal of the experience of the Civil War from the perspective of these students? What are the possible meanings experienced here? What is the significance of these meanings?

## Individual Themes

*Galad*<sup>3</sup>

Galad, a Chinese boy, was born in Hong Kong and has attended CIS since R1 (kindergarten). He is an extremely bright and knowledgeable individual and even skipped a grade. He has visited the U.S. a number of times including New York, Florida and New England. Personable and conversational, Galad enjoys talking to adults, perhaps more than other children. During our conversations, he was always enthusiastic about our sessions and was the only student who poured over my transcribed notes consistently to review content and clarify meanings.

Anecdote text	Themes
<p><i>The Parade</i></p> <p><i>As we marched into the gym. I could hear the beating of drums outside as I was waiting to be signaled [sic] to march in. As we did march in with Sergeant Perez, I saw and heard the cheering and clapping of parents. Although I took a sneak glance at my parents, I noticed they did not notice and I tried my best not to smile. I had a sharp</i></p>	<p>Student seeks an authentic audience</p>

<sup>3</sup> All student names have been replaced with pseudonyms

<p><i>and serious look on my face as I marched on. We made our first "column right". I smelt the calm and serious air, with a draft of fun in it. As we marched and made our second right turn, or column right, I felt nervous that I would do something wrong in the parade, such as doing a "left face" when I was ordered to do a "right face" by my general. We marched into place, and I thought a thought of relief that this parade would only last an hour and we only had to do simple commands and singing. I had memorized my songs and my commands, so I did well. We continued with "Dress Right Dress", and as the other Union and Confederate teams marched into place, I was excited to know that I was going to show off a few days of hard work later that day, but I was not glad the Civil War unit would be over in less than twenty four, also less than twelve hours. The Civil War unit, after all, has been my favorite (and will be my favorite) unit in all of elementary school, and after that grand</i></p>	<p>to share his efforts</p> <p>Student takes pride in knowledge and use of actual soldier commands</p> <p>Performing well in front of peers and parents is valued</p> <p>During the highlight of the unit,</p>
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<p><i>entry to the parade, the parade itself, and the monument show-off, the great Civil War unit would be over.</i></p>	<p>student experiences mixed emotions as the unit draws to close</p>
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*Military Uniforms and Officer Rankings Significantly Affect the Motivation and Relative Self-esteem of the Student*

In a variety of ways, students are constantly seeking to display their uniqueness and feel special in front of their peers. During the Civil War unit, this desire becomes a more obvious and competitive display for many as students are visibly distinguished by the colour of their uniform (blue or grey) and, at a later stage in the unit, by the promotion in military rank by a class leader. Although uniforms are initially distributed to students in the first week of the unit for practical purposes (size and height of student), the minor differences in the uniforms – long or short, button fasteners or zippers, number and colour of buttons, regular or mandarin collar – are a cause for great concern and discussion among students. Given the sizing issue, for the most part, uniforms were randomly assigned without teacher preferences or statements of their relative worth. Students however were quick to note the differences and determine among themselves the relative value of the various styles. The cause for such differences was mainly due to the sheer number of uniforms (200+) and a few parents' efforts many years ago at securing and replacing sufficient uniforms at a minimal cost. In addition to the distinction given by the uniforms, a

more intentional distinction is made in the selection of Generals for the North and the South. Galad discussed his excitement at wishing to become the class general before the unit even began:

Q. *What are you looking forward to?*

A. *In the unit I'm looking forward to getting selected for a team possibly running for general. I'm also looking forward to the all the formal stuff, and just basically having fun.*

After the first week of the unit, Galad commented again on the topic:

*We started the Civil War unit and on the first day we got our uniforms.*

*We were also informed for running for North general and South general or General Grant and General Lee respectively, and we also started points. Points are when we score in teams according to their good and bad things that their teammates do.*

Although the method of selecting the two generals varied among classrooms, their responsibilities were essentially the same. In the eyes of the class and possibly the generals, perhaps the most important function was to give promotions to his/her peers based on observations of positive behaviours and actions. Galad reflected on what he liked during the first week,

*This week's "good stuff" was that I was informed that I had only one competitor running for general although later I found I had two competitors that were running today. My chances are pretty good. As general, I would have the powers to promote and demote people, talk to the other general about what good and bad things the other team has done and also get to do the attendance record.*

Q. *Can you choose and describe a particular event?*

A. *A specific event I participated in this week was running for general. Six people went before me, and my heart was thumping as I approached the so-called stage. People were laughing funnily-used visuals and graphics used from true pictures, but was replaced with my head. In the first round everybody voted. Three people ran for the South and came out in a two-way tie. Then only the southerners voted. Since there were six girls and 2 boys, and the other contestant was a girl, I didn't have quite a good chance of winning. But later, as I found out, it doesn't matter about the gender or age. It just matters about the humour of the speech.*

At the end of the process, Galad was successful in his bid to be the Union general:

- Q. *Tell me what happened in the Civil War this week.*
- A. *This week was really happy. I got elected as general, possibly because of my funny PowerPoint, and maybe also because my speech got delayed one day, and the other two contestants for the South did their speeches on the previous Friday.*

Even as one of the select few, Galad revealed his disappointment in his final comments and rating of the unit. He is obviously enamoured with the unit but his failure at securing the commanding general role for the parade in front of parents remained in his mind:

- Q. *Can you rate this week? 1 for horrible and 10 for fantastic.*
- A. *9.95*
- Q. *9.95? That is extremely high. Can you tell me why?*
- A. *Basically, I loved building the monument and I loved writing the justification and the speech. Writing is always a challenge but it's fun to me. We did more marching, that already elevated it to 100! But guess what is the 0.05? I didn't get nominated to be the overall general. I signed up but didn't get it.*

*'Playing Soldier' and the Points Competition were Highly Motivating Activities*

Throughout the unit, there were a few activities which called for students to 'play soldier'. In addition to the marching (discussed in greater detail later),

students performed a number of tasks in the classroom in their roles as Union and Confederate soldiers. These tasks and behaviours often resulted in the accumulation or deduction of points between the two sides that ultimately decided the 'winner' of the war at the end of the unit. These tasks alone were taken seriously as students assumed the role of soldiers enthusiastically and willingly and seemed to know that playing soldier involved listening to directions and exercising good behaviour. Galad described one of his early 'playing soldier' experiences:

Q. *Can you think of a specific event and describe it to me?*

A. *The specific event that I liked this week was lining up at the back of the class for attendance. When Mrs. Marie<sup>4</sup> puts on the tape player and plays a song from a trumpet, we all rush to put on our uniforms and line up: north at the whiteboard, south opposite them. Mrs. Marie gives uniform checks on North and South alternatively once every two days. We have to hurry to put on our uniforms, since the song's only 40 seconds long and I'm always weary in the morning but when the trumpet blows, I feel normal again.*

The early morning exercise proved to be a literal wake-up call for Galad and many of his peers.

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<sup>4</sup> A pseudonym was used for Galad's teacher

*Video Presentations Proved to be an Engaging and Informative Method of Communicating Content about the Civil War for Student*

One of the instructional methods selected by the curriculum designers to present Civil War content was by means of various video presentations. A wealth of information was found through movies and documentaries that provided specific details and re-enactments of major events. For the most part, the student enjoyed the videos and appeared to learn much of what was intended:

Q. *What did you think about The Blue and The Grey?*

A. *I think so far it's a very good movie and it describes the major battles in the Civil War. And also, it has a good base story to it – a sketcher just going around just sketching things and getting paid.*

Q. *Does it help your understanding of events to read it and watch it as well?*

A. *It actually sort of does help me influence my study of the Civil War.*

Q. *How so?*

A. *Well because we can learn different things, we can learn different things from simulations, from narratives and videos.*

For this student, the videos were a positive influence in providing Civil War content in an informative and entertaining way.

*The Student's Role as a Union Soldier, and perhaps as Union General, Biased  
his Perception of Events*

One of the major tasks of the unit is for each student to assume the role of a particular soldier during the Civil War. Students were given character cards which detailed some of what their character's home and personal life were like, ranging from family members to education levels to particular views on slavery. Like much of what happened in those times, soldiers came from all walks of life. Many were even too young to officially join the army but did so anyway. Most students were keenly interested (and once again proud if they received a card with a 'good' character) in their roles and took them seriously for the duration of the unit. They were also asked to keep and write various journal entries from that individual's point of view based on a number of prescribed events. Students performed their tasks almost too well as they remained in character often beyond class time, sometimes affecting personal relationships. Perhaps as a result of their character roles, particularly when battles were presented (most notably during the videos rather than the textbook readings), students cheered when their side was winning. The character information cards sometimes added a realistic layer of complexity as northerners or southerners occasionally had views that were incongruent with what their fellow residents valued. For instance, even though slavery was commonly accepted in the south, many individuals were against slavery, even by some plantation owners who did not want to use slaves but thought of them as a "necessary evil." Conversely, in the north where slavery was illegal, some northerners kept slaves secretly. These issues were introduced

and often used in class discussions in class and intimate and revealing journal entries.

Through asking the students to take a particular point of view, it was intended that they would be able to view events and issues from multiple perspectives, most notably the two sides – the north and the south – but also their own. However, on occasion, students developed a bias towards their side's views that may have affected their understanding and/or perception of certain events. For example, Galad does not appear to accept the fact that General Tecumseh Sherman, who was a northern general during the war, might have exercised some unnecessarily horrific measures to secure victory in his March to the Sea campaign. Rather than accept any possibility of wrongdoing on his side's behalf, Galad avoids the issue until he finally changes the topic in the end:

*Q. What do you think about Sherman's March to the Sea? What do you think about his methods?*

*A. Um...I think it was pretty destructive and it cut a hole in Georgia 60 miles wide and it also cut the south in two, which was the next part of the Anaconda plan.*

*Q. As a soldier or as yourself, what do you think about what he did? Because up to that point, Lee went up to the north a couple of times but he didn't really destroy private property. But this time, "anything went": churches, farmyards, town halls, what do you think about that?*

- A. *And the union soldiers lived on their food and land and that must have been a time of chaos in the state of Georgia. The news must have gotten to other states too.*
- Q. *As a union soldier, what do you think of think, because that's what YOU GUYS did. How would you have felt in the position, you are ordered by your commanding general to go and purposely burn things.*
- A. *I think, I think, for the union soldiers, actually would have been pretty fun..haha....*
- Q. *Oh yeah?*
- A. *Doing that...I know that some union soldiers commented at the end of the war Sherman's March was their favourite activity because they get to destroy everything...yeah!! Bye bye Confederacy.*
- Q. *Do you think you would have liked doing that?*
- A. *I mean, Sherman did it for his purposes, to split the south in two, although some might not thought it fun, others might have.*
- Q. *Ok, how about your opinion on it, do you agree with what he did?*
- A. *I really don't agree with what he did because basically once the Confederacy was executed, then only the Union remained and then that burned Georgia, was part of the Union, so it was still not worth it. So really there are 34 states in the Union and one is burned down so there is 33.*

- Q. *So do you think the ends justify the means? But if you have a goal, you should be able to do anything you can to get to that goal? You'd agree with that statement?*
- A. *I would agree with that statement.*
- Q. *Ok , so if your job is to get the highest possible grade on your report card, like 'E's', so it worth stealing, it's worth cheating, it's worth lying, because that how you get it?*
- A. *No, I don't think its really worth THAT, but...yeah...but you have to be honest still.*
- Q. *You still have to be honest?*
- A. *Yeah.*
- Q. *So you can say Sherman's not honest. If he were honest and respectful, then he wouldn't have burned all that. Lee you can say was respectful, he left peoples' farms and property alone when he went to the north.*
- A. *Yeah, but although Lee didn't think it that way when he went out to the north to fight Gettysburg and Antietam.*
- Q. *He didn't think about it which way? So I am wondering because I am comparing what the two different generals did, one was 'oh that's a farmland, where here, its more honorable, soldier vs. soldier...Sherman's not that way...over there burn it down, over there , kill them it's ok. Is that ok?*

- A. *I guess everyone who participated in the war was really, really different in this situation and there was also Appomattox?? In speaking with Appomattox?? I am doing Lee for my monument and in my justification I mentioned that at Appomattox...Lee arrived in his best uniform, his shoes were polished and everything, he looked the nicest he could. Grant meanwhile arrived in a dirty private's uniform, nothing was clean about him, he even had some mud on his face.*

*Marching with the U.S. Marines was the Highlight of the Unit for Student*

Learning basic marching drills and commands by actual U.S. Marines was a highly anticipated event that lived up to, and perhaps exceeded expectations.

- Q. *What did you like best this week?*
- A. *Well, we did marching over the past two times, its real exciting marching with real Marines, instead of just teachers.*
- Q. *Instead of just me (sarcastically)...I understand.*
- A. *But I know the Marines know better. It's been a real exciting experience marching with them and its also like once in a lifetime. And bet the Marines have never done this before, they're adults who in the Marines, they're training kids, younger than them, same things they are training adults.*

In addition to the marching, the overall unit was very well received by Galad from the beginning through to the end:

*I'm really looking forward to the big parade and monument show-off today, but I'm not so happy that the Civil War is over. I wish we could study it and go on with the real Civil War simulation for the four years and three days, like the actual Civil War. So you could actually have each battle and each day and everything. That would be quite fun.*

Q. *What did you think of the unit?*

A. *I think overall, compared to the other units I've had in primary school. It was the absolute best unit I've had in elementary school.*

Q. *Can you tell me why?*

A. *I really liked this unit because I got a really first hand experience with the Marines and the marching, and then the monument construction was fun too and as well as learning, we also did an actual simulation Civil War with points and I've seen points can represent soldiers if you multiply them by millions or thousands or something, maybe so...*

Q. *What would you tell a third or fourth grader about the Civil War unit?*

A. *I would tell them that we would be learning about the American Civil War in fifth grade. And then they would say, "Why is that so special?" and I'd say, "Well, first of all, it's really fun. You get to learn what professional adults learn. You get to also learn about American history although in a fun way and not a boring way sorta like Horrible Histories way. And maybe I would just tell them a few battles and basically just tell them that Civil War is a really exciting unit. And I would tell them about points and...*

Q. *You wouldn't want to give it all away...*

A. *No not all away.*

Q. *How would you rate the Civil War unit?*

A. *The rating of the unit, this time I'm it out of 1000. Out of a thousand, it is 999.99.*

Q. *It's pretty close to perfect.*

### *Rachel*

Rachel, Australian by nationality, lived in Melbourne and Queensland until she was 9 years old. She then moved to Hong Kong and has been with the school for two years. She has visited the U.S. a couple of times including visits to San Francisco and Florida. Academically, she is an average student in most subject areas but socially, is mature for her age and very aware of others and their feelings. During the interviews, she would need the occasional push, as her

answers were often short and abrupt. As she grew more comfortable, she became more forthcoming with her level of detail, insight into the intentions of unit and understanding of major concepts. She proved to be the most thoughtful and insightful interviewee as her responses often revealed a complex level of thinking.

Anecdote text	Themes
<p><i>My Person</i></p> <p><i>As Mrs. Marie called my name out, I was so excited but nervous at the same time. Everybody from last year said that the civil war unit is really fun, but is it also very difficult. So I didn't really know what to think about it. I walked up to the box and slowly picked my name out. I turned the small piece of paper over with such joy that I thought my heart skipped a beat. The small fine print on the card was very hard to read. But I ended up seeing some small print that read: Johnny Reb. I was so excited I got to be with all the girls.</i></p>	<p>Being assigned the role as Confederate or Union is an emotional moment for the student</p> <p>Student has high expectations about the unit</p> <p>Being grouped with friends contributes significantly to the student's happiness</p>

<i>Fred Bloom [student's Civil War character name]</i>	
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*Student Gained a Deeper, More Complex Understanding of Major Issues*

The use of essential questions in the design of the unit is intended to better focus the learning from mere facts and details about events to more generalizable and universal themes. Although most students provided only simplistic opinions and responses to these questions and other major concepts, some students were able to extend beyond such responses and demonstrate a complex level of thought and understandings that exceed basic expectations. In Rachel's case, she was often able to provide such insightful answers and grasp of more complex issues.

Q. *Should people/countries go to war?*

A. *People shouldn't go to war cuz it's bad and lots of people die and... but this war is kinda good because they were fighting for what they believed in and it was kinda the right thing.*

Q. *So is it okay to go to war? Is it okay to hurt some else?*

A. *No but I thought that this war was probably like the best of the wars that I have heard because some of the things that people go to war for is really stupid but slavery is very important and people shouldn't be punished just because of their skin colour.*

Similarly, she demonstrates her objection to various events in the war but can appreciate the more general concept that certain actions in war, although wrong, may be undertaken for the greater cause:

Q. *Do you think what Sherman did was right?*

A. *No, but because someone quoted, "War has no boundaries".*

Q. *So you think someone should be able to do anything to win the war?*

A. *I think what happened in Sherman's March was wrong but most of the other things in the Civil War I can understand because it is war.*

Further, Rachel expresses a mature concept of human nature in explaining if individuals can be peaceful:

Q. *Can a person be peaceful?*

A. *A part of them can be but all of them can't be. I mean, some people are... there's got to be some sort of anger and rage in them, I think.*

Q. *Do you think all humans have some anger in them?*

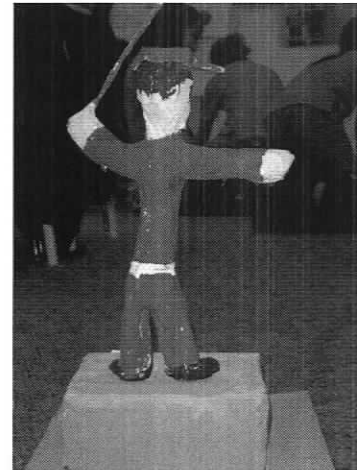
A. *Yeah.*

Q. *So what separates those who act on their anger and those who are able to control it? Because not everyone acts on their anger.*

*Fortunately.*

- A. *I think it's just self-control. But maybe people who act out their anger have been through more things, or they think it's necessary to get their anger out.*

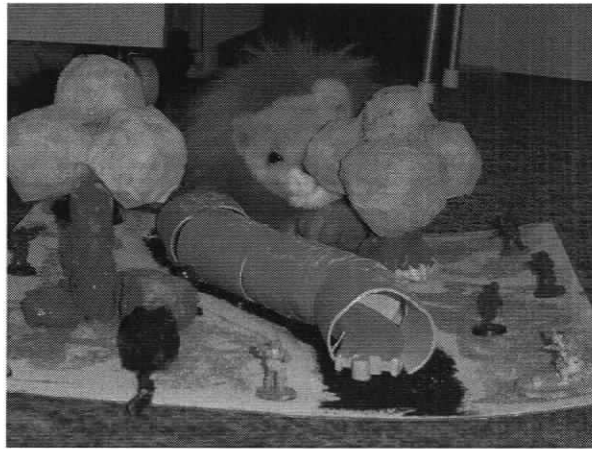
One of the final projects that students created was to design and construct a monument or memorial to honour a particular aspect (e.g. person, event, idea, etc.) of the Civil War. Students also prepared a justification of their monument to defend the selection of their piece. In most cases, boys chose a battle scene or one of the more notable characters, most commonly Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee or Ulysses S. Grant. The focus of most students was primarily on the construction of the monument and most projects were often simple representations of their topics (e.g. a mosaic of General Lee, a sculpture of General Sherman leading his troops).



On the other hand, Rachel was one of the few individuals who combined metaphor and creativity in her choice of topic and construction elements:

Q. *Can you describe your monument?*

A. *It was a lion at one end, and a mouse at the other and a railroad in between them. The mouse represented Harriet Tubman. It was kind of like a simile. The mouse represented Harriet Tubman because she was so small compared to the big fears that lie ahead of her. The lion was the fears that lie ahead of her and the underground railroad because she was a big part of it.*



*Student Revealed Multiple Perspectives and Used her Insights in Expressing her Thoughts and Opinions on Various Topics*

On a number of occasions, students focused primarily on the battle details and specific personalities in the war. The intentions underpinning the essential questions attempt to move beyond such facts and strive for deeper understanding. In assuming the role of a soldier and especially during the question-and-answer period with the Marines, it was hoped that students would discover that life as a soldier was not as glamorous as many believed and that life was not always about fighting. Even during the Marines' visit with students in

the classroom and the explanation of a typical day, what emerges from the variety of topics is illustrated by another student's response<sup>5</sup>:

- Q. *Remember we had our ideas about what soldier life was like when we studied the Civil War? Did talking to them change any of your views about what soldier life is like? Did you think, "Oh, I didn't know soldiers did that." Like cooking? We didn't talk about that during the Civil War.*
- A. *They shoot rocket launchers which I knew only by playing computer and I don't know how heavy it is. And they use real bullets to practise which I think I read in the book in Civil War. They were using the bullets and then they didn't want to waste any more so they didn't use bullets. It's empty. And I kinda knew about the best subject they like is the rifle shooting because I would have said that too.*

Many students still picked up on the more war-related aspects of a soldier's life, which in a relatively safe city like Hong Kong, amounts to almost none of his/her day-to-day life. Contrary to this view, Rachel was able to look beyond the uniform and reveal more of the unit's intentions:

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<sup>5</sup> The response is from another participant of the study, Justin. More information on Justin is presented later in the chapter.

*I learned a lot about the battles and how important they were to people and a lot about how a soldier's life would be and when you think about it, it would be like, difficult. But when you actually read about it and hear about it from someone's point of view, it's much harder than you think.*

#### *Student Experience of the Unit was Influenced by Teaching Methodologies*

Perhaps one of the most interesting outcomes of Rachel's conversations were her opinions on the various activities presented by teachers throughout the unit. She was clear in stating when a particular activity was not well received and made practical suggestions for improvements.

Q. *What didn't you like?*

A. *I thought that some of the things that we did were kinda boring like when we were just reading of paper – that was kinda boring. It would have been better if like the teachers came up with a way for us to move around and learn it. Something like that.*

Q. *So is it important for you to get up and do something rather than just read about it?*

A. *Yeah.*

On things she liked during a particular week:

*I like the pantomimes because we did stuff, we didn't sit down. I think I told you that. I like it when we move around. I didn't like the stories because I thought they were boring. A couple of them were okay. I liked the one where Dorothy knew the president. I liked that one and I liked the movies because I like watching television.*

A. *It [a pantomime] was cool how we weren't allowed to talk and stuff but I liked it because we got up and did something, like I've told you before. I like to move around.*

Q. *So anytime you get up and move around, instead of reading, it's a good thing. What about those things that you really can't get up? Like those topics like long division, math.*

A. *Well, the math you could do something like when you're learning division, like visualizing it, you can get hula hoops when you're dividing, I don't know, 100 by 5. Well not 100 because you wouldn't be able to do that. Well like a smaller number like 10 by 2, you'd have 10 hula hoops and then you'd get kids in the hula hoops. You'd do something like that so it would be unusual...*

Even with marching with the Marines, Rachel was less than thrilled with the overall sessions:

- A. *It kinda feels weird to do it because, I mean, like, imitating those soldiers, it's kinda awkward because you're doing all this saluting and marching and stuff and you're doing it all on a playground. So you kinda feel a little weird. But it's fun. I like the stuff, I can't remember... dress right dress...that's all.*
- Q. *Would it feel more authentic if we went up to the hill, or went to a field? Is it just the playground or are we just making it up?*
- A. *Um, maybe the person who is saying the 'dress-right-dress' – Mr. Cheh – could dress up in a uniform.*
- Q. *So if I showed up in a military outfit, would it make it more official?*
- A. *And you were at the Aberdeen field or at the MS, that field, up at the hill, somewhere...*
- Q. *Would the gym make a difference?*
- A. *A little bit because you don't have basketball hoops around and stuff. But it would still be better if it were at a field.*

In fact, it was the presentation of bizarre or unusual material that left the most lasting impression:

*I liked the assassination of Lincoln, which is kinda mean but it was interesting that it was in a theatre, and Roma brought in this book, *Horrible Histories*, and it had all these really weird facts about Lincoln's death and it was interesting. Like Kennedy, he*

*was shot in the warehouse, and he died in the theatre, and Lincoln, was shot in the theatre and he died in a warehouse. And they were both shot in the head and the names have the same amount of letters. And things like that, it's freaky.*

### *Clara*

Clara, a Chinese girl, was born in California and moved to Hong Kong when she was 2. She has attended CIS since R1 (kindergarten) and has a younger sister also in the school. She has visited the U.S. on occasion including Nevada and Florida. She is one of the younger fifth graders but academically, Clara is a very strong student performing well in all subject areas. During our conversations, she was always careful of her words and reserved in her thoughts, often revealing information in hushed tones. With a bit of encouragement, she was more revealing of her feelings.

Anecdote text	Themes
<p><i>Roots – the Beginning</i></p> <p><i>As we sat down to watch <u>Roots</u>, my legs trembled. I sat down, thinking over and over again, “Is this going to be bloody, is this going to be bloody!?!” Some of the boys started</i></p>	<p>Mature content, such as graphic violence, may be inappropriate for</p>

<p><i>shooting each other immediately and apparently died, while my friend and some others like her were scared like me. Then we heard music. We all turned our heads simultaneously and at that moment, our eyes glued to the screen. As the movie moved on, my heart began to beat faster with every second. I strained to hold back my tears, eyes blinking rapidly. I could see how these Civil Wars might turn out. It suddenly came to a part where we could see all the threats they would use: chains, pieces of metal in which they would use to hold their necks... I left my seat and clutched on to my friend, who also clutched me. My face was getting quite scrunched up and also damp from holding back tears of fear. Suddenly I could hold it no longer. I strode (shakily) up to my teacher and told of my fear and then, I spilled the water out.</i></p> <p><i>Chicken Little [self-included name]</i></p>	<p>students</p> <p>Video causes stress and fear in student</p> <p>Student discomfort is visible and obvious</p> <p>Difficulty with mature content contributes to negative perception of self</p>
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*Student Offered Pragmatic and Straightforward Responses to Essential Questions*

As mentioned earlier, the intention of the essential questions was to frame the unit in a way in which students could focus on the major issues and concepts rather than the specific details of the war. Even without a keen interest in the battles – in fact quite the opposite – Clara did not appear to wrestle with the deeper issues of the unit (from the immediacy of her responses) and communicated a fairly straightforward answer to the essential questions:

Q. *Can you tell me how some of this stuff relates to you? I mean, this stuff is 150 years ago, why is it relevant to us today?*

A. *It is relevant to us because of the mission statement.*

Q. *Can you tell me a little more about that?*

A. *The mission statement is that they do it the American way. And also this might apply to the war and peace thing.*

Q. *Does it apply to anything else in our times?*

A. *I don't know.*

On many occasions, Clara's responses to questions were short, to the point and needed elaboration. Often, I was given the impression that answers were obvious by her tone of voice and mannerisms. Wasn't it obvious?

- Q. *When citizens disagree with their government, what should they do?"*
- A. *From a northern person's point of view, you would say, "You should just live with it". And the south point of view, they should just secede.*
- Q. *And what if you're still angry with the government, what should we do? Throw rocks at government house?*
- A. *Just leave.*
- Q. *Leave? Leave Hong Kong? Say we didn't like Hong Kong's government, what can we do? You could leave...*
- A. *You could go to Canada...*

*Video Presentations had a Significantly Adverse Effect on Student's Level of Comfort and Enjoyment of the Unit*

*I didn't really like Roots because it is kinda scary. I watched it but I covered my ears. It's just looking at all those tortures and what people are going to do to them [slaves].*

For most students, videos were an anticipated and enjoyable method of viewing Civil War content and learning about the specific events, especially battles between the north and the south. However, for Clara and perhaps others, these events proved to be quite contrary to the common experience. As

communicated powerfully in her lived experience description and a number of other occasions, the videos provided Clara with a sense of dread, anxiety and conflict. Sometimes, the blood from the various battle scenes would be too much:

Q. *What didn't you like?*

A. *I didn't like The Blue and The Grey.*

Q. *Because?*

A. *Because of all the stuff.*

Q. *The blood?*

A. *Yeah.*

Concerning another more violent situation, Clara cannot even mention her disgust of a particular scene to me during the conversation.

Q. *What happened this week in the Civil War unit?*

A. *Um, this week we watched a lot of The Blue and The Grey, just now, Gettysburg, cuz we were learning the Gettysburg Address, and about the battle of Gettysburg and we watched Roots and we watched something really bad happen... that I don't want to mention [chopping off part of a slave's foot].*

Q. *You don't want to mention it?*

A. *(head nods no)*

Obviously, the videos were unsuccessful in expanding her understanding of the Civil War (although an emotive response was clearly evident) as she spent much of the time reading separately away from the class or peeking through her hands to watch certain scenes:

Q. *What did you think of the video?*

A. *Um, I like it, though some of it can be scary because I don't really like violence, because the movies I am accustomed to are non-violent ones or if there is violence, like Disney ones, where there are happy endings...*

And ultimately, she was unable to further her understanding of major issues and make meaning from the movies:

Q. *Does this (seeing the movie) help you answer the EQs better, like 'What is worth dying for?' or 'When people don't agree with their government, what do they do?' Do you have a better understanding of some of those questions?*

A. *Kind of but I never relate it back to it. Because there's lots of stuff going on.*

Admirably, Clara maintained a strong level of resolve and courage as she was able to remain in the classroom towards the end of the unit during movies. Nevertheless, during one of our final conversations, Clara's responses were often contradictory to her earlier thoughts about the videos. She actually rated watching the videos as one of her favourite parts and could even mention the horrific chopping off of the slave's foot:

Q. *What was your favourite part?*

A. *My favourite part was watching the movies. And my favourite movie was Roots even though his foot got chopped off. But I think it's better than The Blue and The Grey because I don't really like to see blood that much.*

Similarly, when asked if the videos should be removed from the unit, she defends their use and suggests that the student should alter his/her behaviours rather than negating the video.

Q. *Your understanding of most fifth graders. Say they were kinda like this year. Should we forget about the videos?*

A. *Some of them might be scared... I think it's okay to watch it's just that if they get scared, they can just hide or something. Not watch it or go to the library. Except though they might want to watch it*

*because they'll see everybody else talk about it and they'll be like,  
"What are you talking about?"*

Participating in class activities and possibly wanting to be informed, rather than missing out was clearly a motivation for Clara. Perhaps with the unit done and the videos completed, she was able to claim that she was not as affected and troubled as she appeared earlier.

### *Maxine*

Maxine, an American girl, was born in San Francisco and had lived in Los Angeles (7 years) and London (3 years) before moving to Hong Kong last year. She has also visited Texas and Arizona. Academically, Maxine is an average student in most subjects but has an outgoing personality and shares her thoughts willingly. Throughout the conversations, she was the most vocal, excited and enthusiastic participant, often providing responses rich in detail and expressions. Our conversations were regularly the longest and most animated out of all the interviews as it was easy to have her share her thoughts and opinions. The mood was always light and carefree during our sessions.

Anecdote text	Themes
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<p><i>I was in the middle of the North side on our 2<sup>nd</sup> practice when I looked up and saw that I was the only one with hair that was not black, but blond. I felt that I was special, but then I thought again and felt left out. But every time I agreed on one, I would think again and agreed on the other. I finally agreed on something in the middle.</i></p>	<p>Student experiences the notion of being different</p> <p>Being different can be a positive or negative experience</p>
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#### *Even in Uniform, a Student Can Experience a Sense of Difference*

With a greater multicultural mix of students, and the large number of students at all grade levels, students often complain of not being seen and feeling hidden in the crowd. Adding to the lived experience description above, Maxine talked about standing out:

- A. *I felt a bit different because the whole union thing I was in the very middle, sort of between the second and the third, and so I was in the very middle, surrounded by all people, that I was the only one... who had blond hair. I looked up and I could sort of around me, and all I could see was a sea of black around me.*
- Q. *But isn't that true for CIS?*

- A. *Yeah, it was sort of the same feeling when I was in Vietnam and it was at night and it was packed together, like they were touching each other, each motorcycle and it was so packed and we were trying to get through and I was on my dad's shoulders and I could see that I was so different where every single person on the motorbikes was, like all around me was like...[black hair]*
- Q. *How does it make you feel?*
- A. *In a way it makes me feel kinda special but in a way, I feel just kind of 'different'.*
- Q. *Different in not really a good way?*
- A. *Yeah. Like in Chinese, I am different in a bad way cuz I'm really bad at languages so it's like I'm sitting there and he says something and I'm supposed to say, "Well?" And I can't exactly say it. And even the new person in your class, he's even better than me and he's like brand new! That's like the bad feeling but also there's the good feeling where it's like, "I'm special!" Like part of the time, when I'm in Cambodia and they're all like they want to touch you and they wanting to...*

*Writing from a Soldier's Perspective was a Highly Motivating Activity for Student*

*I don't know why, I just do and I can imagine myself in those times and that's why writing in my journal was one of my favourite things – writing*

*the journal letters. Because I love imagining I was in the time, and if I shut my ears and close my eyes, I can imagine I'm there with the cannons bombing and I just like to use my imagination in that way.*

For the majority of boys, the marching activities were the highlight of the unit. Although the girls enjoyed the marching activities too, Maxine's favourite activity was clearly the writing of the journal from the perspective of her character:

*Just being able to put away my worries of this world and going into my new imaginary world and it's like, it's just a weird feeling when I'm writing those, I just don't think I'm me anymore. I'm this guy, Issac J. Long and even if it only gives you a little bit of information, like this is your name, this is your mom's name, this is your dad's name, it only gives you a bit of information but I can make so much more of that.*

*Video Presentations Proved to be an Informative and Entertaining Way to Provide Civil War Content for this Student*

- A. *I nearly felt like throwing up when I saw the guy getting branded. And um, in the movie when he slapped the girl, the first thing I thought was isn't that a girl thing to slap the guy?*

- Q. *It usually is! But what do you think about the whole thing of watching videos to help you understand. I mean, they describe the same thing in the book...*
- A. *I like that. I like that.*
- Q. *Do you like watching the video? Does it scare you a bit? Does it gross you out?*
- A. *Parts of it makes you say, "Ew that's gross!" and other parts you're like, "Oh, man this a lot better way than just reading, (in a serious low voice) "And he got shot." It's just a lot more lively.*
- Q. *Have you heard of the phrase, "A picture is worth a thousand words?"*
- A. *No I haven't heard that but it makes a lot of sense. Like if you see a picture of this guy, with another guy getting stabbed, you couldn't describe all that in three words.*
- Q. *So overall I guess you kinda like watching over reading...*
- A. *Yeah I like watching a lot better than reading because I can't pay attention to something when I'm bored like I'm always drawing when Mr. Hall is talking and even when he tells me to stop I'm just like, "I'm bored!" I can't fall asleep and I can't draw, what can I do? I can't just think about such boring things.*

The student describes a mostly positive experience in learning about the Civil War from videos and prefers it to other forms of instruction.

*Student was able to Gain Multiple Perspectives in Learning about Given Topics*

Maxine clearly demonstrates a healthy conflict in seeing both sides of the battle having to choose sides:

*When we're watching it [The Blue and The Grey], since some people in my classroom are in the Confederate side, I'm like, "Yay! We won the battle!" and stuff and I think I'm talking to the class and really I'm just talking for myself and the Unions and when they say like, "Yeah, we won the battle!" for when the Confederates say that, I'm like, "But they're the bad guys! How could that be good?" And I just have a very hard time pretending to be on both sides when they say that. And when they're watching the movie, when we're on the Confederate side, at that moment when we're learning about them and certain character or something, I can't imagine that they're such a nice person and they want such a bad thing.*

Maxine's strong empathy towards others and her ability to see different perspectives may be a result of her extensive travels to many parts of the world. In discussing different perspectives, she relates our discussion to a real life experience:

- Q. *Isn't that a weird thing? That your enemy is supposed to be a bad person but you realize that sometimes enemies aren't bad people, they're just like you, but they're on the other side. That that's the only difference?*
- A. *I've always found it a hard time to believe like when I went on vacation to Vietnam, I saw all these pictures that these little kids drew of the U.S. bombing their city and stuff, I just felt so like the bad guy, but I looked at it from the other people's side and it was just like we were saving them and to help them stay free and it is just so hard for me to imagine both sides being good but not being good... it's just hard...*

It is interesting to note that in both comments, Maxine uses the distinction of good and bad to justify her perspectives. Further, when challenged to judge if General Sherman – a fellow Union soldier – was justified in his violent actions to fulfil his goal, she is able to qualify her response from multiple perspectives:

- Q. *So you agree with the general's ultimate goal?*
- A. *His strategies were really great.*
- Q. *To burn everything down? To cause as much destruction as possible?*
- A. *Well, if you were looking at it and being nice or mean, well duh! He's the worst strategizer on the planet, if you think about it that*

*way. But if you think about it in winning or losing, that's probably the best way – the blockade, to keep them starved, to surround the area, and the burn down – that's the best way probably I can think of, but like a strategizer that way, it just that you can look at it two ways.*

*Being a Union Soldier Biased Student's Perception of Information*

Despite her maturity of thought and sense of empathy towards others, Maxine still identified with her side and views the Union's actions as positive. In talking about her love of the journal writing, she claims to be on the 'good side':

*I think still it's the journal writing as it's so much fun for me as I love pretending I'm someone else and I'm glad I'm not like an evil person, well not evil exactly, it's okay but since I talked last time but I'm glad that I don't like slaves and I'm on the North side. I liked being the "good" person. It's easy for me.*

In further conversations, Maxine did not accept the notion that the Southerners could be justified whatsoever in their beliefs and actions. Focusing on the main issue of slavery, the actions of the South were indefensible, which influenced her opinion on their entire belief system and way of life.

*Marching Provided a Sense of Focus and Discipline for Student*

A self-proclaimed 'hyper' individual, Maxine mentioned her boredom with many school activities during the day. She spoke often about her need to constantly doodle throughout lessons and or talk to her friends. Given her understanding of herself and her tendencies, she was able to find a reason to focus and concentrate on:

*It [marching] was really fun because we got to, act like real Marines and normally I'm really hyper and I'm running around and I'm not disciplined but since I was pretending, I was like all, "Hui!" [attention & stomping]. I was being all quiet – I just didn't say a word the whole time which is really amazing for me. When we're in marching, instead of just like being in p.e. or doing the normal thing, I feel sorta like important and I stand up a little straighter and I try my best and I don't talk cuz I get psyched when there's a new thing...*

*Opportunities for Authentic Audiences and Feedback were needed for Student to Share and Celebrate Work*

Perhaps the project that the students spend the most time and effort on is the creation of the Civil War journal. As a soldier, students complete 6-8 journal entries on a range of topics, with emphasis on specific content, empathy and imagination. Other items that may be included are poems, drawings, illustrations, maps and other related material. With so much emphasis revolving around one

piece of work, a greater effort needs to be made to share the work with others. Presently, failing the initiative of the student, the only audience the Civil War journal receives is that of the teacher. Maxine rues this grand omission:

*And I like having people appreciate my work. And nobody really reads it except maybe you and your parents if you bring it home . And I was like, "I just want someone to read this!" I was like, "Here Mr. Hall<sup>6</sup>, you read it!" and I gave it to him so he could read it. He gave it back and he had a few mistakes in it and I'm like, "Aaaaaand?"*

#### *Nikhil*

Nikhil, also an international student, was born in Hong Kong and has lived in the city his entire life. He is an only child and has attended CIS since R1 (kindergarten). He has visited U.S. a few times including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas and Washington D.C. Academically, Nikhil is a strong student and excels in all subjects. During the conversations, he was a very thorough and thoughtful individual and always chose his words carefully. He took a no-nonsense and professional approach to our conversations. Even when pressed or asked to elaborate, Nikhil stuck to simple, seemingly obvious and straightforward responses to my questions.

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<sup>6</sup> A pseudonym was used for Maxine's teacher

Anecdote text	Themes
<p><i>My Favorite Moment in the Civil War Unit</i></p> <p><i>My favorite moment was when I was performing my Civil War March. While I was marching I felt so proud to have performed this in front of my parents. I remember the Marine shouting "Left..... Face!" and all the solders in the Union following the Marine's orders. I had been taught all the basic movements a Marine should know and now we were performing this in front of our parents. I really enjoyed how the Marines came over from the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong and told us their experience in boot camp. I really enjoyed this experience, which is why I chose this as my favorite memory in the Civil War unit.</i></p>	<p>Student feels proud and competent with Marine commands</p> <p>Experience with Marines leaves a lasting impression with student</p>

#### *Uniforms Added a Level of Excitement for the Student*

As like many of the other students, especially boys, receiving and getting to wear the military uniform, particularly for the first time, is a special moment in the unit. Nikhil describes the moment:

*When I got in a uniform I was really excited because it looks really good, and then when I looked at the book they showed a picture of the real uniforms that they used and my uniform is something like that. But their uniform is a bit different and a bit nicer but they had stitching in the arms. Since that I am not a general or a sergeant, I don't have a zipper uniform but some of my classmates did. So I would like the zipper kind. It is easier to put on the zipper uniforms. I feel like I'm a soldier out there and actually a soldier in the real war.*

*Student Applied and Related Issues from the Civil War to Present-day Situations*

One of the intentions of teaching social studies is to make concepts and ideas relevant to students' lives. As mentioned in the opening chapter, learning about a war that occurred almost 150 years ago in a foreign country may not appear relevant to many students. However, in focusing on general concepts beyond battle details, the focus of the unit has grown to connect historical issues with more contemporary situations in the world today.

- Q. *Well, the war took place in 1861, well when it started, and we are in 2006. Are there any lessons that we can learn from studying... I mean why bother? Why should we even do the Civil War?*
- A. *Because right now in the world, there is a lot, a lot of bad things going on like U.S. selling nuclear stuff to India. Iran is not giving up*

*the nuclear thing. Iraq's war. I think we can learn a valuable lesson from the Civil War. Peace is a guide to happiness in life.*

*Marching was the Highlight of the Unit for Student*

As with the other boys in the study, marching under the instruction of the Marines and performing in front of the parents for the final assembly was the most exciting part of the unit.

Q. *Can you tell me about your single, favourite activity?*

A. *[no pause or hesitation] Marching definitely.*

Q. *Can you describe it for me?*

A. *I had a lot of confidence while marching. I felt proud. I felt happy. I felt like I was a real soldier going into war. And I was like in boot camp, except in four weeks instead of thirteen weeks.*

Q. *On a scale of 1 – 10, what do you think about the past week activities?*

A. *9.2.*

Q. *9.2! that's pretty high! Can you tell me why?*

A. *Last week I enjoyed much more than all the other weeks.*

Q. *Good to hear, can you tell me what about it? Was it just because of the marching or some other things?*

A. *Because I was really excited about the marching.*

Q. *Did it live up to your expectations?*

- A. *Much more.*
- Q. *If the Marines weren't here, would you still enjoy the unit? Say we didn't get to march...*
- A. *Not that much to look forward to because the main highlight of it, is marching. And doing it. But we could still learn it without the Marines. And if someone knew it, then it would still be okay.*

*Justin*

Justin, a Chinese boy, was born in Hong Kong and joined CIS in R1 (kindergarten). He has visited the U.S. but not since he was very young. Academically, Justin is a dedicated and capable student and performs well in all subject areas. During our conversations, he took time to think through questions carefully and was always polite with his responses, rather than assertive or forceful with his opinions.

Anecdote text	Themes
<p><i>Special taste of a moment in the Civil War Unit</i></p> <p><i>As the bright morning sun crept up from the horizon, birds flew over trees singing joyfully as if they knew it was the day when the HKIS fifth grade pupils march and present their</i></p>	<p>Student's excitement about an important school function creates a positive outlook towards the day</p>

*knowledge about the army and the Civil War Times.*

*As the clock struck eight o'clock, many fifth grade students were already in their classrooms trying to calm down or starting to get nervous. I was one of them, the hyper type. I felt really in high spirits and to run and run and run till I drop exhausted. My Mom was coming to watch me march! Such a great experience! At last it was time, our Civil War uniforms were comfortable and our Civil War army hats were all on. We marched our way down the gym was full of parents who were watching their proud children or eyeing their nervous children. I scanned the chairs but my Mom was not there, I scanned the parents standing up, my Mom was not there either! I felt neither scared or panic, I just went on with it because I am still presenting to parents, not mine, but others.*

*When the march was over, us, students rushed up to their classrooms to get ready to present their miniature monuments. My partner and I*

Student seeks audience to share in a special event

Despite comments to the contrary, a parent's presence provides reassurance and a level of comfort to his/her child

<p><i>practiced our speech of our monument one last time. Though my partner was a bit worried when we were presenting to his Mom and mine, I was going on and talking about my part of the speech to the audience and my partner was waiting until it was his turn.</i></p> <p><i>Afterward, I learned from my mom that she missed the marching part when I was finished presenting to her.</i></p> <p><i>I felt a bit disappointed but large amounts of the pure happy of the Marines here just covered it up.</i></p>	<p>Student masks disappointment in his mother's absence from the parade performance</p>
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*Soldier Uniforms and Ranking of Soldiers Provided Student with Great Motivation, Pride and Competitiveness*

*I have two favourite things that happened this week. The first thing is that we got the uniforms and I got the general's uniform, which has blue cuffs and gold buttons, which represents I'm a really high rank.*

Regularly during the first four conversations, Justin mentioned some aspect of his uniform or the activities associated with the promotion of officer rankings for himself or others. Early on, he was selected to be the general (the highest rank of soldier) which brought much pride and satisfaction:

Q. *Can you talk about something specific about this week?*

A. *I want to talk about getting the uniforms. I only knew the colour of uniforms was blue. I forgot there were gray uniforms. I never knew there was ranks for the army soldier of high rank or private rank soldiers. I have never thought that I would be a general. But when I got to be general I was really happy, although I was blamed for surrendering. I got to the general by Mr. Hall<sup>7</sup> choosing. For the next day next to my name was the word 'general' on the board. I am really happy that I can lead the army, but I think the real general will have a lot of pressure for the army may disagree me. The uniforms made us look real and it kind of makes me proud. And we also changed the seats to officer, general, officer at the front row then behind us will be the low rank such as Johnny Rebels or the rest of the Confederate Army. I think my uniform is really lucky, because I have double buttons and it is gold, while the other officers who have the same uniform has a bit of rusted off gold. I*

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<sup>7</sup> A pseudonym was used for Justin's teacher

*was the first one back with the uniform. It was kind of like a fashion show.*

However, despite the good intentions of Justin's teacher in allowing others to experience the leadership position as the General of the Army, the sheer randomness in which his teacher promoted and demoted individuals clearly had a negative influence on him.

A. *I was disappointed because I didn't get my Officer's uniform back for I was demoted a few weeks later and so the person wouldn't exchange back.*

Q. *Why did you get demoted?*

A. *Because Mr. Hall wanted to have everyone have a chance to be officers and he just said that I got shot in the arm and I just got demoted.*

Q. *Just like that? Do you think that's fair? What do you think about that?*

A. *I think it's not fair because Stonewall Jackson got shot in the arm and he was still the general. I also enjoyed the place we took the singles photo, because it's kinda like the Wall but it's actually only a big rock.*

In addition to the officers' rankings, the authenticity and overall look of the uniform contributed to the student's sense of character and happiness.

A. *I was an officer; my character card was Lt. Colonel or something... I actually liked the army shirt but I really didn't like the hat. I thought the regular soldiers were more cool. But after today, I watched The Blue and The Grey, I saw that the officers' hats were almost the same so I felt a bit better.*

Q. *So does the uniform make a difference?*

A. *Yes.*

#### *Student Demonstrated Inconsistent Understanding of Major Concepts*

At times, Justin was able to communicate thoughtful and insightful responses to various questions.

Q. *Do you think we can ever have peace in this world?*

A. *It can happen but the chance of not having it is 99.99999%*

Q. *Why is that? Why do humans have to go to war? Why do humans like to fight?*

A. *They might like to fight for land, for fame, for freedom, for I don't know but I think it's kind of like a bad idea for fighting, because like in the Civil War, they actually fighting their selves.*

Responses to the essential questions contained opinions supported by facts and examples. When asked about what citizens should do if they disagreed with the government, Justin replied:

*I want to talk about when people disagree with their government what they should do... I kinda agree with the abolitionists that making conferences and making almanacs and newspapers and so on, they weren't forcing the Confederates to not do anything but they were just showing how they feel in not in a harmful way. But I don't agree with Joe Brown because I think he did something violent or so...*

Q. *What if two cultures really don't like each other? They tried compromises and it doesn't work. What then?*

A. *They could separate. Or move farther apart. Like the more generous one, can just say, "Here you can have [be] the boss of us," or the other one can say, "Okay." Like, one should be generous so that the other one won't be too mad and war won't come.*

### Common and Significant Themes

As noted in chapter 2, even holding conversations with all 200 students would not provide a complete understanding of the phenomenon of students'

experiences of the unit on the Civil War. However, in conducting conversations with six students, common and significant themes emerged that have important implications. Occasionally, a theme would surface from only one of the six students. Then again, some themes were consistent to almost all participants. As mentioned earlier, the relatively small sample size and nature of phenomenology does not necessarily warrant applicability or generalizability of findings. Rather than the number of similar responses or particular themes, I have chosen those themes that appear most relevant to the student experience of the unit, and/or most telling, poignant or surprising. The claim remains that these are not the only themes or necessarily the most central themes. The main criteria in selecting themes was not the consistency among participants but those in which teachers and other educators should most likely be made aware of and have influence over in designing future units of study to improve student learning. Implications from themes will be discussed in the next section.

*Assuming the Role of a Soldier and Participating in its Associated  
Activities—Particularly Marching—Contributed Significantly to the Students’  
Excitement, Enthusiasm and Enjoyment*

Since prior to the start of the unit, many students were aware that fifth graders get to work with U.S. Marines to learn how to march. The demeanour, behaviour and overall attention of students changed during the various but brief opportunities each class got to work with the Marines. Even normally distractible

and disruptive students behaved incredibly well during the formal lessons. As one student mentions in working with the Marines,

*...it was really fun because we got to, act like real Marines and normally I'm really hyper and I'm running around and I'm not disciplined but since I was pretending, I was like all, "Hui!" [moves to attention & stomps on the ground]. I was being all quiet – I just didn't say a word the whole time which is really amazing for me.*

*(Maxine, personal communication, February 27, 2006)*

Needless to say, and supported vehemently by all three male respondents, marching was the highlight of the unit, causing great pride and excitement. Even though none of the girls rated the marching as their favourite activity, all of them mentioned that it was an exciting and memorable part of unit. Being around the Marines, whether during discussions in the classroom or practising the commands in the gymnasium, students appeared attentive, engaged constantly in awe. The research clearly shows that it is more than just the marching, although marching is definitely a highlight and something that the students tend to remember for years to come.

*Students Developed Both Multiple Perspectives and Bias in their Perception and Understanding of Information*

In many of the student responses, an understanding of more than one perspective was revealed. Students became more thoughtful in their responses to essential questions and qualified their answers based on the Union or Confederate perspective. However, on a number of occasions, students cheered when it was stated in class or shown on video that one side won a particular battle. Students quickly developed a competitive relationship with each other, even among friends. This did not adversely affect friendships outside the classroom or beyond the unit but the level of tension and excitement grew throughout the weeks. Occasionally, students would quickly defend a course of action simply on the basis of their association, rather than on the facts presented<sup>8</sup>. However, as illustrated previously in Maxine's and Galad's conversations, students could not or would not admit to wrongdoing on their side's part. Although admirable in protecting the interests and honour of their side, one wonders about the student's true understanding and acceptance of concepts.

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<sup>8</sup> One could argue that the selection of facts to present can obviously elicit sympathies towards a particular point of view. For discussion purposes, I will try to maintain that different points of view were presented but students still chose sides based on their affiliation.

*The Teachers' Choices, Instructional Methods and Behaviours Greatly Influence  
the Students' Perceptions of the Unit*

In her research, Cervone (1983) noted that student attitudes towards studying history was largely dependent on the teacher. From various conversations, students mentioned a number of lessons in which the teacher and his/her methods of instruction did not capture the child's interest or motivation. Compared to other subjects in the day, Civil War (i.e. social studies time) is generally looked upon as the highlight of the day:

*Normally, it's like a normal unit, I'm like, "Yeah, um, yeah, well... yeah whatever. It's just life." But this time, it's like, before it's like [voice quickens], "Yay! And other things are like [voice trailing off and body deflating], "Damn." This time, it's like every time it's like, "Okay go work on your project," and I'm like [shouts], "Ya-hoo!" Or, "Go write your journal entry," and I'm like [exclaims], "Yay!" or just everything just seems so happy. But I don't think it's like the best thing in the universe, like I rather be in p.e. but, yeah...*

*(Maxine, personal communication, March 21, 2006)*

In the teachers' defense, the Civil War includes some highly motivating and exciting events (e.g. marching with the Marines) that seem to dwarf other events by comparison. However, the comments by various students describe

lessons in which little engagement occurred and teachers did not meet students' expectations. The teacher's performance and/or selection of content delivery—from following the social studies textbook and answering comprehension questions for homework to performing a pantomime of a particular scene—made a significant difference in the excitement and retention level of content by students. In the latter example, the teacher is mindful of the child's experience in learning the material in an interesting and memorable way. Whether it was the behaviours shown (fairness in promoting or demoting students' military rankings), activities that were performed (lecturing about a given battle or performing a story tableau of the same battle), or choices that teachers made (e.g. seating assignments based on Union or Confederate soldiers), each had an impact on the student experience which needs to be thoughtfully considered and tactfully implemented. Teachers can build on such student perceptions toward stronger pedagogical engagement.

*Definitions of War and Peace Remain Essentially the Same by the End of the*

*Unit*

In many cases, the students who participated in the study provided definitions of war and peace that were basically similar to what they presented prior to the start of the unit:

*Peace is not having war. Compromising. Making a peace sign. A war is a battle between the world or the same country. The battle includes guns, people dying, and victory. People go to war, either forced by the government or just wanting to help their own country.*

*(Justin, personal communication, January 10, 2006)*

*The definition of war is a harsh way of fighting. Fighting is usually you end up with bruises and a lot of hurts that are serious. But for war, it's like you go and kill people and a lot of people die. And for peace, it's kind of like, no war, the opposite of war, and maybe compromises. No well, not really compromising because that's kind of like sharing and trading really, but like peace is just like, [in a cool, Vulcan-like accent and demeanor]. "I come in peace,"*

*(Justin, personal communication, March 14, 2006)*

As compared to students prior to the beginning of the unit, some students were able to provide more detail about why countries go to war:

*War is when two teams or groups or countries are fighting against each other in where they kill people. Peace is exactly the opposite.*

*(Galad, personal communication, (January 13, 2006)*

*... war is when a group of nations or states do not want to be part of one's country anymore and therefore want to be independent, but the other country does not want that and that's what outbreaks war. Well, it's basically when two countries are fighting against each other for independence...*

*(Galad, personal communication, March 16, 2006)*

Similarly, students' understanding of peace remains largely described as an absence of war rather than as a positive concept in its own. Still, one student hints at the positive aspect:

*Peace is just the opposite of war. It's when war ends or when a war hasn't started yet and there is total calmness around and basically no fighting.*

*(Galad, personal communication March 16, 2006)*

### *Student Responses to Essential Questions and Issues Ranged in Quality and Complexity*

In seeking authentic literature for grade five students to experience, curriculum designers had great difficulty locating appropriate literature. Perhaps this largely unsuccessful endeavour suggests the overall difficulties in teaching the American Civil War to ten and eleven year-old children. In the eyes of many students, the answers were straightforward and simple.

Q. *What is worth fighting for or dying for?*

A. *Well nowadays, I think nothing is worth dying for because then you'd already be dead. And there's not really a point, in my opinion.*

*(Clara, personal communication, March 10, 2006)*

On numerous other occasions, students were unable to move beyond simple responses to seemingly complex questions. Given the students' limited life experiences and stages of development, are teachers expecting too much? Or perhaps improved and more direct instruction towards enduring understandings is needed to establish stronger connections between the lessons and the essential questions.

## Chapter 5: Implications and Conclusions

A tactful educator realizes that it is not the child but the teacher who has to cross the street in order to go to the child's side.

(van Manen, 1991, p. 155)

In the previous section, common and significant themes from various students were identified and presented. In this section, the themes will be discussed from the perspective of improving pedagogy to foster a more engaging and educationally worthwhile student experience. Essences of the greater human experience will then be drawn from these themes before concluding with remarks concerning the overall value of the Civil War unit.

### Implications for Teaching

#### *Provide a More Informed and Realistic View of Soldier Life*

Most students display a natural curiosity and interest in the Marines during their visits to the school. Particularly when they were in uniform, students treated them with great respect and even sought their autographs on their last visit. Such interest and enthusiasm could be channeled into more a more realistic view of the Marine experience. Even during the one classroom conversation with the Marines, students gained knowledge of soldier life that surprised and contradicted prior assumptions held. Instead of fighting and using weapons, the

Marines talked about the variety of jobs Marines hold (computer technicians and programmers, transportation operators, translators, chefs, etc.) that were in stark contrast to what students learned about soldier life from textbooks, movies and even from other teachers. To the collective gasp and laughter of students, one Marine even spoke of his fondness and skill in baking chocolate chip cookies. Humanizing what Marines do and how they live provided a new perspective to many students. Perhaps more time with the Marines, especially through conversations or even a visit to the U.S. consulate where they work, rather than marching, would provide more opportunities for students to understand this fact. Further, discovering that women could join the Marines was a revelation to one student, although she later mentioned that she would still not choose it as a profession after what she learned about fighting and war. Allowing students to view Marines more as living, emotional people and less as soldiers involved in combat would provide a more complex, realistic and perhaps a less romanticized understanding of soldier life. As Maxine and Justin noted earlier, there were times during the marching that they really “felt like Marines”. Although students enjoy the simulation, ‘playing soldier’ needs to be coupled with a realistic portrayal of a Marine’s life, which of course is much more than marching. If the unit continues to emphasize Marines, then a more complete and realistic awareness of their contemporary lives is essential.

*Involve More Points of View, Roles for Students*

If you see two sides form a third; If you see many sides, form a circle; If you see many circles, begin to dance.

(Gerzon, 2005, p. 1)

Barton (1996) suggests that, "historical perspective-taking is not beyond the ability of fourth and fifth graders" (p.26). As evident from a number of students, a clear area of growth involved the understanding of perspective. In assuming the role of a Union or Confederate soldier, students are forced into taking a side and experiencing various issues and concepts from differing points of view. In the students' soldier journal entries, the quality of responses and discussion of topics reveal growing insight into the role of the soldier. However, as the unit only highlights two roles, the scope of student views proved limiting. To deepen and further expand student perspectives, there is a need for multiple histories, not just one. Although the soldier is perhaps the most popular role (from the boys' perspectives), students should be given a choice as to the role they wish to assume during the unit, and especially encouraged to give voice to those in the Civil War that are typically not heard. Perhaps students assume a variety of roles throughout the unit to develop greater empathy and understanding for other lives that are affected: slaves, plantation owners, overseers, Underground Railroad workers, abolitionists, presidents and politicians, etc. Not only should there be a multitude of roles, but the sources of information from which students learn and experience content should be numerous and varied as well. The use of a variety of authentic texts (such as real

photos, letters from soldiers, first hand accounts, etc.) other than traditional textbooks, would provide alternate voices and a richer experience for students as well as examining a particular battle from different points of view: North, South, border state, pacifist, wife, grandparent, etc.

*Improve the Teacher's Sense of Pedagogy and Use of Tact*

Hornstein (1990) suggests that the difference between what children like and dislike in social studies is simply the difference between being actively involved in thinking and doing, versus passively regurgitating what they have read (p.29). Teaching involves more than just being competent with content and possessing a variety of methods. In terms of the Civil War, knowledge of the necessary content involves preparation, as the school employs a comparatively transient teaching staff with varying backgrounds to U.S. history. Fortunately, shared professional development opportunities and common assessments built into the unit provide some consistency in method of teaching and student tasks. Still, these factors do not guarantee that teachers exercise what van Manen (2002) describes as "a certain kind of seeing, of listening, of responding to a particular child or children in this or that situation" (p.10). Although it may be impossible to cater to the interests of, or ways of learning for all students, a thoughtful and tactful teacher must always keep the child and his/her experience in mind to engage the learner. More important than any specific event or skill the teacher can possess, his/her mode of being present for each child and being

attuned to his/her needs, largely determine the daily and overall experience of the students.

*War and Peace Education Needs to Involve Greater Complexity*

In the conversations with the six students, all were consistent before and after the unit in defining war and peace as it related to fighting or the absence of fighting. In their studies of Dutch children, Hakvoort and Oppenheimer (1999) describe separate and distinct stages of students' developmental understandings of peace. Although characteristic of older students, it is possible for students to develop a more complex notion of peace, not in terms of the absence of war, but as a 'positive peace'. They mention that,

...during childhood an understanding of "positive peace" is already present, although it is developmentally constrained to or defined by the immediate interpersonal environment. With the development of social knowledge, and interpersonal understanding (role taking) in particular, we assume these early conceptions of positive peace to be generalized to wide national and international contexts. [parentheses included] (p.75)

By the end of the unit, only Rachel began to define war as more than groups fighting, "but it doesn't have to be physically fighting. It could be like mentally or... yeah. Same as peace" (personal interview, March 22, 2006). By

involving a more direct and intentional way of presenting peace and peacefulness in their daily lives, students can learn less of the violent concreteness of war and the more abstract notion of peace. Avery, Johnson, Johnson and Mitchell (1999) suggest that “children’s and adolescents’ understanding of and toward war and peace may be largely based on their personal experiences involving social interdependence (co-operative, competitive, and individualistic efforts) and conflict” [parentheses included] (p.275). To this effect, more efforts in the students’ daily lives, within and beyond the unit, can be modelled and shared with students to promote this value of peace. Student support services such as counsellors can be called upon to support teachers’ efforts. In the classroom, counsellors can teach conflict resolution strategies and teachers can reinforce peaceful attitudes and behaviours for themselves and their interactions with others. Additionally, the students themselves can be advocates for responsible and peaceful behaviour and work to resolve conflicts among the student body. The use of peer mediators or peer helpers provides valuable skills and opportunities for students to deal with others in authentic problem-solving situations. Finally, an active student council allows members to work closely with staff in various areas that can have a direct impact on the environment of the school, whether it be through organizing special functions or planning fund-raising activities for notable causes.

*Curricular Goals for the Civil War Unit Need to be Age and Developmentally  
Appropriate*

Barton (1993) commented that fifth-graders are generally able to move beyond regurgitation of facts to make meaning. Still, evidence from student conversations have shown that this may not be true for all students, some who provided little more than facts in their responses. Specifically, in her conversations with me, Clara revealed an honest fear of the content shown in various videos. In answering the fourth essential question, "What is worth dying for?" many students appeared lost and could not answer the question to any degree of depth or conviction. In any classroom, the range of student abilities, maturity levels and life experiences will make responding to essential questions difficult and perhaps even meaningless for some. Essential questions must reflect responses that are open-ended and applicable to new situations within and beyond the topic. Teachers and curriculum designers need to ensure that the intended outcomes are valuable, reasonable, age-appropriate and able to be connected to students' lives.

*A Discussion of Essences*

Themes have been extracted and discussed regarding how students view the Civil War unit. However, what can the students' comments reveal about human nature? If phenomenology involves the exploration and description of essences, what is uncovered about the human experience through the students' participation in the Civil War unit?

### *The Need to be Heard*

As the interviews progressed, the participants grew in their sharing of information and experiences of the unit. Perhaps students became more accustomed with the procedure of the interviews but I would suggest that they became more appreciative of and active in the opportunity to speak their minds. In these instances, an educator was interested in their thoughts and ideas that were not related to assessment or evaluation and had no right answer. Arguably the most important revelation in this research process involved the realization that students have something to say and what they say has value. Engaging the student voice has significant implications towards improving teaching and student learning. This speaks to the deeper need for all individuals to be heard and meaningful opportunities to allow for this should be provided. One example may include providing regular and more frequent opportunities for students to offer feedback, not only on content but on the processes of schooling as well. Additionally schools may authorize student voice through active student councils that make significant contributions to student life. Similarly, class officers can be afforded some influence into classroom procedures and learning opportunities. In general, the more opportunities for student participation and action, the greater the chance that they will be heard.

### *Gendered Perspectives*

A detailed investigation and discussion into gendered perspectives is beyond the scope of this paper. However, despite the few participants interviewed, I wish to comment on one notable difference revealed during the conversations. In describing the characteristics of students' imaginative lives from ages 8-15, Egan (1992) suggests that the kind of knowledge that most readily engages students' imaginations and interest involve "the extremes and limits of the human experience and the natural world: the most courageous or the cruellest acts, the strangest and the most bizarre natural phenomena,..." (p.73). Although present in both boys' and girls' interviews, it was clearly more pronounced and frequently commented on in the conversations with boys (e.g. the bloodiest battle, the most decorated general, the harshest prison, etc.). In conversations with the girls, the emphasis was clearly on relationships (between themselves and their friends, themselves as soldiers, relating to the war, etc.) and the emotive elements of the unit. This is consistent with Egan's findings that "compassionate engagement with distinct forms of experience and the imaginative sympathy necessary for understanding them" are more characteristic of females at this age (p.74). Similarly, Caine and Caine (1991) suggest differences between male and female brains and that some approaches may favour one sex over another (p.32). These findings speak to the different ways in which boys and girls were able to engage with and access the unit. Further research and discussion is needed to draw implications for designing other units and teaching to boys and girls in general. From a pedagogical perspective, I

would argue that the emphasis by girls on relationships and compassionate engagement with the experiences are closer to meeting the objectives of the unit. In that respect, I would recommend the addition and inclusion of activities and behaviours that encourage boys to pay closer attention to relationships.

### *Importance of Feedback*

The importance of celebrating student work and achievement and receiving feedback cannot be ignored. In participating in a number of activities and working through a variety of assignments, the results of student efforts were occasionally overlooked. This was most evident in Maxine's plea for someone to read her journal and Justin's deep disappointment with his parent missing the parade performance. In putting forth a large part of themselves in their work, or perhaps in participating in an event that is meaningful, the need to have someone acknowledge their work and celebrate their efforts cannot be overemphasized. Feedback provides a student with a sense of validation for his/her efforts, often from a person of standing or influence, in this unit be it a friend to share work, a teacher to comment on a job well done or a parent to be in attendance for a performance. If students are to commit to and invest themselves in an assignment or experience, honouring their efforts and attending to the affective element, whether a simple acknowledgement or grand celebration, is vitally important to the overall student learning experience.

### *The Value of Individual Recognition*

Perhaps more than anything else, students' experiences with the assigned military uniforms and its relative status was a constant preoccupation in the classroom. I would contend that rather than serving as a symbol of violence, the essence of the uniform involved the need for individual recognition and acknowledgement. Although the word 'uniform' was used to imply sameness, the minor differences in appearance (e.g. gold versus silver buttons, short or long, zipper or button fasteners, etc.), and changes to the status of individuals due to promotions, contributed greatly to a student's sense of satisfaction, self-worth and relationship with others. Students, individually and collectively, assigned importance to these differences that went beyond what teachers had intended. This perhaps speaks to each individual's basic need to be recognized, often in front of others. In becoming the general of the Union, a student is honoured. In achieving the same military ranking as his/her friend(s), a student experiences camaraderie. In walking past another student in a different grade level (in a regular school uniform), a student stands out. This affective aspect of the unit implies that more needs to be done, regarding the handling of the uniforms and other activities, to ensure that all students experience a sense of validation and recognition in front of others.

### Pedagogical Implications

A number of insights may be drawn from this study. In this section, I speculate on the implications for teaching other units from the students'

experience of a unit on the Civil War.

### *Student Voice*

In conducting conversations with six students, a wealth of information and insight was revealed. Each student provided a unique voice into the teaching of the Civil War unit, much more than any objective test or unit assessment could provide. Students shared not only their likes and dislikes of the various activities but also their understanding (or lack thereof) of intended concepts. Further, unintended but significant learnings were revealed involving more than just content: interaction with friends, co-operative and competitive efforts, attitudes and interpretations, teacher behaviours, and other factors that affected student perceptions. Through what was said and not said during conversations, and how it was communicated, valuable information was shared about the overall experience. The listening to students is important in two respects.

Firstly, authorizing student perspectives acknowledges and honours the student voice. As discussed, the need to share one's voice and be heard is powerful and central to the human experience. Acknowledging the student voice elevates the status of the student towards the role of students as partners in the education process rather than the recipients of information. In this way, working together provides the opportunity for improved student learning.

Secondly, listening to the student voice affords a level of understanding into the student experience. Rather than being overly concerned with how the unit is taught, the emphasis shifts more beneficially to how the unit is received

and/or perceived. In listening to students before a unit, teachers can determine background knowledge and the understanding of where students are. In listening to students during a unit, teachers are able to monitor and assess student progress and the direction of the unit in order to continue or make changes. In listening to students after the completion of the unit, teachers can connect learnings, review important concepts, reflect on experiences and seek opportunities to improve the teaching of the unit and others. In exercising good pedagogy, teachers constantly seek ways to improve professional practice and are afforded direct and useful information about the effects of their teaching practices.

*Romance, Wonder and Awe*

A provision must be made to satisfy our curiosity and hunger for novelty, discovery, and challenge.

(Caine & Caine, 1991, p.81)

In Egan's (1992) discussion of imagination in teaching, the notions of romance, wonder and awe (as well as limits and extremes mentioned previously) are characteristic of students between ages of 8-15. The focus on the strange, distant and exotic, as well as associating with the heroic, amazing and unimaginable, contributes significantly to student fascination and interest (p.78). Supported by my conversations and experiences with the students and their heightened sense of excitement around the Civil War unit, it therefore seems

prudent to seek ways to reproduce such enthusiasm towards other subject areas and units of study. Although a large part of the enthusiasm for the Civil War unit involved the visit of the Marines, the inclusion or adoption of similar practices – involving important guests, large-scale simulations, costumes and role play, opportunities for student recognition – could contribute towards building student interest. Further, instead of focusing on what students know, emphasizing the differences, the bizarre and the extremes, rather than the similarities to everyday experiences may actually invoke and stimulate the imagination. In seeking the limits and extremes of human experience, students may better find their place in the world. As Egan mentions, there currently appears to be little awareness and attention given to incorporating romance, awe and wonder into the design of curricula. More could be done to encourage and stimulate students' imagination and passion using these emotions. The romantic nature of student interest and their attraction to the wonderful and awesome can be used to generate and maintain excitement and enthusiasm.

### *Affective Learning*

In authorizing student perspectives, we reveal not only the cognitive aspects about the student experience but also the affective dimension as well. As Caine and Caine (1992) mention, “when we ignore the emotional components of any subject we teach, we actually deprive students of meaningfulness” (p.58). Similarly, they speak of the “interconnectedness of concepts and emotions” in providing the student with lasting impressions (p.57). In many cases during the

conversations, the attitudes and feelings of the students were shared concerning their various experiences. A large part of the excitement and lasting effects of the Civil War unit involved the emotions students invested in their characters. In revealing students' hopes, fears and joys, it was obvious how strongly they felt about their involvement with the unit and the engagement in the various activities; overall students were generally positive throughout the unit.

In listening to the student experience, teachers are afforded a more informed position in which to create and modify activities that pique student interest and encourage deeper involvement. In general, most of the emphasis in planning curricula involves cognitive and occasionally some behavioural objectives. However, greater attention to the affective elements of learning needs to be included and addressed in setting unit objectives and designing lessons. If students are able to invest themselves and their emotions into the unit, then the overall experience will be more memorable, engaging and personally meaningful.

### The Value of the Civil War Unit

Since my initial experience in teaching this unit many years ago, I continue to wonder about and wrestle with the appropriateness of having students dress up in Civil War uniforms and perform in a military parade. From the students' point of view, not only do they seem to savour the performance in front of their peers and parents, but as evident in the anecdote in the introduction to this thesis, they continue to talk about it throughout the rest of the year and for years

to come. However, just because the students like this event does not make the experience necessarily an education we want for our children. Overall, is the Civil War unit a worthwhile student experience? Are students actively engaged in activities that demonstrate good pedagogy?

In answering the first part of this question, it is clear from the conversations with the students, the extremely high ratings, and the overall excitement during social studies time (as evident in Maxine's earlier comments), that the Civil War unit is a popular and highly engaging unit of study. Enthusiasm during the various activities, from taking re-enactment photos outdoors to creating monuments of important individuals, strongly suggests that students' interests and efforts are largely focused on the unit and leave lasting impressions. Afterwards, students can vividly recall various activities during the unit and regularly mention the final parade as one of highlights of the year. As Grant (1999) notes, "if students are to see any value in the study of history, then how to engage their interest becomes a key question (p.37). Commanding the students' natural excitement and enthusiasm towards any topic affords the enviable opportunity for teachers to teach to a captive audience. In this case, inherent student interest for the subject matter allows the teacher to deal more with the lesson, rather than motivation or discipline problems. From the conversations, student involvement and participation in class activities seemed consistently high throughout the unit. This is consistent with what Egan describes as using romance, wonder and awe to enhance imagination and engagement with students at this age level. Although particular student interests may be

different than what teachers originally intended, the opportunity presents itself for teachers to engage students actively and direct efforts towards the goals of the unit.

The second aspect of the question regards whether or not the unit promotes and demonstrates good pedagogy. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the direction of the unit has moved largely away from historical content—specific names, battles and dates—towards general and universal concepts, established by curriculum designers. I contend that this has been a step in the right direction. The unit objectives are aligned to the school's standards and are intentionalized in the various activities and common assessments. The most significant piece of work by students—their Civil War journal entries as soldiers—reveals a strong emphasis on the essential questions decided upon by curriculum designers in aligning to standards.

In addition to adhering to the mission statement, the question remains, is the unit itself pedagogically sound? Is the unit valuable and worthwhile? In reviewing the students' responses to the essential questions (i.e. determining the students' grasp of the most important concepts), a definitive result was unclear. In some cases, students did not extend dramatically beyond initial constructs and responses from before the start of the unit. Answers remained shallow and students could not extract key concepts from the various discussions and activities to enhance understanding of big concepts. However, some students did demonstrate growth in their depth-full and extensive discussion of the key ideas. Responses involved some attempt at applying concepts beyond the Civil War

towards contemporary issues and/or their personal lives. Nevertheless, I believe that the essential questions may have been too difficult for a majority of students. The students who participated in the study represented an unusual and group of mostly self-motivated learners and deep thinkers. To the majority of students, addressing the essential questions may have proven too challenging. I am still in favour of focusing the unit by using essential questions but they must be targeted appropriately to the students' comprehension level in order for students to be able to make meaning. Rethinking and revisiting the essential questions, especially revising or eliminating the fourth question, "What is worth dying for?", will allow for greater access by more students and an improved opportunity for personal construction of meaning.

Secondly, the unit involved dressing up young children in military costumes and essentially teaching them to play soldier. In their journal entries, they were asked to write from the point of view as soldier as they experienced various and significant events of the war. One obvious and valid criticism that may be levelled against the unit is that it promotes militarism and violence. Similarly, the inclusion of U.S. Marines suggests an element of American propaganda for the military, especially during a time when the U.S. is actively engaged in conflict with countries around the world. Is it too much to ask students to think, act and write like soldiers without associating and promoting the aggressive and militaristic side of soldier life? It may seem disturbing in hearing or reading about a student talk of taking the role too seriously, as when first receiving his uniform, Nikhil comments, "I feel like I'm a soldier out there and

actually a soldier in the real war” (personal conversation, January 23, 2006). In their interaction with the Marines—through classroom conversations or marching practice—students could possibly receive an overly positive and naïve perception (bordering on propaganda) of Marine life.

In questioning the contributions of the Marines, I contend that there is a place for their involvement in the education of fifth graders. The mere appearance of Marines at school, especially in uniform, will always be of interest to students (particularly boys). By capitalizing on student interest and promoting aspects of Marine life that are less well-known, a more realistic and humane perception of their contemporary role may be possible. In the one classroom session with the students, the Marines did not answer a single question about violence and focused their responses on their day-to-day responsibilities, personal backgrounds and opinions on a number of areas including sports and entertainment. Students learned about jobs other than firing a gun and met Marines who drive trucks, program computers and work behind a desk. Some students recognized two Marines who are active members of the local community, attending the same church or playing in the same softball league as their parents. It may be safe to assume that many students walked away from the session with a more personal and connected perception of Marines. Without trying to ignore the violence that some Marines can and do experience, their interaction with the students and role in the unit can be a positive one involving age-appropriate concepts and minimizing the emphasis on violence.

Although the wearing of the military uniform often signifies the potential violence of soldier life, its function in the classroom is more practical in serving as a visible way for students to stand out in front of their peers and the other grades. As mentioned, the essence of being recognized and acknowledged is of primary student concern. In a controlled environment such as the classroom, the teacher is afforded some measure of input into determining the significance of the uniform in how promotions are awarded (e.g. fair play, desirable behaviours, etc.) and therefore the opportunity to reinforce peaceful, co-operative and non-violent behaviours.

However, it would be impossible to teach the Civil War without mentioning casualties and deaths, especially concerning the costs of war. My contention is not to ignore or gloss over the violence but to present it in a way that is appropriate for and comprehensible to the age group. Students can be presented with realism and bare facts and can be permitted to draw their own conclusions. If anything, students come away from the unit with an overwhelmingly anti-war message. Rather than recoil from and censor all aspects of the brutality of war, a measured and appropriate presentation of the futility of war could be presented to convey a positive and hopeful message. And therein lies the fundamental reason that the inclusion of this unit should be continued: the invitation to subvert and challenge the idea of war. The realities of war are present in contemporary society and although distant from Hong Kong, are constantly in the newspapers and television. Through the study of a major conflict in the U.S. almost 150 years ago, students may apply such learnings to ongoing conflicts in the Middle East,

Iraq and wars to come. To some, the American Civil War is an isolated, glamourized and far-removed story of conflict in a foreign land. The unit provides the opportunity to dispel the myths of war, and in making content and experiences accessible to more students, greater depth of understanding is possible. This understanding can then be used to open discussions into a larger perspective on conflict and human relations.

### Concluding Thoughts

The Civil War unit has been a highly popular and engaging experience for many groups of fifth grade students. It is a source of conversation with former students and anticipation for those yet to come. Donning the military uniform with matching cap for the first time is a proud and celebrated moment, along with marching to the drumbeat with friends and classmates into a gymnasium full of sparkling flashbulbs and beaming parents. Overall, the unit remains a popular and celebrated unit with students and teachers.

The present research project is primarily a phenomenological inquiry into the experience of the Civil War unit. Phenomenological studies, are involved with the complex lifeworlds of individuals, who have varying backgrounds, attitudes and motivations. It explores the question of what it is like to be a child experiencing the unit. The phenomenon of students' experiences of the Civil War unit is not done from an objective, distant perspective but from face to face conversations about specific areas of interest. In the case of this research study, the interest in students' experiences is pedagogical.

We need to constantly question how we should help students experience the unit that is pedagogically sound and constantly ask what is in the best interest for the well being of the students in the present and for their future lives. Pedagogy seeks to attune teaching to the interest of the child, in this case by looking at the child and his/her experience. Pedagogical thoughtfulness involves a certain kind of seeing, of listening and of responding to a particular child in a given situation. In doing so, one involves the child and gives him/her a voice in the discussion and values that voice—especially in pedagogical decision making.

The experiential conversations and the interpretation of the pedagogical significance underlying the study of the unit may provide an important source and opportunity for reflection on the pedagogical questions about the Civil War and its place in the grade five program. Teachers, students, parents, education scholars, test, curriculum developers, education administrators will hopefully benefit from an increased awareness of such student experiences as they seek to address the unit through the child's perspective.

The present study of the students' experiences is hopefully useful in the way that it contributes towards a more comprehensive, thoughtful and sensitive pedagogy of the teaching of the Civil War. Most importantly, the overall research exercise is intended to give voice, value and influence to those who are most directly affected by the efforts and intentions of educators in designing, implementing and evaluating curricula. Students are the most important stakeholders in this process and should be heard in terms of what is actually being taught, learned and experienced, rather than simply what is tested at the

end of the unit. The six participants in the study, even though not representative of the larger student population due to the nature of this study, have been provided an opportunity to voice their opinions and experiences in an important and meaningful way. Their message can now be used to share their experiences to others, in fifth grade and throughout the school, wherever there are individuals involved in creating curricula. As Clark mentions (in Cook-Sather, 2002), “authorizing student perspectives can directly improve educational practice because when teachers listen to and learn from students, they can begin to see the world from the students’ perspectives” (p.3). In listening to these six voices, perhaps what resonates most loudly is that more listening is needed. Each voice provided a unique experience—thoughts, preferences, questions, memories, understandings—that left an impression, whether or not intended by teachers and curriculum designers. In listening to the voices of our students, educators may come to better understand and learn from student experience in order to improve student learning and become better teachers.

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## Appendix A

### Civil War Unit Reflection, Spring 2005

#### What worked well:

Journals

Becky's voice lesson

Essential questions guiding instruction and discussion

Interact – soldier identity, combat cards, points, etc

Uniforms

Videos

Marines and marching

Band

Sepia photos

Read aloud *Pink and Say* (Polacco)

*Shades of Grey* as a read aloud/shared reading

*Fields of Fury*

*Lyddie* as a read aloud

#### What Needs Work:

Hats are too small – can we amend

Literature at appropriate levels

Video clips – could we bookmark these by chapters

## Appendix B

### Assent Form for Children's Participation in the study of Hong Kong Grade Five Students' Lived Experience of a unit on the American Civil War

Dear student:

#### **What do you think about the Civil War unit?**

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project to explore this question. I need to do research as part of my course work at the University of Victoria. The purpose of this study is to look deeply into your experiences – thoughts, impressions, frustrations, learnings and other feelings – of the Civil War unit to describe and better understand how students experience the unit.

By signing below, you agree that you understand that:

- I am not doing this research for myself. This project is for my own courses and has nothing to do with your grades or your report card.
- The activities that you will take part in will be:
  1. To meet with the other students who are also taking part in this study to talk about what we will be doing and the types of questions I may ask you.
  2. To meet with you once a week throughout the unit to record your thoughts (on audio-tape and video-tape at the first session only) about what you have experienced.

I will ask you after each session if you want to continue to be part of the study. You are free to say "yes" or "no" at any time.

- Our sessions will be outside of instructional time with your teacher and that you may be asked to meet before or after school. The total hours of participation should be around 7-8 hours.
- Aside from the first meeting with the other students, no one will know exactly what you share with me; in other words, other students involved in this study may know who you are but not what you say. When I write about you for my teacher, I will change your name so that no one can tell it was you.
- When I am working on my project, all of your information will be kept safe at school, locked up and/or protected by the school's computer system. When I am finished with my project, I will shred any papers with your name on them,

and erase any tape or video recordings with you on them. I will only keep information that will not identify anyone.

- If you don't want to take part in the study, you can just say "no". It won't matter to your school grades or your report card if you do say no. Even if your parents want you to take part in the study but you don't want to, you don't have to.
- You can change your mind any time if you don't want to take part in the study later. It won't matter to your school grades or your report card if you change your mind. If you change your mind, tell me that you don't want to be part of the study anymore. Then I will ask you what you (and your parents) want me to do with the information you have shared with me. You may allow me to use the information gathered so far in my project, or not use at all and destroy all data.

If you understand all of these things and you want to take part in the study, talk to your parents first and then together please sign below. You can ask me any questions you have now or later if you think of more. You will get to keep a copy of this form and I will get one.

If you or your parents have any concerns about the ethics of this study, you can speak to my teacher, Mr. David Blades, at [dblades@uvic.ca](mailto:d blades@uvic.ca) 1-250-721-7775, or to the University of Victoria Associate Vice-President of Research, at 1-250-472-4362 or [ovprhe@uvic.ca](mailto:ovprhe@uvic.ca). You can also speak to me or call me at 2806-2576.

Thank you for your help with this study.

Sincerely,

Mr. Gene Cheh

Your signature below indicates that you understand that this is for Mr. Cheh's study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

A copy of this Assent letter will be returned to you to take home, and the original will be kept by Mr. Cheh.

## Appendix C

### Request for Parental/Guardian Consent Hong Kong Grade Five Students' Lived Experience of a unit on the American Civil War

Project Summary: What is the students' lived experience of the Civil War unit?

In my research to explore this question for my thesis project for my Master's Degree in Curriculum Studies through the University of Victoria, I would like to work with a number of grade five students at HKIS. Much time and effort has been given by our school in designing and implementing curricula that is meaningful, challenging and aligned to national standards. The purpose of the study is to determine and describe the actual thoughts, impressions, feelings and learnings of students and to ascertain to what extent our intended outcomes are realized, as well as reveal unintended outcomes.

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Dear parent:

This letter is to request permission to work with your child. Participants will take part in a preliminary session to meet the other participants and allow me to introduce the project and orient the group to the form and format of future sessions. Subsequently, I will work with each participant individually to ask about his or her thoughts of the unit as it progresses. I anticipate a total of 7-8 hours of non-instructional time. The preliminary session and individual interviews will be audio-taped and the first session video-taped as well (to clarify and ensure the accuracy of each student's comments). These activities will be spread out over the course of the Civil War unit (January 16 – March 10, 2006). The conversations will take place in a classroom that is free from other students and/or school activities.

Your child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary. I assure you that you and your child are under no pressure to participate. If you choose for your child to participate, please return this consent form to your child's homeroom teacher. There are no known or anticipated risks to your child by participating in this study. However, in order not to affect or disturb instructional time, participants will be asked to meet outside of class time (i.e. before school, recesses, after school) at mutually convenient times. Your child can withdraw at any time, without consequence or explanation. If you or your child chooses to withdraw, I will not use your child's results gathered up to that point without your written permission. During the study, your child will have the right to not answer any questions that he or she does not want to. After each conversation session, I will ask your child if he or she is still willing to continue with the study. A permission slip will return home to you to sign if you or your child wish to withdraw after any session.

All of the data gathered during the study will be kept confidential. Each child will be assigned an alternate name for their information to be recorded under, so that they cannot be identified through the study results. During the course of the study, all data gathered will be kept locked in a storage cabinet at school. After I have defended my thesis, any recorded interviews will be recorded over or destroyed, and any papers that might serve to identify your child will be shredded. Data that your child cannot be identified from may be kept by the researcher for future writing. However, since your child will be meeting in a preliminary session with the other participants, complete anonymity is not possible.

Your child's results will not be reflected in his/her school records, nor will they influence his/her marks in any way, as my role as researcher will not affect your child's homeroom teacher. Likewise, if you choose not to allow your child to participate, it will have no impact on your child's school grades or assessment.

The results of my research will be presented in my written thesis dissertation, and possibly in several articles to be submitted to social studies and general education journals. You will be given an opportunity to read any document arising from this study prior to publication for your information; and a summary of my findings will be distributed to all participants upon completion of the study.

I am carrying out this study under the supervision of Dr. David Blades. He can be reached at 1-250-721- 7775, or at [dblades@uvic.ca](mailto:d blades@uvic.ca). You can contact me at 2806-2576 or [gcheh@hkis.edu.hk](mailto:gcheh@hkis.edu.hk). You may also verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns that you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research, at the University of Victoria at 1-250-472-4362 or [ovprhe@uvic.ca](mailto:ovprhe@uvic.ca).

Thank you for your help with this study.

Sincerely,

Gene Cheh  
Project Researcher and Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

A copy of this consent form will be returned to you and the original kept by Gene Cheh

## Appendix D

### School Administrator's Consent Form for the Action Research Study Hong Kong Grade Five Students' Lived Experience of a unit on the American Civil War

You are being asked to approve a study to be conducted at your school entitled "Hong Kong Grade Five Students' Lived Experience of a unit on the American Civil War." This study is being conducted by Mr. Gene Cheh, a graduate student in the department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by phone 2806-2576 or e-mail at [gcheh@hkis.edu.hk](mailto:gcheh@hkis.edu.hk)

Dear Mr. Handrich:

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters degree in Education (Curriculum Studies). This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. David Blades who can be reached at 1-250-721-7775 or [dblades@uvic.ca](mailto:dblades@uvic.ca).

As you know, much time and effort has been given by our school in designing and implementing curricula that is meaningful, challenging and aligned to national standards. The purpose of the study is to determine and describe the actual thoughts, impressions, feelings and learnings of students and to ascertain to what extent our intended outcomes are realized, as well as reveal unintended outcomes. One of the most popular units in the fifth grade curriculum involves the study of the American Civil War. In addition to the excitement and wonderful memories created, I wish to examine and describe the students' lived experience of the unit. By approving this project, educators will develop a greater understanding of the actual effects, intended and unintended, of a particular unit of study. These findings can be used to help shape and improve this and other units and courses.

Grade five students in the other 8 homerooms are being asked to participate in this study because they are the students who engage in learning about the Civil War. Conversations will be held with individual students before, during and upon completion of the unit. Audio-tape and video-tape recordings will be made of the group and individual conversations. Transcripts will be made, and verified, of student responses and analyzed for themes before implications and recommendations can be made.

Participation in this study poses little or no harm, other than the inconvenience of students' non-instructional time, namely before or after school. A total of 7-8 hours per student is anticipated to complete the gathering of research. Since the selection of participants will be on a voluntary basis, the time commitment will be

stated clearly in communications with students and parents. Meeting times will be scheduled flexibly around students' other commitments and activities.

The potential benefits of conducting this research at our school may include the participants' increased level of understanding into their own learning, as well as any potential growth in self-confidence as a result of providing opinions that will be invaluable towards the research and improving curriculum.

The students' participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If they do decide to participate, their participation means that they will give me permission to use their comments as data for my study. Know that the students may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or any explanation - a participant need only to tell his or her homeroom teacher or me. If a student withdraws from the study, I will seek the consent of the student and parent(s) to use the data collected up to that point. If consent is not received or denied, I will destroy all data collected from the student.

During this research study my role will be as the researcher as I am not the participants' homeroom teacher. To prevent any conflict of interest, I will not include my own homeroom students in the pool of potential and actual participants.

The students' anonymity and the confidentiality of the data collected for this research project will also be protected. Their names will not appear in any part of the project, even the final copy. Instead, they will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used instead. Our school name will also have a pseudonym. All data including the consent letters, written notes, student recordings and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet and upon completion of my thesis defense will be destroyed. Any computer files I have regarding this project will also be erased. Only unidentifiable student data may be kept for future writing.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with other teachers. The final draft of the project will be bound and available to teachers and student teachers-in-training at the University of Victoria's Curriculum Library. I may also present my findings to the school, at educational and research conferences, and publish these findings.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above contact information, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria at 1-250-472-4362 or [ovprhe@uvic.ca](mailto:ovprhe@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above nature and conditions of this study, you approve of this study, and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by my university supervisor, Dr. David Blades or myself.

Sincerely,

Mr. Gene Cheh  
Project Researcher and Grade 5 Teacher  
Hong Kong International School

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Administrator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E

### Prompts for Student Conversations

Prior to the beginning of the unit:

1. What are your thoughts about the upcoming S.S. unit on CW?
2. What have you heard about the CW unit?
3. What you know about the CW?
4. What are you looking forward to?
5. What do you want to learn?
6. What is peace? What is war?

Each week:

1. Tell me about what happened this week.
2. What did you like the best?
3. What didn't you like?
4. What did you learn?
5. Rate the CW activities this week?
6. Think of a specific event that you participated in this week. Tell me about <the event> as descriptively as you can.

After the completion of the unit:

1. What did you think of the unit?
2. What was your favourite part?
3. What parts did you not enjoy?
4. What did you learn?
5. What would you tell a 4th grader about the CW?
6. What are the most important things you learn about the unit?
7. Have your views on war and peace changed?
8. Choose your favourite moment in the unit. Tell me about it in as much detail as you can.

To further the conversation:

1. What was it like?
  2. Who said what?
  3. Why this event?
  4. In what way?
  5. Can you give an example?
  6. What did it feel like?
- (repeat the last thing that was mentioned) to proceed