Constructivist Approach: Improving Social Studies Skills Academic Achievement

Kimeko McCray

Marygrove College

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master's in Special Education

Table of Contents

Page

Title Page

Table of Contents ……..……. *i*

Abstract…… 4

Chapter 1: Introduction …… 5

1. Statement of research problem …… 5

2. Element of the problem …… 5

3. Purpose of study …… 6

4. Definition of terms ……. 7

5. Research question ……... 9

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ……. 10

1. Literature Review ……... 10

Chapter 3: Methodology …….. 17

1. Research design …… 17

2. Theoretical framework …… 17

3. Sampling ……... 17

4. Variables …….. 18

5. Methods of data collected ……. 18

6. Data analysis procedures …….. 18

7. Ethics and human relations …….. 19

8. Timeline …… 20

9. Summary …….. 20

10. Reference ……..… 17

Chapter IV ……... 21

1. Data Analysis …….. 21

2. Data Summary …… 48

Chapter V …… 51

1. Summary ……. 51

2. Conclusions ……. 51

3. Recommendations …….. 52

References …… 54

Appendix A – Questionnaire …… 56

Appendix B – Informed Consent Form …… 59

Appendix C – Approval Request Form …… 60

Abstract

This report describes a program designed to enhance social studies skills and knowledge. The target areas for enhancement are geography, economics, history, and core democratic values. The need for strengthening these skills was documented by literature, and surveys. An analysis of probable cause for lack of social studies skills reveled that Constructivist technique may improve students' academic performance and achievement. Social and Cognitive Constructivist learning methods were the main focus of the interventions chosen to help students to achieve higher academic achievement Post-intervention data upheld the premise to what extent that these strategies would serve to raise the students skills and understandings in the area of social studies and community. A qualitative research and action research design will be used in a survey sampling 25 teachers between the ages of 25 and 50 years old throughout the Southeast Michigan, including urban and suburban schools.

Chapter I: Introduction

Problem Statement

There is evidence of an exisisting problem in teaching social studies at the elementary and secondary levels. According to the Michigan Social Studies Journal many students lack social studies skills, which cause the students to achieve low scores on standardized state test, such as the MEAP. Students do not understand or retain succinct knowledge. Many researchers, host many discussion and writings about why social studies is important and how it should be taught, have caused further conflict among educators. No one answer to the problems was found. However many researchers suggest that a constructivist method could improve students social studies skills.

Element of the Problem

The philosophy for many teachers is to create an environment that is conducive to learning. The teachers' main focus is to bring out the best academic achievement performance by their pupils. As a result the teacher may use various methods to reach those goals. Whiteside (2000) conclude that some teachers fall short when it comes to choosing a method that will activate prior knowledge and implement new found knowledge.

Jafallah (2000) identifies that education is experience. Students need to learn how to learn. Subject matter needs to be made meaningful and relevant to the learner. Education is life-long learning. Learning is building upon students'

prior knowledge. Learning is constructing meaning from experience. These statements have become standard expressions that teachers use to explain the meaning of constructivism. But what do they really mean? How do teachers translate them into meaningful social studies learning experiences? Because of the difference perspectives about what constructivism means and how it is translated into classroom practices, the qualitative research will clarify some major distinctions. First, a very significant issue is the nature of knowledge. Historically, this issue has been associated with the distinctions between Piagetian cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's social constructivism. Also, these variables will be measured to determine how they might contribute to improving social studies skills and enhance overall academic achievement. These constructs are

1. Teacher factors: social constructivism, cognitive constructivism, to what extent does it improve social studies skills
2. Other sub-variable: surveys

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the relationship to constructivism as it relates to improving social studies skills and to determine whether constructivism is the best approach to take in improving social studies skills. Therefore, the researcher will extend on previous research to explain the relationship between constructivism approach and improving academic achievement in social studies.

Definition of Terms

In the spirit of all concern, in this study, this researcher elects to use the following descriptions of the variables as explained by previous researchers.

Constructivism- is a method of instruction based on a descriptive theory about the thought process involved in learning. Constructivism views learning as a process in which the learner actively constructs or builds new ideas on concepts based upon current and past knowledge. In other words, "learning involves constructing one's own knowledge from one's own experience.

Cognitive Constructivism- is about how the individual learner understands things, in terms of developmental stages and learning styles. Piaget (1929) Cognitive constructivism is based on the idea that knowledge is constructed and made meaningful through an individual's interactions and the analyses of the environment. In that sense, knowledge is constructed on the minds of the individual

Social Constructivism- emphasizes how meaning and understanding grow out of social encounters. Vygotsky (1978) From the Vogotskian perspective, social interaction with the teacher and other students are a significant part of the learning process. Knowledge is not solely constructed within the mind of the individual; rather, interactions within a social content involve the learner in sharing, constructing, and reconstructing their ideas and beliefs

Constructivism in the Curriculum- Constructivism calls for the elimination of standardized curriculum. Instead, it promotes using curricula customized to the student's prior knowledge. Also, it emphasizes hands-on problem solving

Constructivism Instruction: Educators focus on making connections between facts and fostering new understanding in students. Instructors tailor their teaching strategies to student responses and encourage students to analyze, interpret, and predict information. Teachers also rely on open-ended questions and promote extensive dialogue among students.

Assessment in Constructivism: The elimination of grades and standardized testing. Instead, assessment becomes part of the learning process so that students play a larger role in judging their own progress.

Research Questions

Based on the conjectural framework, there are interconnected variables of constructs that indicate that various methods of constructivism can improve social studies skills and overall academic achievement. The primary research questions are: "What is constructivism?" "Are Constructivism Methods effective or ineffective?" "And to what extent does constructivism contribute to increasing students' academic achievement and skills in social studies".

Chapter II:

Literature Review

The Michigan Curriculum Framework: Content Standards and Draft Benchmarks (1996) view social studies as "The integrated study of the social sciences to prepare young people to become responsible citizens.

This chapter will review the literature of several researchers who have studied the relationship and provided evidence that Constructivism Approach to learning is proven to be most effective when improving social studies skills. In addition, the researchers have provided useful information, strategies and techniques that will enhance overall higher academic achievement for students. The teacher will also have fun implementing recommended strategies. A few definitions will help began the process. Constructivist is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own rules and mental models, which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

Various Forms of Constructivism

Hoagland (2000) advocates that applying constructivist concepts to the teaching of social studies can revolutionize the learning environment, and perhaps recapture the joy of learning that is central to human nature. There are

many versions of constructivism that can alter educational approaches called radical and social constructivism. The two in particular have had a major impact on educational theories.

Radical Constructivism

Hoagland (2000) the first and oldest is known as radical constructivism. It directly comes from Piaget. It focuses on the individual. Piaget saw real learning as happening when an individual came into contact with a new idea that was in conflict with the previous idea, the dissonance between the two ideas forces the individual to actively reexamine their worldview and construct a new one. (Scheurman a, 8). The key role of the teacher is to promote analytical or scientific thinking by creating situations where students have to solve problems that challenge their current way of thinking.

Social Constructivism

Hoagland (2000) Social constructivism comes from the ideas of Vygotsky. Social constructivist holds that the social context of learning is at least as important as what happens in the mind of an individual. By interacting with Others we come to a public understanding and shared sense of what information is right and what is wrong. With social constructivist, group interaction is the key.

McKay (2000) the teachers role is to be a collaborator who participants with the children in constructing reality by engaging in open-ended inquiry that elicits and addresses students misperceptions the teacher interacts with the

students to come to new understandings. Group work and class discussions are the critical activities in a classroom.

How Constructivism Impacts Learning

McKay (2000) suggests that Curriculum- Constructivism calls for elimination of standardized curriculum. Instead, it promotes using curricula customized to the students' prior knowledge. Also, it emphasizes hands-on problem solving.

Brooks & Brooks (1993) advocates that Instruction- Under the theory of constructivism, educators focus on making connections between facts and fostering new understanding in students. Instructors tailor their teaching strategies to student responses and encourage students to analyze, interpret, and predict information. Teachers also rely heavily on open-ended questions and promote extensive dialogue among students.

McKay (2000) also mentioned Assessment- constructivism calls for the elimination of grades and standardized testing. Instead, assessment becomes part of the learning process so that the students play a larger role in judging their own progress.

Teaching Students with Constructivism

Steele (2005) suggests that learning should be meaningful and related to real life situations. For example In social studies, students could role play as lawyers, judge, and jury for a simulated court case or conduct an election for classroom leaders instead of memorizing the related procedures and policies. In

essence teachers following a constructivist perspective base their instructions on what the student already knows as a foundation. Another principle underlying the constructivist approach is to focus on key ideas and the relationship of these ideas within the subject area. For instance, in social studies themes such as conflict and diversity might be used to teach units on warfare, exploration, and government at many different grade levels.

Duhaney & Duhaney, (2000) advises that active learning is an important facet of a constructivist approach to instruction. When students are actively involved in the lesson, they learn and retain the information. Therefore it is Highly recommended that teacher assign projects involving maps and posters, planning trips and routes as motivators for students.

Cognitive view of Constructivism

McKay (2000) the cognitive view of constructivism, exemplified by Piaget, posits that people develop universal forms of structures of knowledge that enable them to experience reality. Knowledge is individually constructed and is based on the knower's intellectual development as she experiences reality during physical and social activity. In cognitive constructivism, the teacher's role as a facilitator is pose problems that challenge children's conceptions of reality.

Constructivist Applications

Lucks (1999) Constructivist learning activity lesson focus on explanations and answers to problems or questions. The explanations and answers come from the learners, not the teacher, and derive from content representation and social

interaction. The teacher helps students construct knowledge by guiding their social interaction and providing content representation. Students are given autonomy and control to work on their own. Students develop an understanding that makes sense to them. Students also acquire understandings that can be applied to their everyday world. Constructivist lessons are intrinsically motivating because they simulate curiosity; keep learners actively involved, autonomous and controlling of what they learn. This also increases motivation, which results in children learning more.

Lucks (1999) teachers must know how to intervene to guide the lesson in the direction of the content goal. They also need to know when to provide additional representation of the topic, like when children are having a lot of trouble on a topic. It is very important to have proper timing on when to bring a lesson to a closure.

Benefits to Constructivism

Lucks (1999) were surveyed teachers in New York, Delaware, and Maryland and asked their opinion on constructivist teaching and why? Many teachers that were surveyed said, "Constructivism is great in the special education inclusion class. It leads itself to higher order thinking and cooperative learning strategies. It enhances relevance." "This method sways a teacher to become more organized." "It is a great tool for teaching math productively. It is a great tool in kindergarten for developmental learning."

Limitations to Constructivism

Ayers and Frazee (2000) All forms of constructivism are ineffective because they focus on how social studies should be taught in elementary classrooms rather than on the content knowledge that should be the centerpiece for teaching and learning. All serve to emphasize the social aspect of teaching and learning with little recognition of the importance of content knowledge in the teaching process. In short everyone is caught up in structuring a learning environment no one gives much thought to what is or is not actually learned. What about elementary school-aged children have limited experiences and knowledge and few are mature enough to determine what they need to learn.

Lucks (1999) there are a lot of work for teachers who use constructivism approach in the classroom. Constructivism is not effective all own its own. Children need modeling and examples to learn effectively. Constructivism is not good when you have to worry about standards and pacing.

Hoagland (2000) when an educator adopts a constructivist approach for an entire course, it radically alters their approach to teaching. Properly planning and conducting constructivist approaches is considerably different than objectivist type lesson. They also typically require more time to conduct. But the return on this investment can be considerable.

Hoagland (2000) when a teacher is contemplating a lesson, they must take the objective into consideration. The first step in the process is deciding whether the goals for a lesson really fit a constructivist approach. Not every goal can be met through constructivism. Lessons meant to transfer straightforward

information aren't good subject matter for constructivism. But if a lesson focuses on higher order thinking and understanding a concept in greater depth, a constructivist approach can serve very well.

Hoagland (2000) One of the key concepts in constructivism from Piaget is the idea of dissonance. A powerful lesson can be based around the creation of dissonance, or friction, between what students think they know and new information. Not every constructivist lesson has to include explicit sources of dissonance, but this is a very useful technique. It is especially useful in shorter lessons that take one class period or less.

Ayers and Frazee (2000) The key ingredient for constructed meaning is content knowledge. Without such knowledge, it is impossible for students to engage in the higher order thinking and critical analysis that purveyors of constructivism claim as the goal of this method. Constructivism has no value to the standard movement without the acknowledgement of the importance of building and increasing a substantive and meaningful content base.

Ayers and Frazee (2000) As long as social studies leaders tolerate the expanding environments curriculum and promote social constructivism without emphasizing content knowledge, the situation is unlikely to improve.

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Design

For the purpose of this qualitative and action research design, is to determine to what extent the participants agree or disagree with the findings that are presented in the review of literature.

Theoretical Framework

According to Brooks & Brooks (1993) there have been many studies addressing the issues as to which method a teacher should use to improve students skills and overall academic achievement from curricula to instruction there have been many suggestions and few were taken into considerations.

In effort to reflect how adopting constructivist methods can improve social studies skills and overall academic achievement. The researchers will use a Likert Scale Survey to measure the findings. Therefore, this study will explain if constructivist approach is the key to enhancing social studies skills and overall academic achievement.

Sampling

The researcher will select teachers located in the urban and suburban area of Southeastern, Michigan. A total of 25 teachers will be used in the proposed study. The phenomenon that the researchers wish to study is the degree of similarity between the theories-in-action of several social studies teachers at

urban and suburban area school, and its effect of any variation on constructivism.

Variables

The independent variable will be constructivist approach and the amount of teacher and student collaboration in utilizing the constructivist approach in the classroom. The two dependent variables will be the students' knowledge of social studies. The second dependent variable is an improvement in social studies skills. The data collection and analysis will focus on the curriculum and the constructivism teaching method each teacher uses to teach social studies.

Method of Data Collection

The data will be generated using a survey questionnaire on a five point Likert scale, which will use a scale of 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3), undecided 4) disagree and 5) strongly disagree. Numerical values will be assigned to each category.

A teacher's survey sheet will be distributed only to teachers who participate in the research. Each participant will be assigned a number. Each of the questionnaires will be numbered and each teacher will be required to use the same form. All instruments will be maintained for confidentiality of participants. Last, using the survey designed for the study will test face validity.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher will use reflective analysis to analyze the data. The researchers will assess the degree of agreement between the theories in action,

and the potential impact of any observed disagreements on students learning. Once the data has been generate, the researcher will assemble the data using an interpretational analysis and design a chart using Excel with tally marks to indicate the responses. The researcher will show the actual data for each social studies class on each variable. Product-moment correlation coefficient will be calculated to determine the degree of relationship between the independent and dependent variables

Ethnics & Human Relations

All participants will be informed of the risk that may accompany them during the research process; however, the researcher will take the following precautions to ensure the safeguard of all participants in the study. All participants' rights will be protected in the following ways: they will be assured that their responses will be kept confidential and no names will be used in the report; the participants will be told that they can terminate their participation at any time; the participants will be assured that their individual responses will not be shared with others under any circumstances. Permission will be obtained by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Marygrove College and all necessary precautions will be taken for the protections of Human Rights for all participants. Parents of the students participating will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the study.

Timeline

The proposed timeline for the research with the survey will be conducted in Late October and the survey ending in Mid November of the school year. The researcher may conduct another survey at the end of November.

Summary

Based on the review of literature, the researcher will investigate whether constructivism improves test scores and overall academic achievement. Also, the literature review of several researchers who have studied the relationship and provided evidence that Constructivism Approach to learning has proven to be most effective when improving social studies skills. In addition, the researchers have provided useful information, strategies and techniques that will enhance overall higher academic achievement for students. The teacher will also have fun implementing recommended strategies that will enhance their academic performance in their social studies class. Furthermore, this proposed research would provide teachers with constructive ideas could be utilized to enhance their overall comprehension and academic performance in social studies.

Chapter IV: Survey Results

Data Analysis

Twenty-Five statements encompass the survey distributed to twenty-five certified teachers in the urban and suburban area of Southeastern, Michigan that teach Social Studies. Of the twenty-five surveys that were distributed, 20 were completed and returned. The survey statements were design to assess the level of teacher's agreement with the following questions.

1. What is constructivism?
2. Are constructivism methods effective or ineffective?
3. To what extent does constructivism contribute to increasing students' academic achievement and skills in social studies?

The following is a breakdown of the twenty responses for each of the twenty-five survey statements. Each of the twenty-five statements will illustrate with a corresponding graph and pie chart. The pie charts represent the total percentage and the total number of responses. The graphs present an illustration of the number of response for each of the five categories of the Likert Scale (SA = Strongly Agree, A= Agree, U= Undecided, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree)

Data analysis revealed the following to question # 1 when asked the following: "The teacher's role is to facilitate students learning by challenging a student's reality through active experiences and the creation of new ideas." The following bar graph and the pie graph illustrate the results. Look at Figure 1(a) and 1(b)

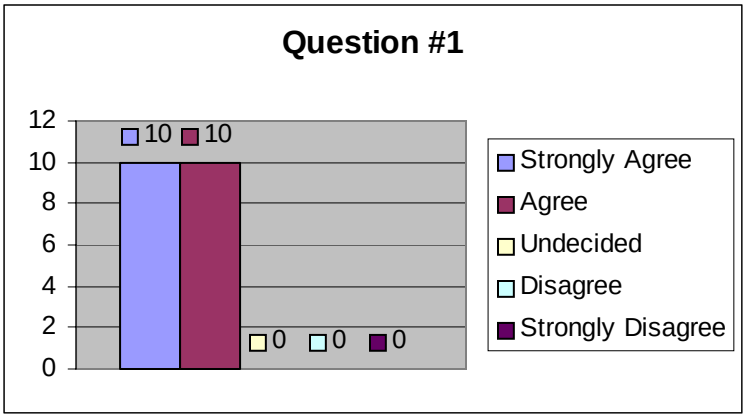

Figure 1(a)

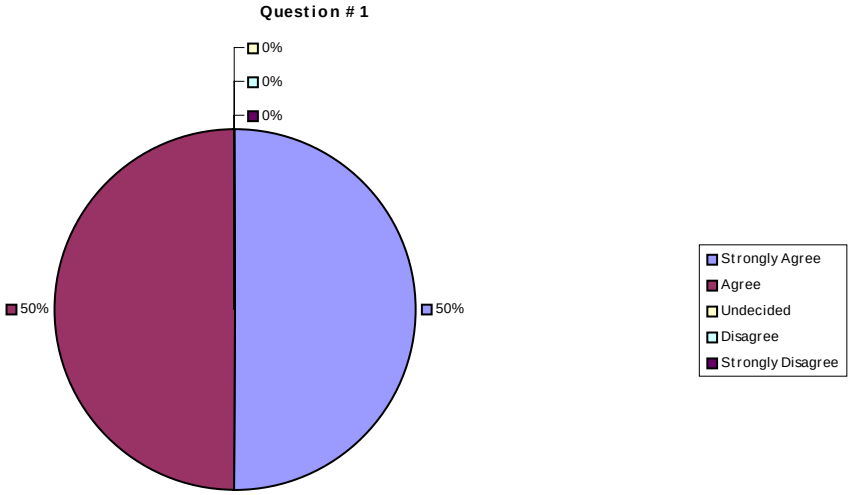

Figure 1(b)

Fifty percent strongly agree with question #1. The other fifty percent agree with question # 1 also. Zero percent were undecided, disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Data analysis revealed the following when analyzing the question #2, "Cognitive development facilitates learning through actively involving the learner. The following bar graph and the pie graph illustrate the results. Look at Figure 2(a) and 2(b).

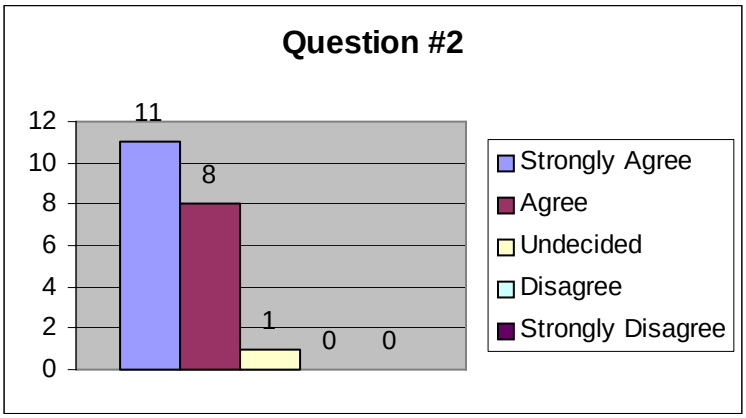

Figure 2(a)

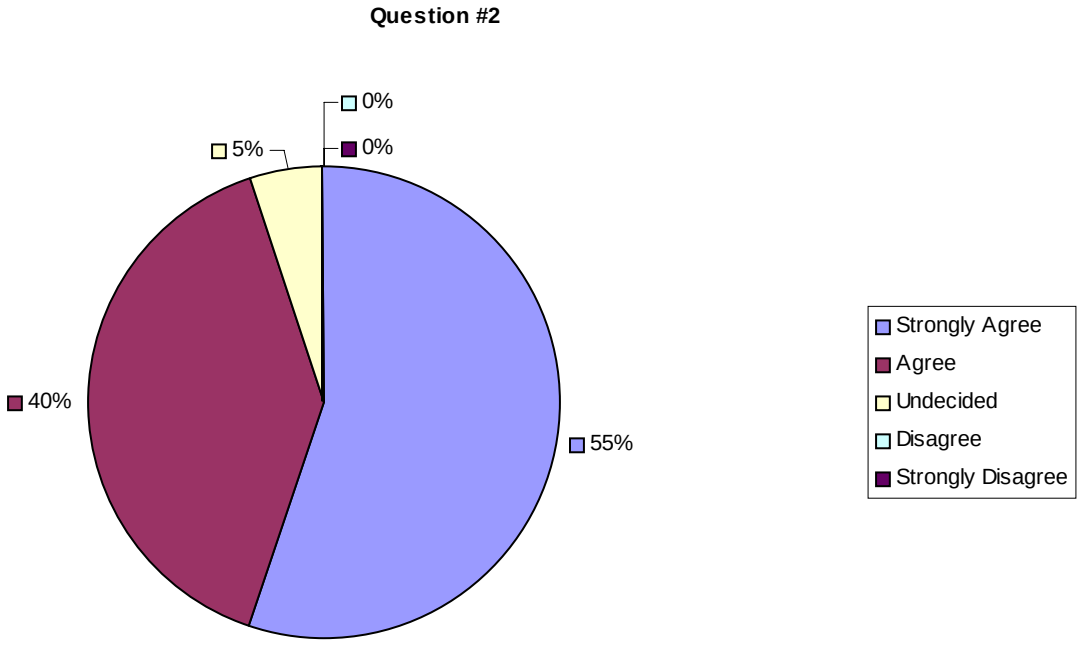

Figure 2(b)

The researcher discovered that fifty-five percent strongly agreed with question # 2. Forty percent agree with question # 2. Only five percent were undecided and zero percent disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Data analysis revealed the following to question #3, "Constructivism will improve social studies skills." The researcher discovered the following. Both the bar and pie graph will reflect the findings. Look at Figure 3(a) and 3(b).

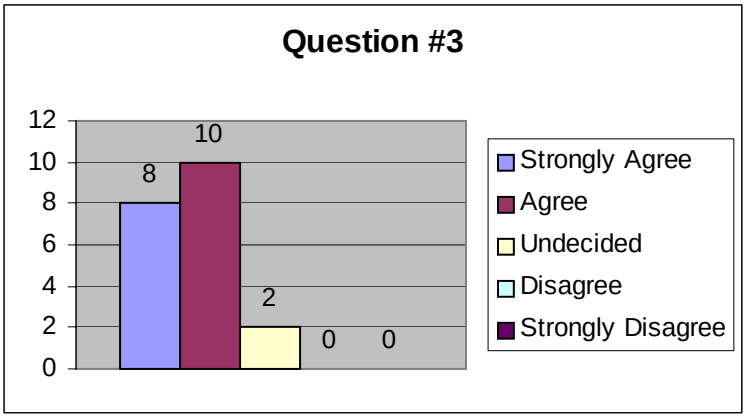

Figure 3(a)

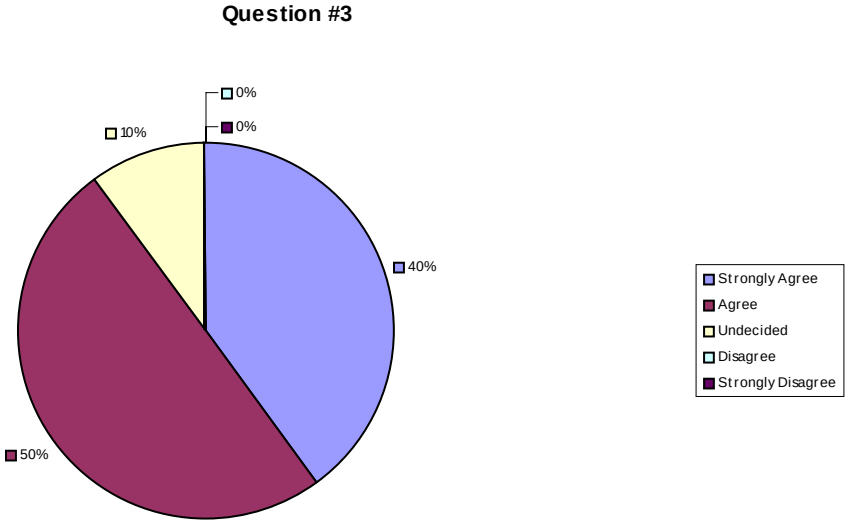

Figure 3(b)

The researcher discovered that forty percent strongly agreed with question #3. Fifty percent agree with question # 3. Ten percent were undecided. Zero percent disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Data analysis revealed the following to question #4, "Cognitive development facilitates learning through actively involving the learner. The following bar graph and the pie graph illustrate the results. Look at Figure 4(a) and 4(b)

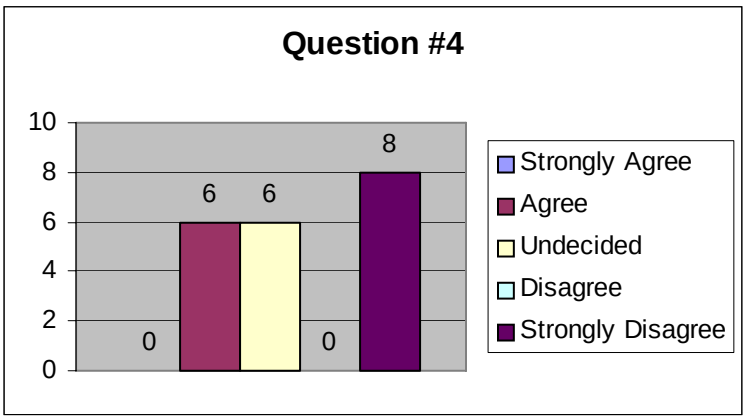

Figure 4(a)

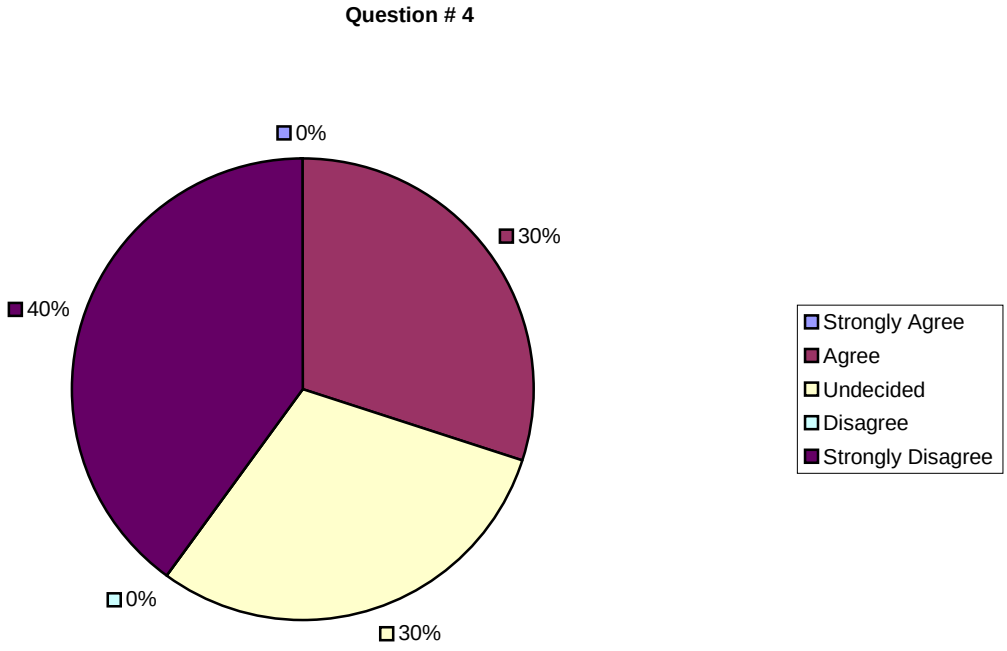

Figure 4(b)

The researcher discovered that zero percent strongly agreed with question #4. Thirty percent agreed with question # 4. Thirty percent were undecided. Zero percent disagree with question # 4 and forty percent strongly agree with question # 4.

Data analysis revealed the following to question #5. "I use various forms of constructivism in my classroom." The researcher discovered the following finding. Both the bar and pie graph will reflect these findings. Look at Figure 5(a) and 5(b).

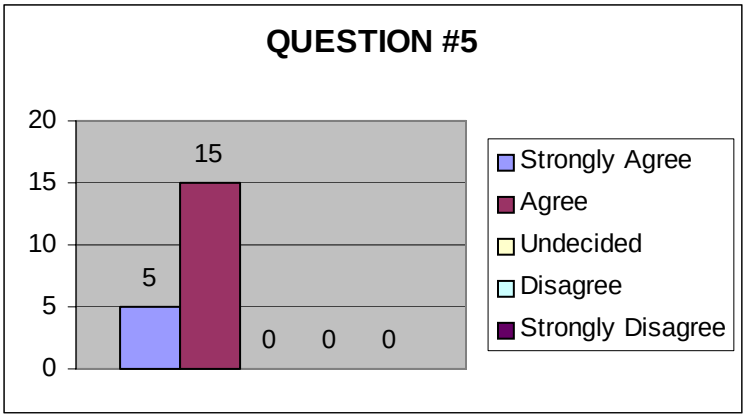

Figure 5(a)

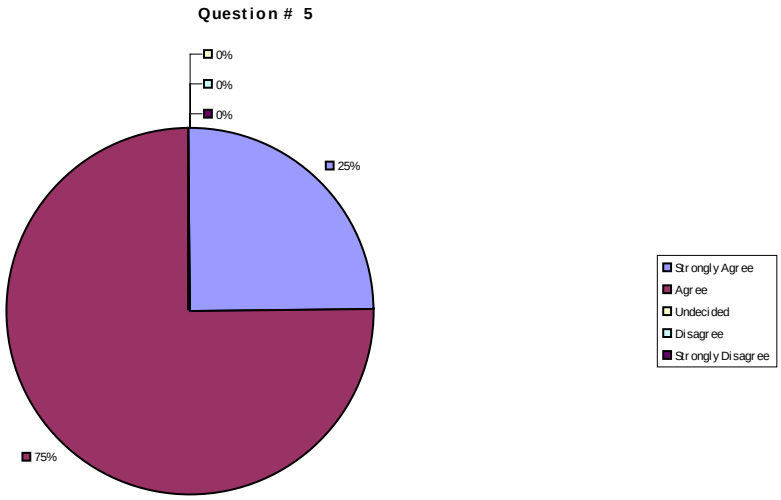

Figure 5(b)

The researcher discovered that twenty-five percent strongly agree with question #5. A monstrous seventy-five agree with question #5. Zero percent are undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree with question # 5.

Data analysis revealed the following to question # 6. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that they will never use any form of constructivism in their classroom. Look at Figure 6(a) and 6(b) for results.

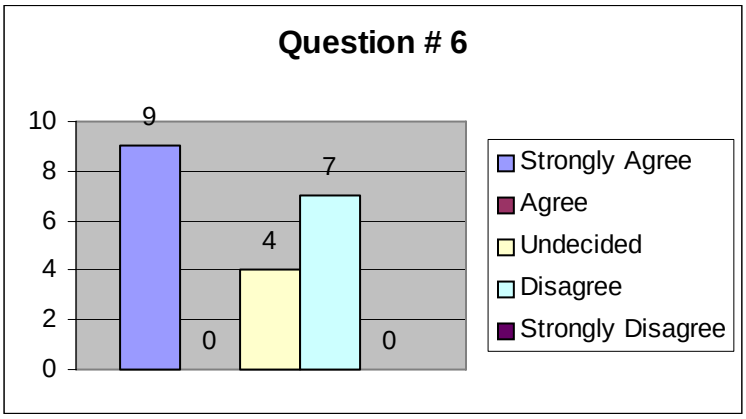

Figure 6(a)

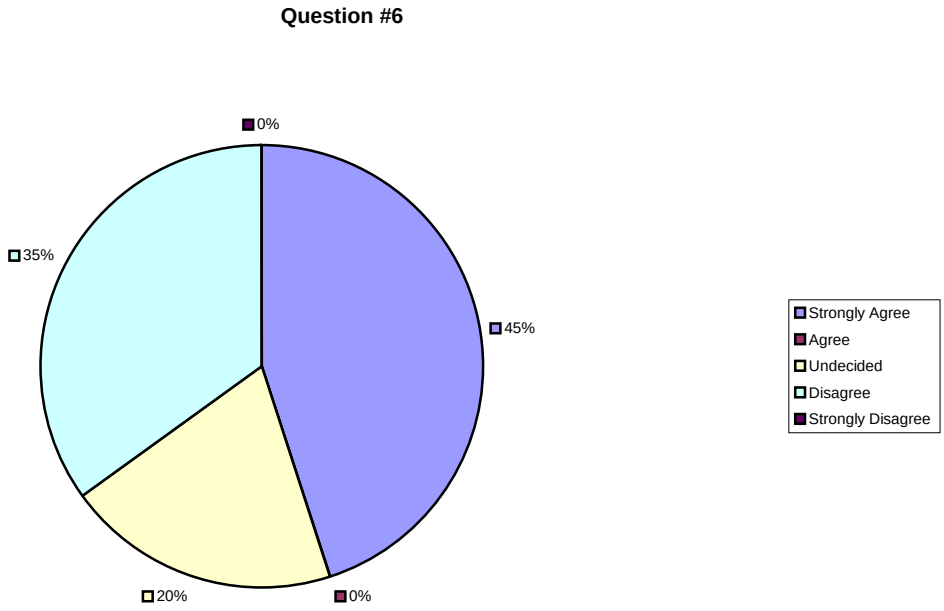

Figure 6(b)

Statement six received nine strongly agree (45%), zero agree (0%), four were undecided (20%), seven disagree (35%), and zero strongly agree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following in question # 7. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that their student's social studies skills improve when they activate prior knowledge. Look at Figure 7(a) and 7(b) for the results.

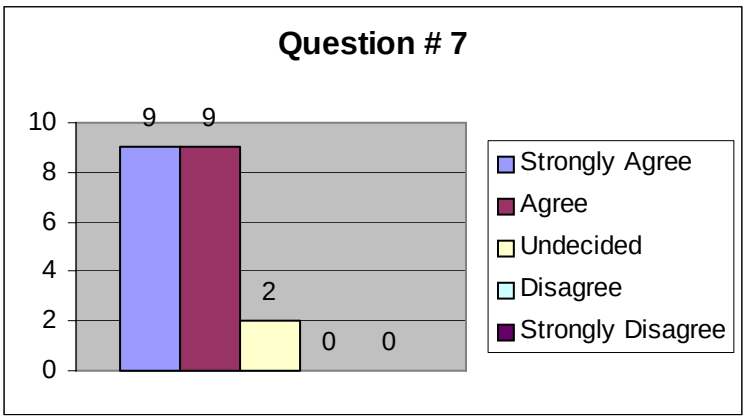

Figure 7(a)

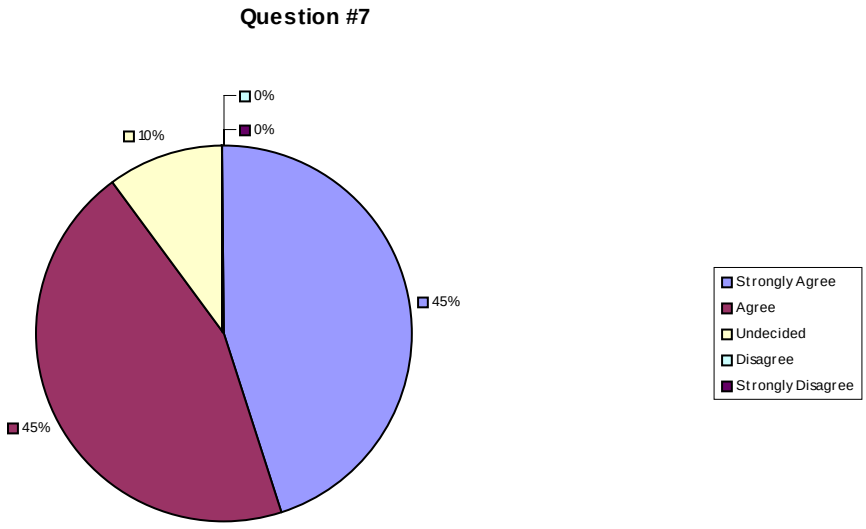

Figure 7(b)

Statement seven received nine strongly agree (45%), nine also agree (45%), two were undecided (10%), zero disagree (0%) and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question # 8. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that their student's social studies skills do not improve when they activate prior knowledge. Look at Figure 8(a) and 8(b) for the results.

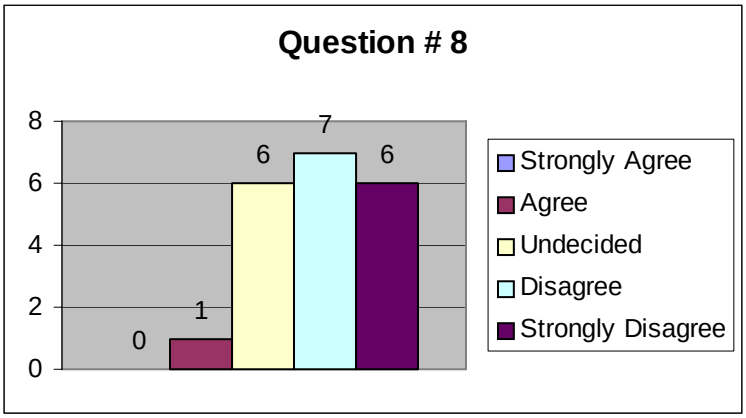

Figure 8(a)

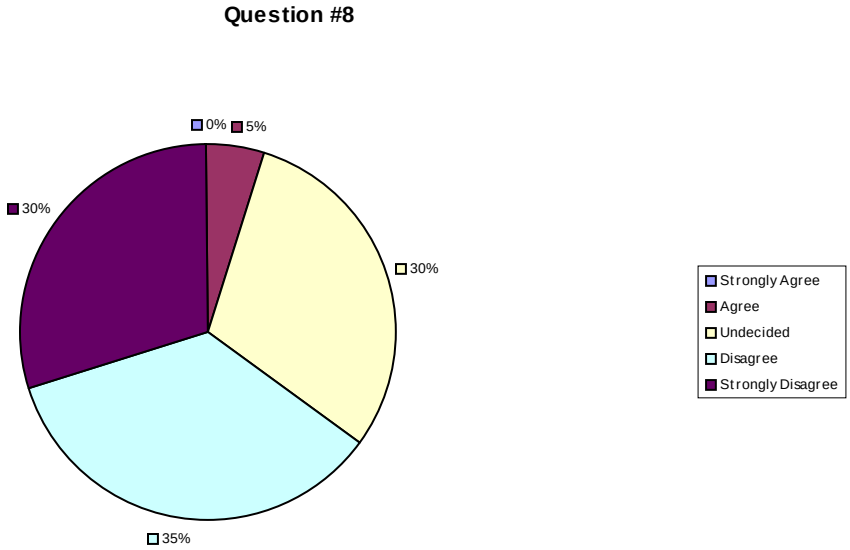

Figure 8(b)

Statement eight received zero strongly agree (0%), one agree (5%), six were undecided (30%), seven disagree (35%), and six strongly disagree (30%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #9. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that their students learn best from content-based lectures. Look at Figure 9(a) and 9(b) for the results.

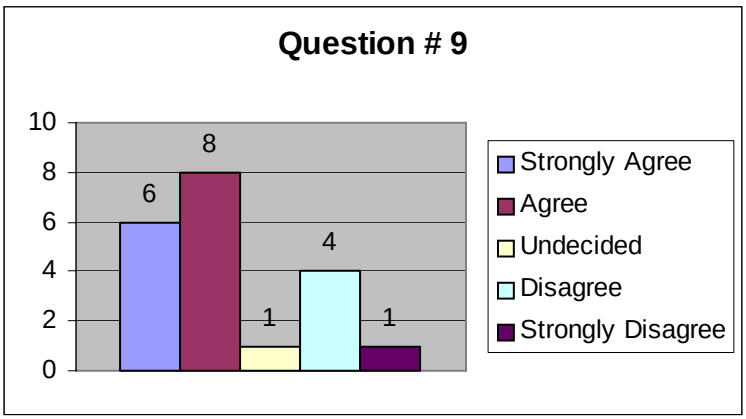

Figure 9(a)

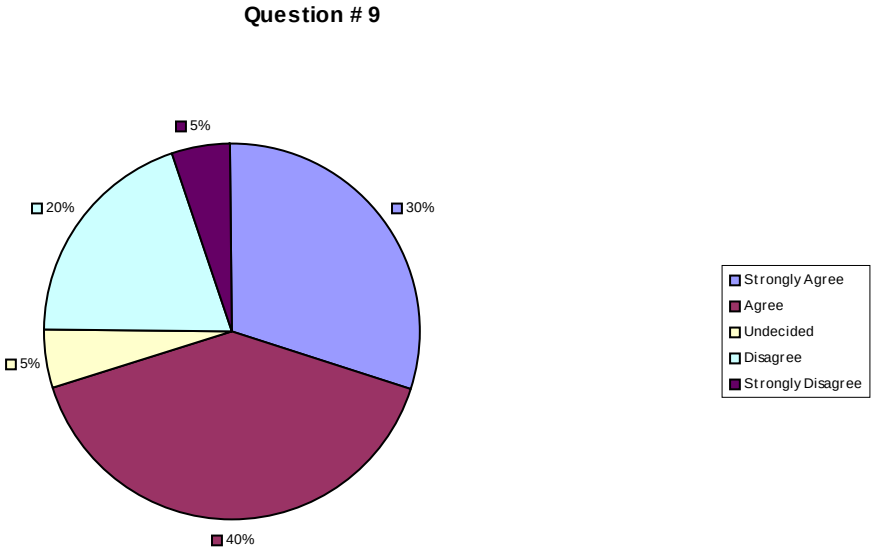

Figure 9(b)

Statement nine received six strongly agree (30%), eight agree (40%), one was undecided (5%), four disagree (20%), and one strongly disagree (5%)

Data analysis revealed the following to question # 10. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that their students do not learn from content-based lectures. Look at Figures 10(a) and 10(b) for results.

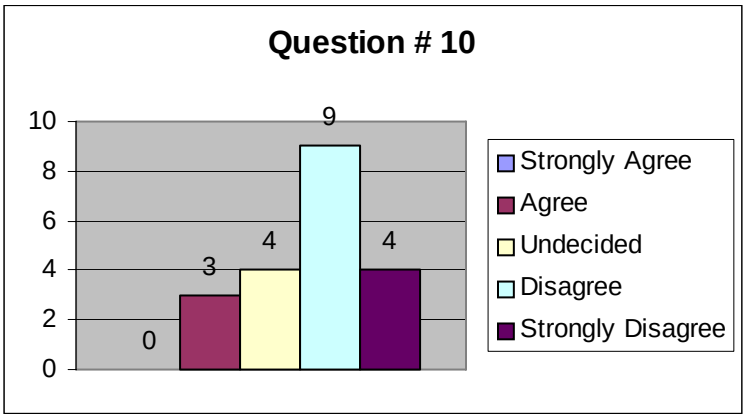

Figure 10(a)

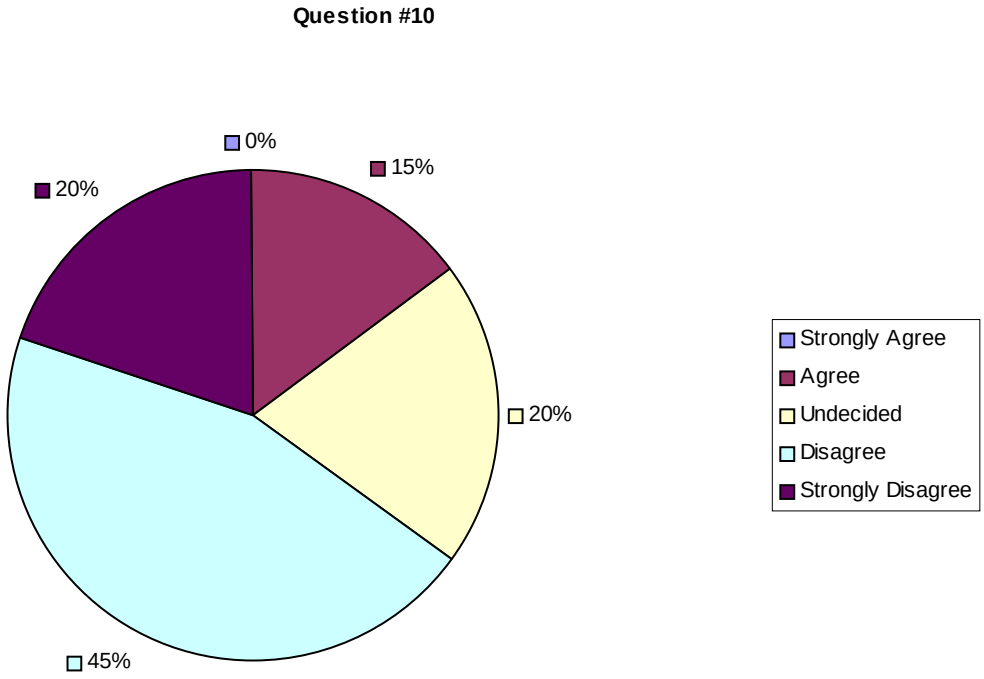

Figure 10(b)

Statement ten received zero strongly agree (0%), three agree (15%), four were undecided (20%), nine disagree (45%), and four strongly disagree (20%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #11. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that their students learn best from hand-on approach. Look at Figures 11(a) and 11(b) for results.

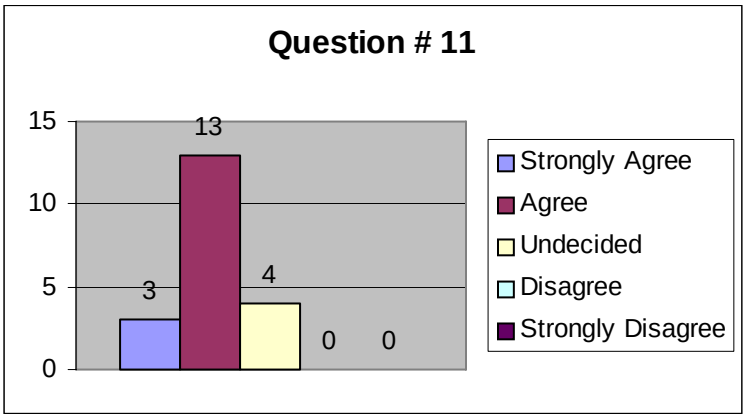

Figure 11(a)

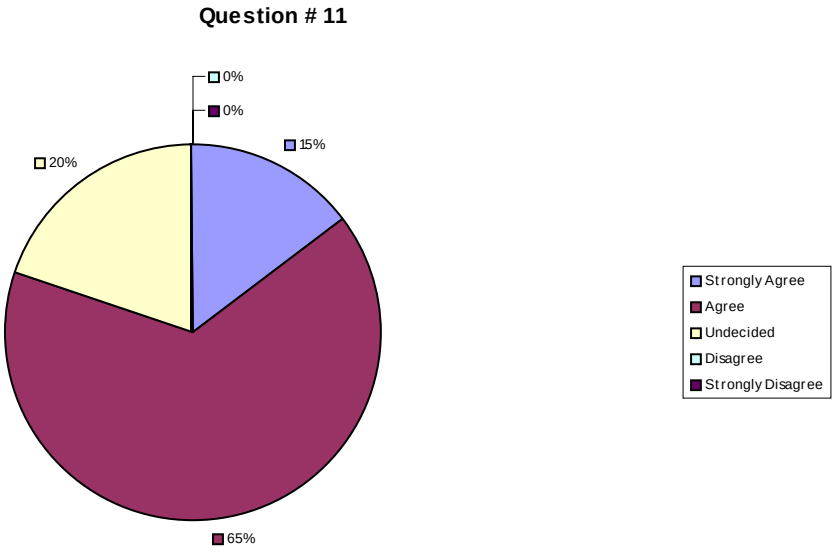

Figure 11(b)

Statement eleven received three strongly agree (15%), thirteen agree (65%), four were undecided (20%) zero disagree (0%), and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #12. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that their students do not learn best from hand-on approach." Look at Figures 12(a) and 12(b) for results.

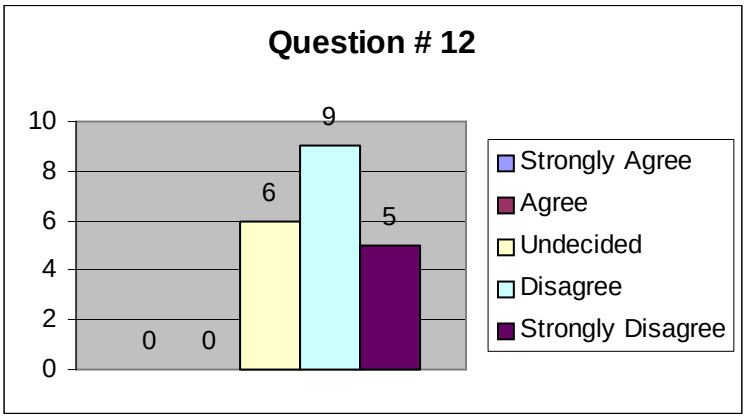

Figure 12(a)

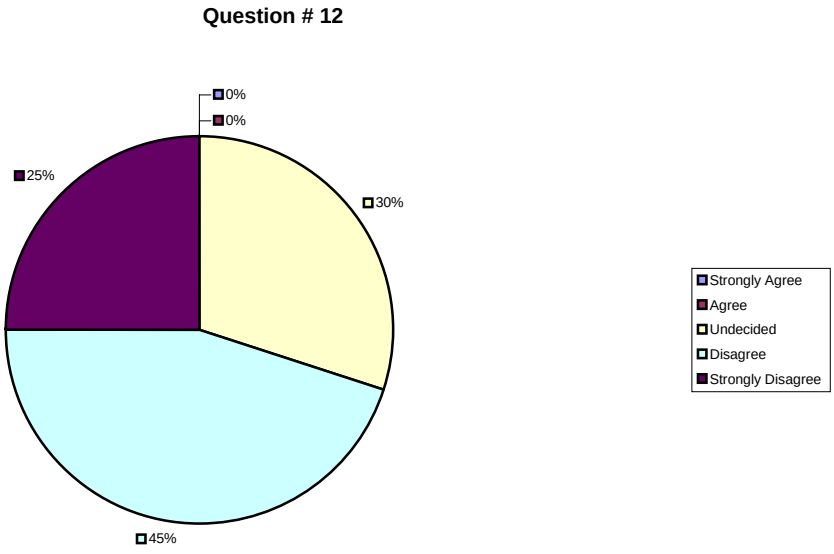

Figure 12(b)

Statement twelve received zero strongly agree (0%), zero agree (0%), six were undecided (30%), nine disagree (45%), and five strongly disagree (25%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #13. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that knowledge and ideas emerge only from a situation in which the learner has to draw them out of experiences. Look at Figures 13(a) and 13(b) for results.

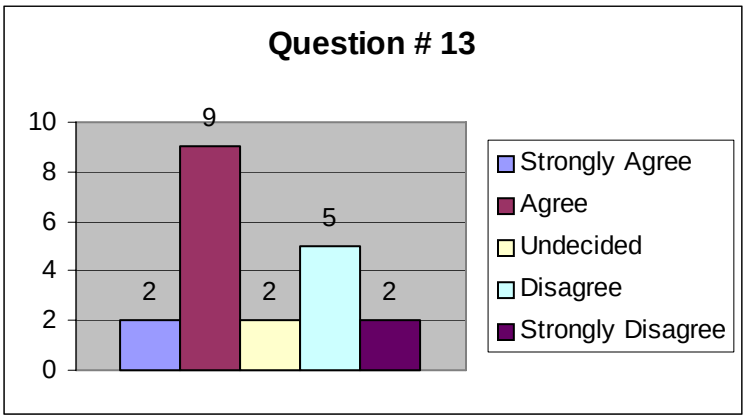

Figure 13(a)

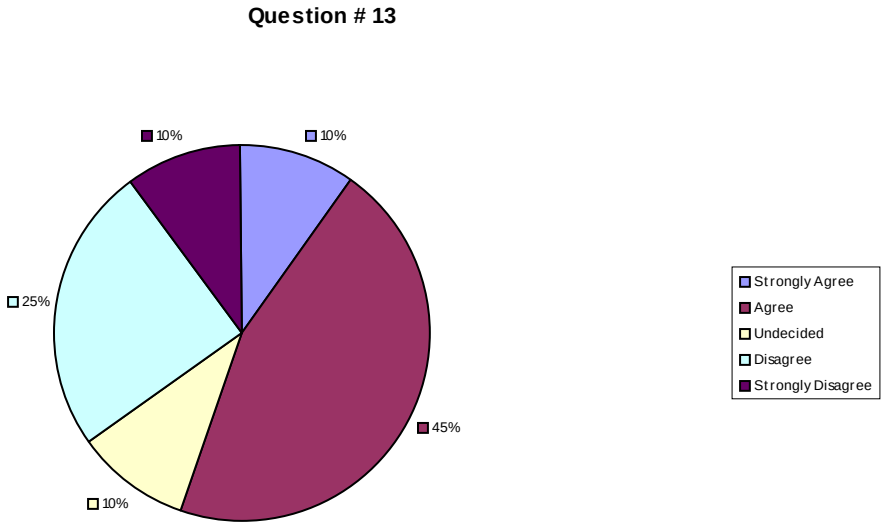

Figure 13(b)

Statement thirteen received two strongly agree (10%), nine agree (45%), two were undecided (10%), five disagree (25%), and two strongly disagree (10%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #14. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that understanding is built up step by step through active involvement." Look at Figures 14(a) and 14(b) for results.

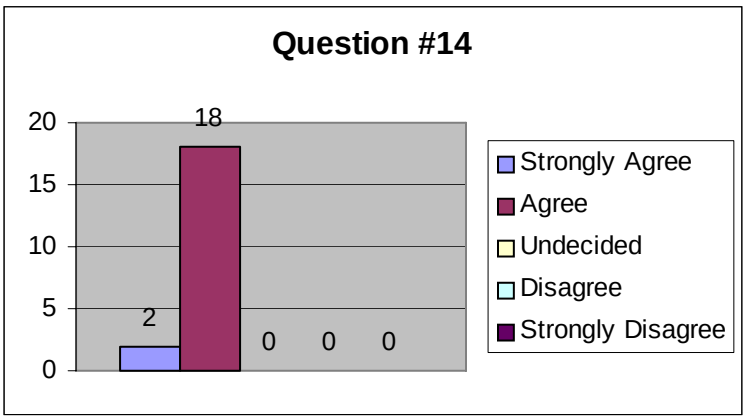

Figure 14(a)

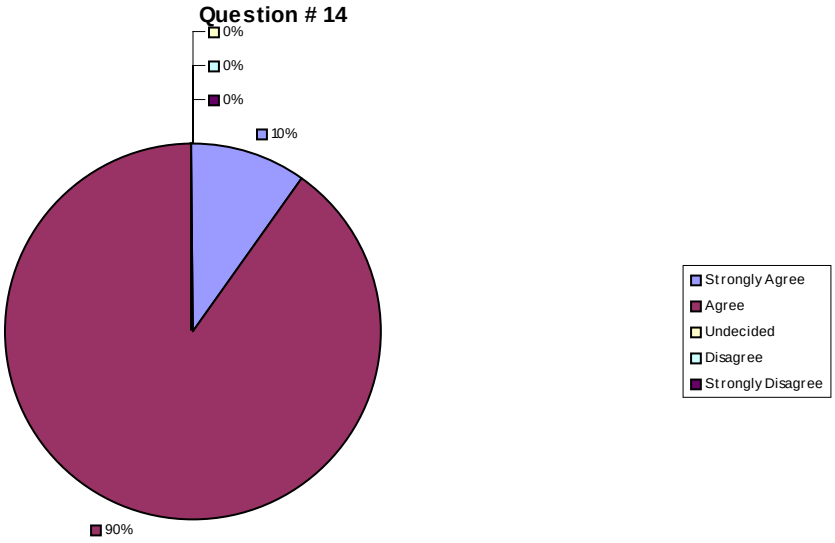

Figure 14(b)

Statement fourteen received two strongly agree (10%), eighteen agree (90%), zero were undecided (0%), zero disagree (0%) and zero strongly disagree (0%)

Data analysis revealed the following to question #15. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that constructivism is the best teaching method." Look at Figures 15(a) and 15(b) for results.

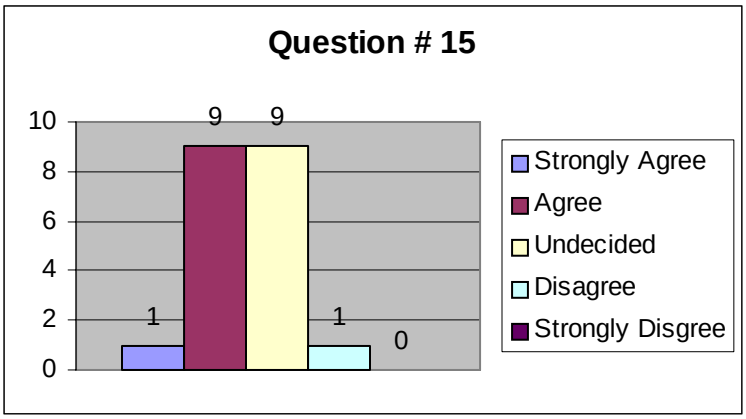

Figure 15(a)

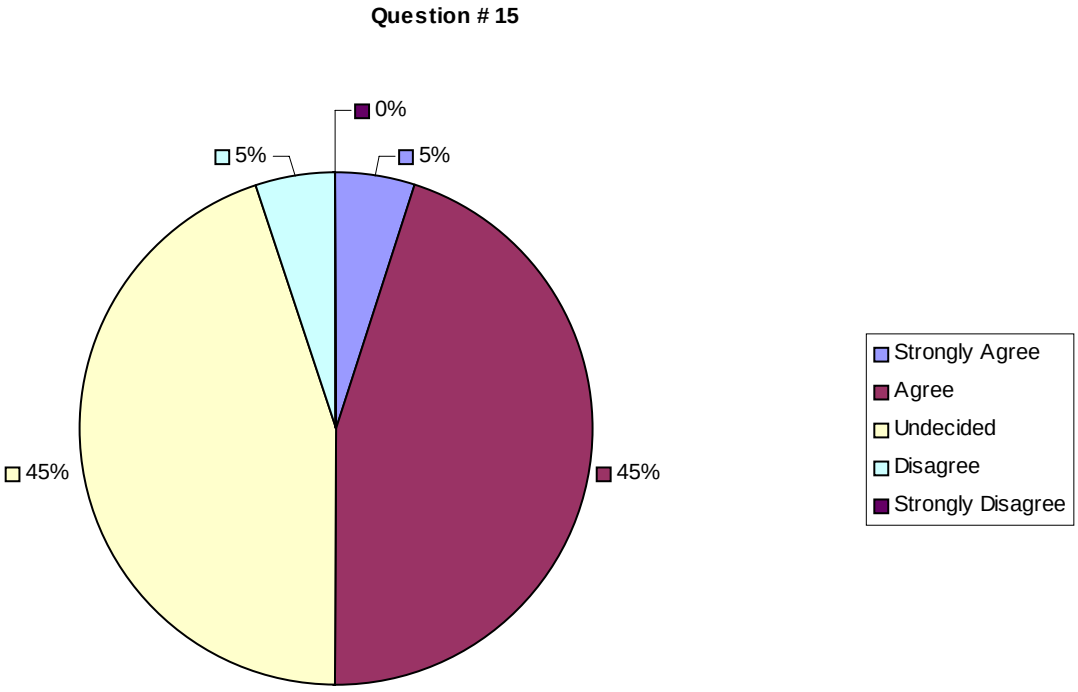

Figure 15(b)

Statement fifteen received one strongly agree (5%), nine agree (45%), nine were undecided (45%), one disagree (5%), and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #16. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that constructivism is the worst teaching method. Look at Figures 16(a) and 16(b) for results.

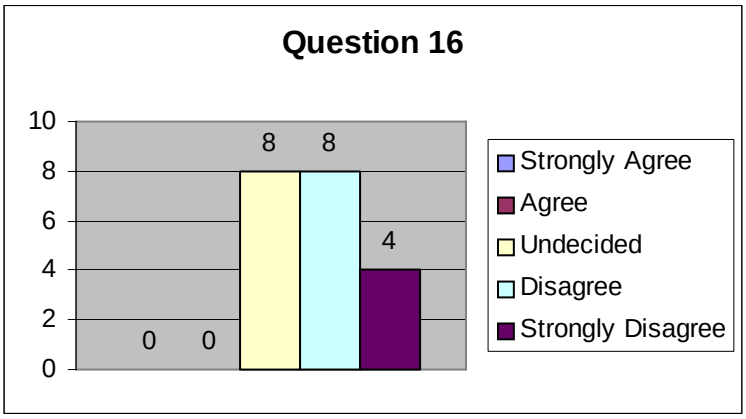

Figure 16(a)

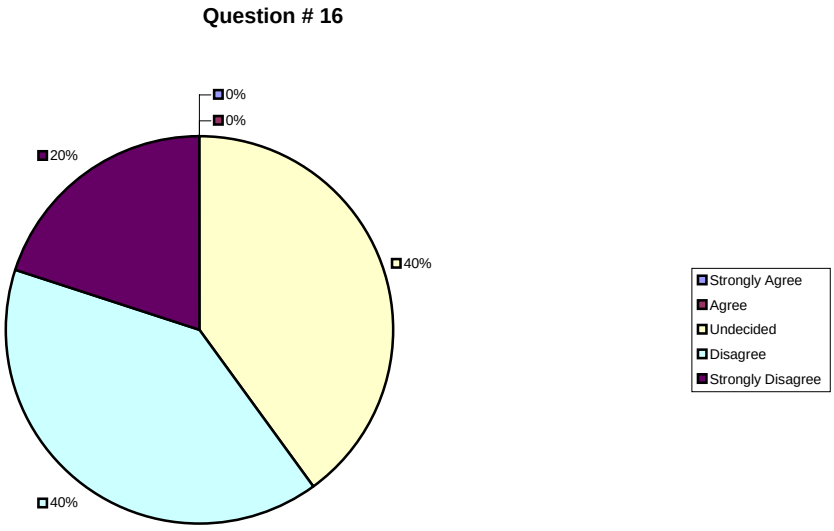

Figure 16(b)

Statement sixteen received zero strongly agree (0%), zero agree (0%), eight were undecided (40%), eight disagree (40%), and four strongly disagree (20%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #17. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that constructivism calls for the elimination of standardized curriculum." Look at Figures 17(a) and 17(b) for results.

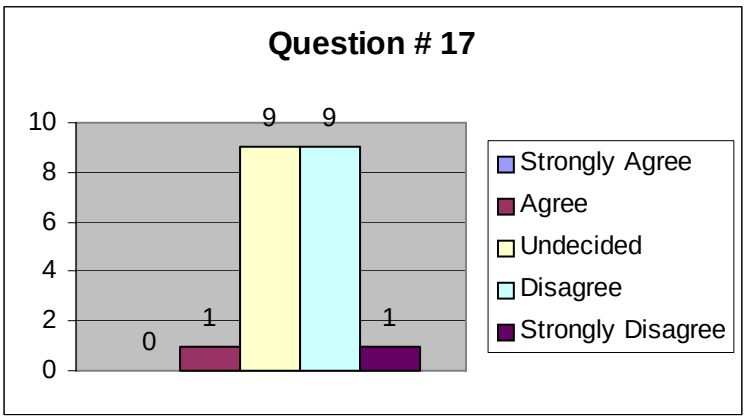

Figure 17(a)

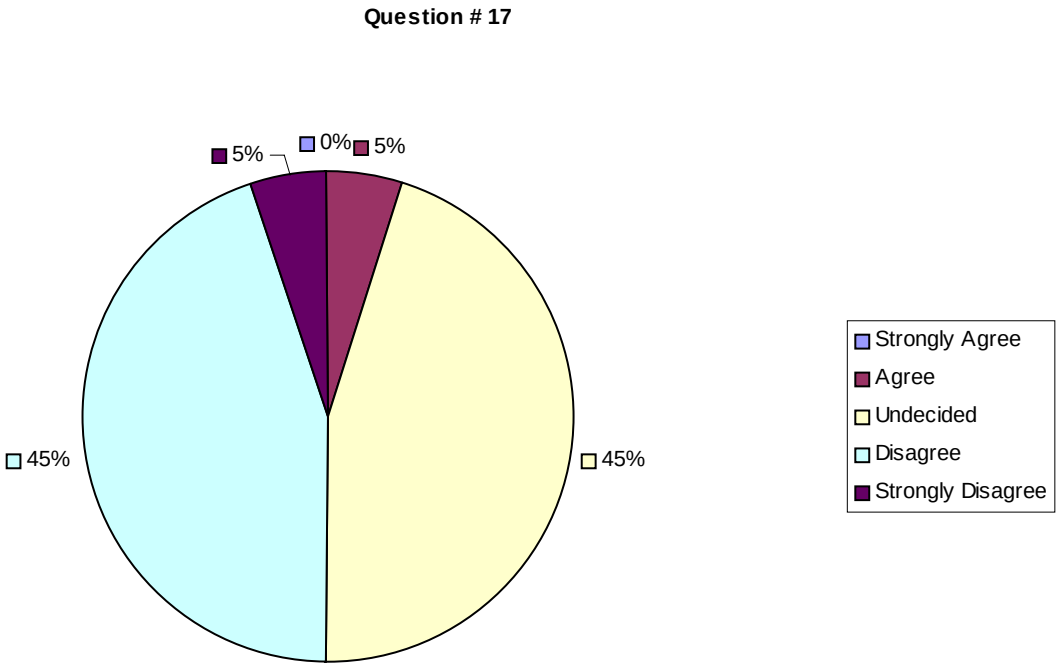

Figure 17(b)

Statement seventeen received zero strongly agree (0%), one agree (5%), nine were undecided (45%), nine disagree (45%), and one strongly disagree (5%)

Data analysis revealed the following to question #18. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that the purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorize the "right" answer." Look at Figures 18(a) and 18(b) for results.

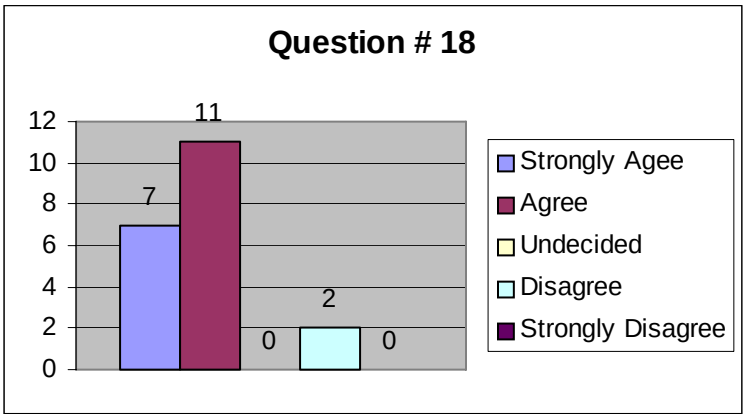

Figure 18(a)

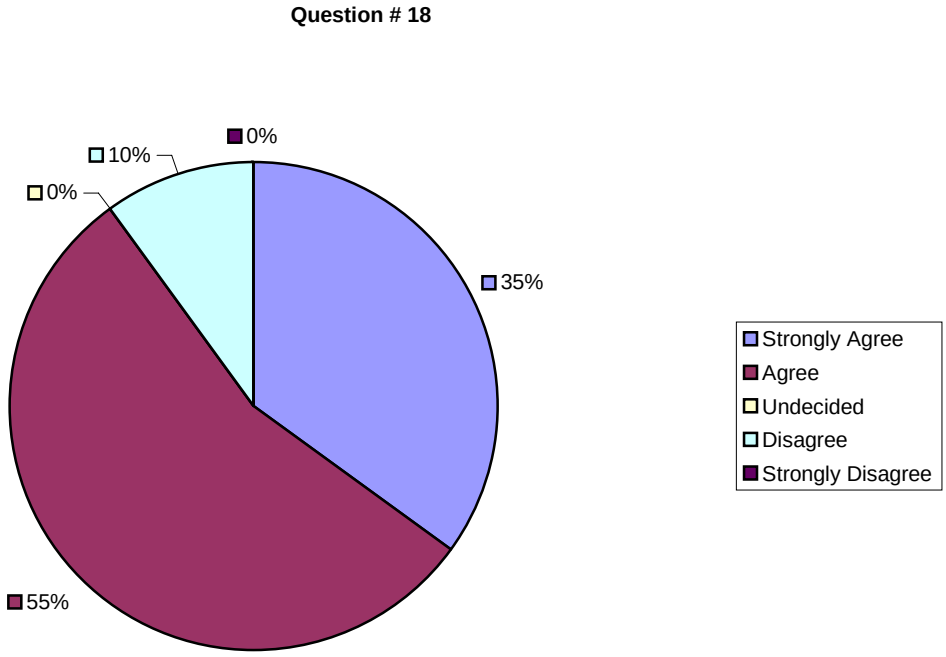

Figure 18(b)

Statement eighteen received seven strongly agree (35%) eleven agree (55%), zero were undecided (0%) two disagree (10%) and zero strongly disagree (0%)

Data analysis revealed the following to question #19. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that they encourage their students to analyze, interpret and predict information." Look at Figures 19(a) and 19(b) for results.

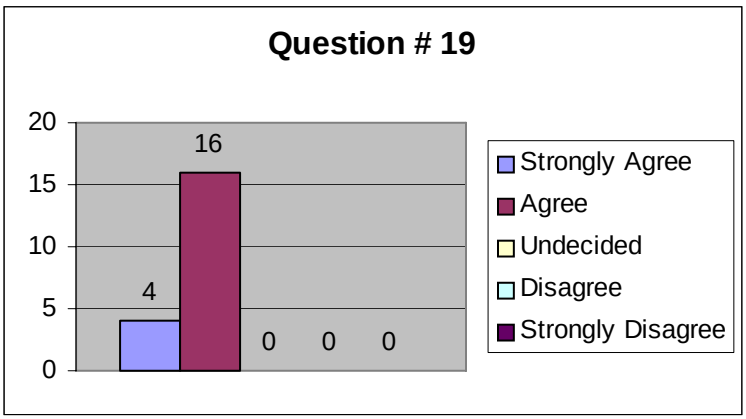

Figure 19(a)

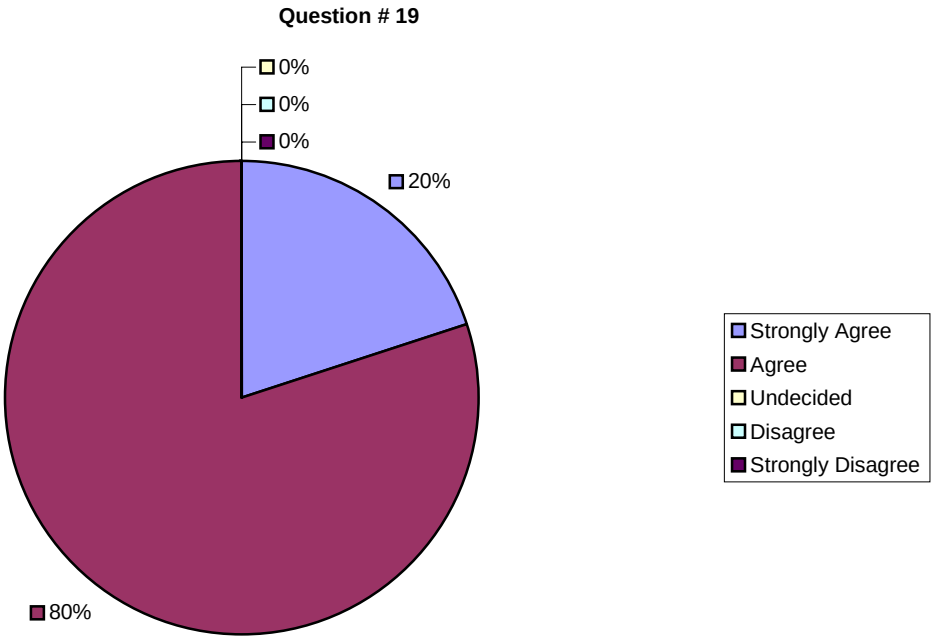

Figure 19(b)

Statement nineteen received four strongly agree (20%), sixteen agree (80%), zero undecided (0%), zero disagree (0%), and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #20. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that they occasionally encourage their students to analyze, interpret and predict information." Look at Figure 20(a) and 20(b) for results.

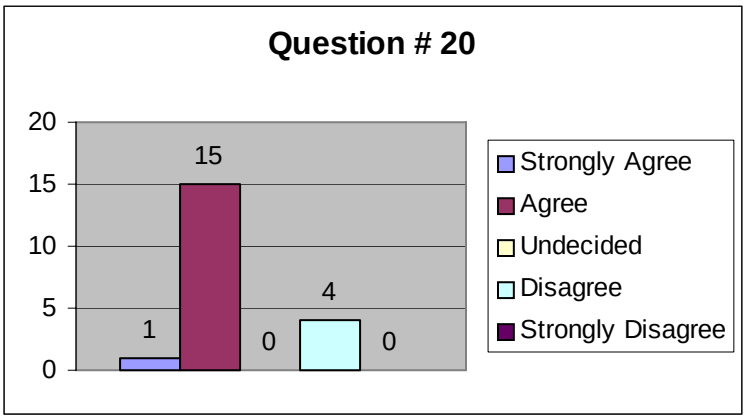

Figure 20(a)

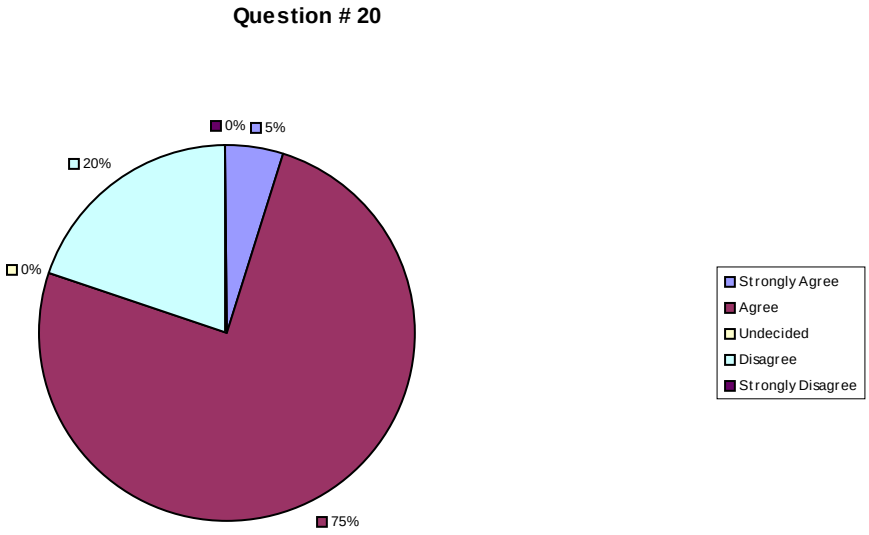

Figure 20(b)

Statement twenty received one strongly agree (5%), 15 agree (75%), zero was undecided (0%), four disagree (20%), and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #21. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that teachers should structure learning around essential concepts." Look at Figures 21(a) and 21(b) for results.

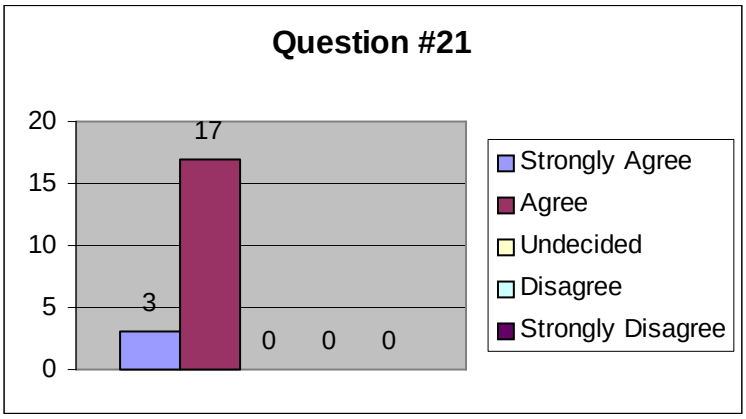

Figure 21(a)

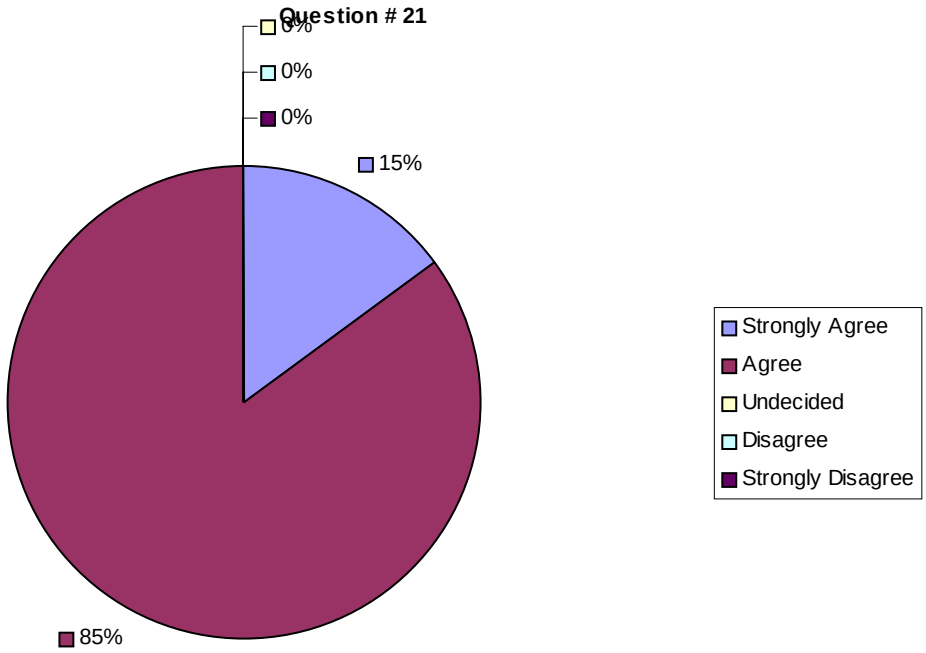

Figure 21(b)

Statement twenty-one received three strongly agree (15%), seventeen agree (85%), zero were undecided (0%), zero disagree (0%), and zero strongly disagree

Data analysis revealed the following to question #22. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that teachers should pose a problem that are or will be relevant to the students." Look at Figures 22(a) and 22(b) for results.

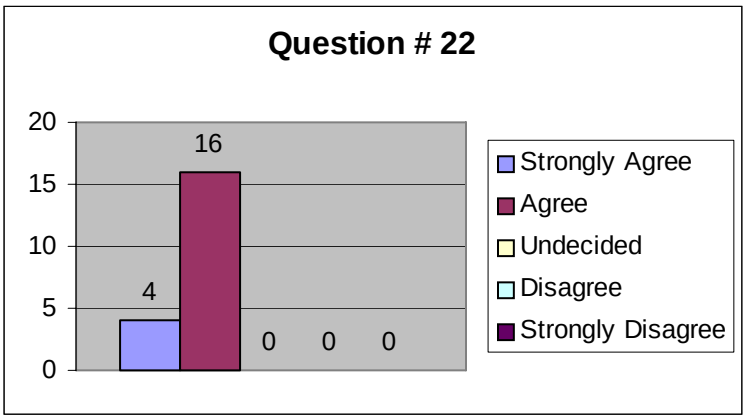

Figure 22(a)

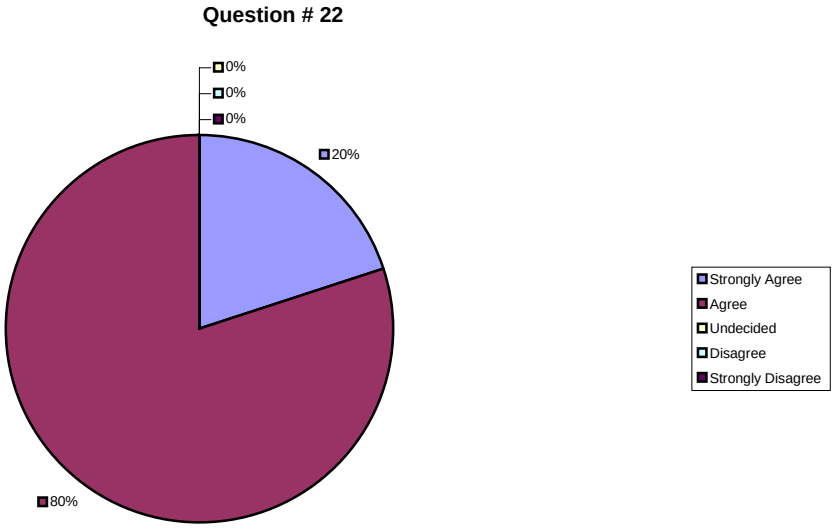

Figure 22(b)

Statement twenty-two received four strongly agree (20%), sixteen agree (80%), zero was undecided (0%), zero disagree (0%) and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #23. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that teachers should adapt curriculum to address students' supposition and development. Look at Figures 23(a) and 23(b) for results.

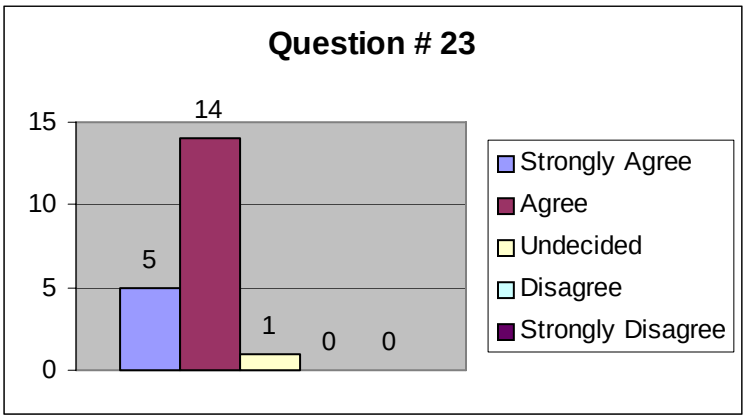

Figure 23(a)

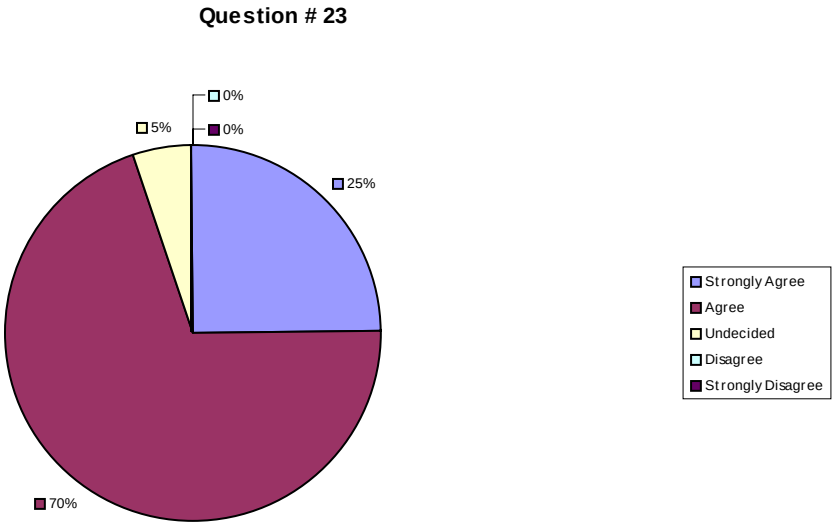

Figure 23(b)

Statement twenty-three received five strongly disagree (25%), fourteen agree (70%), one undecided (5%), zero disagree (0%) and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #24. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree that learning should be meaningful and related to real life situations. Look at Figures 24(a) and 24(b) for results.

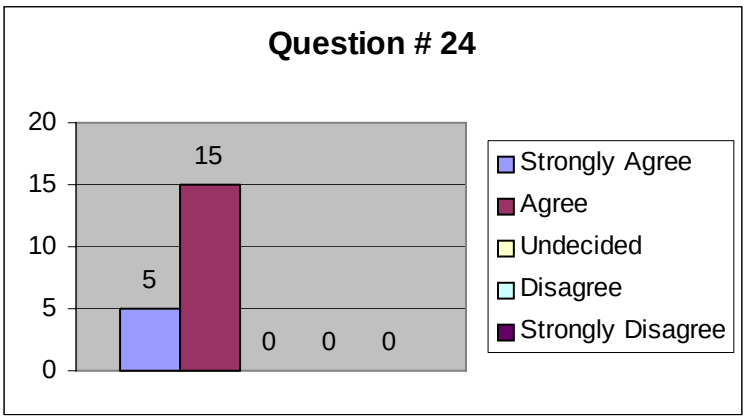

Figure 24(a)

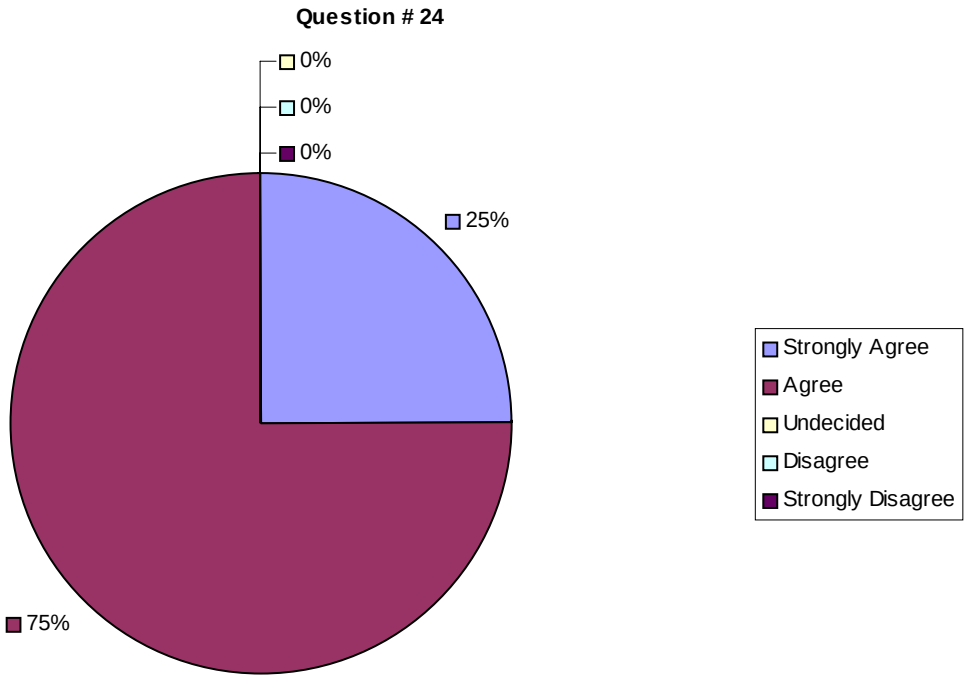

Figure 24(b)

Statement twenty-four received five strongly agree (25%), fifteen agree (75%), zero was undecided (0%), zero disagree (0%), and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Data analysis revealed the following to question #25. To what extent will teachers agree or disagree when students are actively involved in a lesson, they retain the information. Look at Figures 25(a) and 25(b) for results.

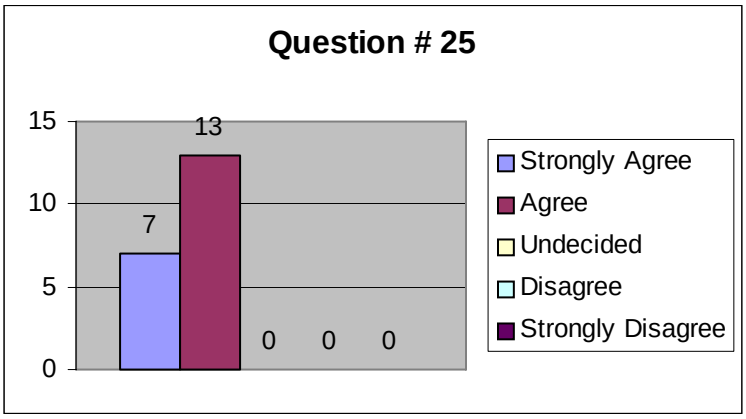

Figure 25(a)

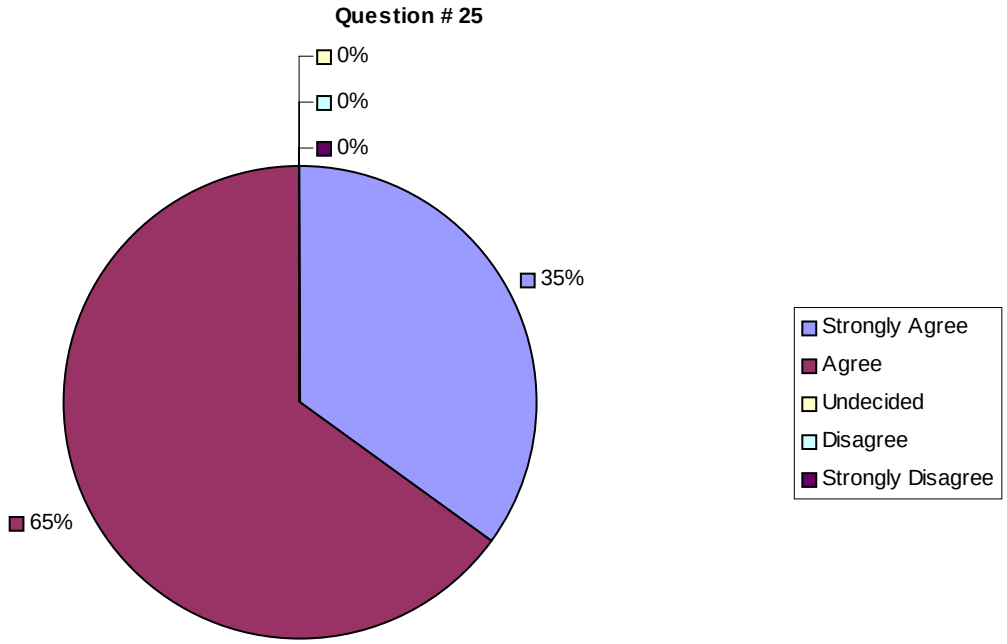

Figure 25(b)

Statement twenty-five received seven strongly agree (35%), thirteen agree (65%), zero was undecided (0%), zero disagree (0%), and zero strongly disagree (0%).

Response Totals and Percentage

Figure 26 (a)

Response Totals	Questions												
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13
Strongly Agree	10	11	8	0	5	9	9	0	6	0	3	0	2
Agree	10	8	10	6	15	0	9	1	8	3	13	0	9
Undecided	0	1	2	6	0	4	2	6	1	4	4	6	2
Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7	4	9	0	9	5
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	6	1	4	0	5	2

Figure 26(b)

Response Totals	Questions											
	#14	#15	#16	#17	#18	#19	#20	#21	#22	#23	#24	#25
Strongly Agree	2	1	0	0	7	4	1	3	4	5	5	7
Agree	18	9	0	1	11	16	15	17	16	14	15	13
Undecided	0	9	8	9	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Disagree	0	1	8	9	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 27(a)

Response as Percentage	Questions												
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13
Strongly Agree	50%	55%	40%	0%	25%	45%	45%	0%	30%	0%	15%	0%	10%
Agree	50%	40%	50%	30%	75%	0%	45%	5%	40%	15%	65%	0%	45%
Undecided	0%	5%	10%	30%	0%	20%	10%	30%	5%	20%	20%	30%	10%
Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	35%	0%	35%	20%	45%	0%	45%	25%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	30%	5%	20%	0%	25%	10%

Figure 27(b)

Response as Percentage	Questions											
	#14	#15	#16	#17	#18	#19	#20	#21	#22	#23	#24	#25
Strongly Agree	10%	5%	0%	0%	35%	20%	5%	15%	20%	25%	25%	35%
Agree	90%	45%	0%	5%	55%	80%	75%	85%	80%	70%	75%	65%
Undecided	0%	45%	40%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%
Disagree	0%	5%	40%	40%	10%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	20%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Data Summary

Twenty social studies teachers in school districts throughout Southeastern Michigan answered twenty-five statements on a survey. All the data collected indicates that most of the teachers agree with the findings of the literature review, which implements that various use of constructivism will improve social studies skills. Survey results that twenty teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that the teacher's role is to facilitate students learning by challenging a student's reality through active experiences and the creation of new ideas. Twenty teachers (95%) strongly agree or agree that cognitive development facilitates learning through actively involving the learner. Twenty teachers (90%) strongly agree or agree that constructivism will improve social studies skills. Twenty teachers (70%) undecided or strongly disagree that Constructivism has no value to improving social studies skills. Constructivism has no value to improving social studies skills. Twenty teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that they use various for of constructivism in the classroom. Twenty teachers (45%) strongly agree or agree that they will never use any forms of constructivism in their classroom. Twenty teachers (90%) strongly agree or agree that their students' social studies skills improve when they activate prior knowledge. Twenty teachers (65%) strongly disagree or strongly disagree that their students' social studies skills do not improve when they activate prior knowledge. Twenty teachers (70%) strongly agree or agree that their students learn best from content-based lectures. Twenty teachers (65%) disagree or strongly disagree that their

students do not learn from content-based lectures. Twenty teachers (80%) strongly agree or agree that their students learn best from hand-on approach. Twenty teachers (70%) strongly disagree or disagree that their students do not learn from hand-on approach. Twenty teachers (55%) strongly agree or agree that knowledge and ideas emerge only from a situation in which the learner has to draw them out of experiences. Twenty teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that understanding is built up step by step through active involvement. Twenty teachers (50%) strongly agree or agree that constructivism is the best teaching method. Twenty teachers (60%) strongly disagree or strongly disagree that constructivism is the worst teaching method. Twenty teachers (45%) strongly disagree or strongly disagree that constructivism call for the elimination of a standardize curriculum. Twenty teachers (90%) strongly agree or agree that the purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorize the "right" answer. Twenty teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that they encourage their students to analyze, interpret and predict information. Twenty teachers (80%) strongly agree or agree that occasionally they encourage their students to analyze, interpret and predict information. Twenty teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that teachers should structure learning around essential concepts. Twenty teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that teachers should pose problems that are or will be relevant to the students. Twenty teachers (95%) strongly agree or agree that teachers should adapt curriculum to address students' supposition and development. Twenty

teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that learning should be meaningful and related to real life situations. Twenty teachers (100%) strongly agree or agree that when students are actively involved in a lesson, they retain the information.

Chapter V:

Summary

The philosophy for many teachers is to create an environment that is conducive to learning. The teachers' main focus is to bring out the best academic achievement performance by their pupils. As a result the teacher may use various methods to reach those goals. The effectiveness of constructivist approach is apparent in this research. Students' social studies skills can improve drastically when teachers incorporate constructivism methods in the classroom. Researchers suggests that learning should be meaningful and related to real life situations therefore the student will grasp and retain the new found knowledge that they've recently discovered. The researchers also suggest the subject matter needs to be made meaningful and relevant to the learner. Therefore, learning is building upon students' prior knowledge, and learning constructs meaning from experience. In the end the student is building up on prior knowledge.

Conclusions

Most participants agreed that various form of constructivism improve social studies skills. The teachers also agreed that their students learn best when they can relate to the subject manner. Majority of the teachers agree that they currently use some form of constructivist in their classroom. When asked the teachers that the teacher's role is to facilitate students learning by challenging a student's reality through active experiences and the creation of new ideas they all agreed (100%).

Based on the results of this survey and the review of the literature regarding constructivism and to what extent will it improve social studies skills, activating prior knowledge can improve overall academic achievement in social studies skills.

The literature review of several researchers including the researcher that was performed in this research have studied the relationship and provided evidence that Constructivist Approach to learning has proven to be most effective when improving social studies skills. Furthermore, this proposed research also provided teachers with constructive ideas can be utilize to enhance their students overall comprehension and academic performance in social studies.

Recommendations

It is this researcher's recommendation that further research take place regarding the constructivist approach and its ability to be effective or ineffective. It is a proven fact that there is no one way a student can learn, however according to this research one method can improve the way students retain information. Therefore I recommend that potential researchers take into considerations of multiple variables that can prove that constructivist approach is effective or ineffective. One of those variables is that the researcher may look at the student's background, and culture. Perhaps administering a pre and posttest to rate the improvement or lack they're of. Another variable is the teachers experience and background as well. Does that teacher have enough

background information on their students' population? How much experience does the teacher have in teaching social studies? The next variable to consider would be case studies. Case studies provide a more detailed look at the effectiveness or the ineffectiveness of constructivist approach. Finally the last variable to consider is observation. Observation is concrete, by observing a classroom you get to see hands on how effective constructivism really is, the potential researcher will the theories in action. The potential researcher will then understand that Piaget and Vygotsky both were a genius in creating and sharing their views in constructivism.

References

Brooks, J.G. & Brooks, M.G. (1993) In Search Of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,

Brousseau, B & Todorov, K. (1998). Statewide Social Studies Assessment: A Tool for Developing Responsible Citizens. Michigan Department of Education. *Michigan Social Studies Journal. 2(1)*

Duhaney,D.C., & Duhaney, L.M.G. (2000) Assistive Technology: Meeting the Needs of Learners with Disabilities. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 27, 393-401

Frazee, B, & Ayers, S (2000) Garbage In, Garbage Out: Expanding Environments, Constructivism and Content Knowledge in Social Studies

Hoagland, M. A. (2000).Utilizing Constructivism in the History Classroom. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED482436)

Jafallah, E. (2000). Constructivist Learning Experiences for Social Studies Education. *The Social Studies* (Washington D.C.) 91(5) S/O 2000.WN:0024500640005.

Lucks, R. (1999). Constructivist Teaching vs. Direct Instructions. University of Delaware. Remote Name: 205.188.199.34. Retrieved February 22, 2006, from http://ematusov.soe.udel.edu/EDUC390.99F

McKay, R. (1993). Constructivism: *Defining our Beliefs, Examining our*

Practices. Canadian Social Studies. 27(2). 47-48

Piaget, J. (1929). The child's conception of the world. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co.

State of Michigan. (1996). *Michigan Curriculum Framework, Content Standards & Draft Benchmarks*, p.22.

Steele, M.M. (2005). Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities: Constructivism or Behaviorism? *Current Issues In Education* [On-Line], 8(10). Retrieved January 24, 2006, from http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume8/number10/

Vogotsky, L.S. (1978). Mind in society. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Whiteside, K. D. (2000). Building Geography Skills and Community Understanding with Constructivist Teaching Methods. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED442733).

Appendix A

Survey

Direction: *Please answer each of the following questions by circling the answer that best applies to your style as a Social Studies teacher. Your answers will remain anonymous.*

1. The teacher's role is to facilitate students learning by challenging a student's reality through active experiences and the creation of new ideas.

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Cognitive development facilitates learning through actively involving the learner.

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. Constructivism will improve social studies skills

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. Constructivism has no value to improving social studies skills

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I use various forms of constructivism in my classroom.

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I will never use any forms of constructivism in my classroom

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. My students social studies skills improve when I activate prior knowledge

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. My students social studies skills do not improve when I activate prior knowledge

   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. My students learn best from content-based lectures

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

10. My students do not learn from content-based lectures

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

11. My students learn best from hand-on approach

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

12. My students learn do not learn from hand-on approach

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

13. Knowledge and ideas emerge only from a situation in which the learner has to draw them out of experiences.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

14. Understanding is built up step by step through active involvement.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

15. Constructivism is the best teaching method.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

16. Constructivism is the worst teaching method

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

17. Constructivism call for the elimination of a standardize curriculum

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

18. The purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorize the “right” answer

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

19. I encourage my students to analyze, interpret and predict information.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

20. Occasionally I encourage my students to analyze, interpret and predict information.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

21. Teachers should structure learning around essential concepts.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

22. Teachers should pose problems that are or will be relevant to the students.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

23. Teachers should adapt curriculum to address students' supposition and development.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

24. Learning should be meaningful and related to real life situations.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

25. When students are actively involved in a lesson, they retain the information.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Undecided** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

Appendix B

Monday, October 22, 2007
Marygrove College
8425 West McNichols
Detroit, Michigan 48221-2599

Dear Participants:

My name is Kimeko McCray. I am in a graduate program at Marygrove College. I am currently working on my graduate research project to investigate Constructivism and how it can improve Social Studies Skills. By conducting this research I will need to administer a survey to collect data. I am writing this letter to request your participation in the survey. Your participation would be imperative to my research and your participation is greatly appreciated.

I would like to administer the survey on Thursday, November 12, 2007. It would take approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete the survey, and collect the data. In advance I asked that you please answer all the questions honestly. As a participant all information collected will remain confidential except as may be required by federal, state or local law. Your participation will be 100% voluntary. If you decide to withdraw or do not wish to complete the survey, it would not be held against you now or in the future. Thank you very much for your time, consideration, and your immediate response. If you have any questions or concerns in regarding this request, please contact me immediately at (313) 586-2426.

Sincerely,

Kimeko McCray

I have read and understood the above consent information. My questions about the research have been answered. I understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

APPROVAL REQUEST FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

MARYGROVE COLLEGE
Institutional Review Board

Type all information which you provide. Approval MUST be renewed annually if you continue to gather data. This form is for NEW submissions only. ***IMPORTANT NOTICE:*** *YOU MUST* ***INCLUDE*** the instrument(s) [i.e., survey(s), questionnaire(s), schedule(s)], and consent form(s)]. Omission of these items **will delay** the review process. **Submit via regular or interoffice mail the completed, signed and dated form, and all supplementary documents (consent documents, instruments, etc.) to the IRB chair. In addition, electronically submit the application and supplementary documents to the IRB chair.**

Project Title: Constructivist Approach: Improving Social Studies Skills

Principal Investigator or Advisor
Name: Dr. Eugene R. Shaw

Department: Education Department

Office Address: MC 226

Home Address:

Office Phone (313) 927-1317 Home Phone: E-mail address:eshaw@marygrove.edu

Co-Principal or Student Investigator
Name: Kimeko T. McCray

Department: Sage

Office Address:

Home Address: 20823 Eastlawn. St. Clair Shores Michigan 48080

Office Phone:(313) 586-2426 Home Phone: (586) 871-2774
E-mail address:kmccray1744@marygrove.edu

Is this work for your Master's Thesis? Yes _X__ No _____

Proposed Start Date of Project: 11-05-07 Proposed End Date of Project: **11-19-07**

Has Funding been requested? Yes ___ No _X_ If yes, what is the source of funding? _____

This application is to be considered for (check only one box):

( ) Basic Review* (X) Expedited Review* ( ) Full Review

*cite specific criteria from IRB Guidelines (attached)

Revised 4/07

Categories of Human Subjects to be studied:

Proposed Age Group of Subjects (range): **25 - 50 AGE** Proposed # of Subjects **25 Participants**

Participants in Special Consideration Categories:

____ Children under age 18
____ Cognitively-impaired persons
____ Prisoners
____ Pregnant women
____ Non-English Speaking individuals
____ Students
____ Wards
____ Economically or Educationally Disadvantaged persons
____ Other subjects whose life circumstances may interfere with their ability to make free choice in consenting to take part in research (please specify)

If any of these populations will be included in your study, on a separate sheet of paper, explain the rationale for including these vulnerable populations and ways in which they will be protected.

PROJECT OUTLINE

1. Project Description: State briefly but precisely the following: the purpose of the research, the research procedure (including what exactly participants will do as part of the study), method of data collection, and how the results will be disseminated (e.g., thesis, peer-reviewed journal, presentation). Attach questionnaires, interview scripts, etc. Coding sheets for video- or audio-tapes and other data collection procedures are required.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the relationship of constructivism as it relates to improving social studies skills and to determine whether constructivism is the best approach to take in improving social studies skills. Therefore, the researcher will extend on previous research to explain the relationship between constructivism approach and improving academic achievement in social studies.
The participants that will assist in the study are Social Studies Teachers from the age range of 25-50. The researcher will arbitrarily pick teachers in the urban and suburban setting throughout Michigan. The participants will complete and Likert Scale Survey to determine if Constructivism is effective on ineffective in improving social studies skills.

2. Benefits of Research: Briefly describe the expected or known benefits of the research. Indicate benefits specific to the research participant in addition to longer term or more general benefits.

The benefit of this research is the satisfaction of determining if constructivism is effective or ineffective. The method could also contribute to my professional development as a social studies teacher. It may also improve my overall teaching style and philosophy to understand effective ways my students can improve social studies skills.

3. Anticipated Risks: State in adequate detail any anticipated physical, mental, emotional or social risk to the subjects of this research activity and the degree of likelihood that it may occur. Explain the procedure in detail and the rationale for using it. Describe measures to be taken to protect subjects from possible risks or discomfort. (Risks include even mild discomforts or inconveniences, as well as potential for disclosure of sensitive information.)

In my research there are minimum anticipated risk therefore I will keep all participant and school names anonymous to avoid such risks. I will keep all participants names anonymous. For instance I will give fictitious names for all my participants. I will also keep the schools names anonymous, for instance instead of using the schools name I will just refer the school setting such as urban or suburban setting.

4. Subjects: Describe how you intend to contact and recruit participants. Attach all written advertisements, posters and oral recruitment scripts. The exclusion of women and minorities in research studies must be specifically justified. If certain populations are intentionally excluded in your study, this needs to be well documented.

The researcher will contact participants on a volunteer basis. My recruitment script will be the following: *Hello! My name is Kimeko McCray and I am a graduate student conducting a study on constructivism. To determine and to what extent do they agree or disagree with the content on constructivism and improving students social studies skills. I would like to know would you be willing to participate in my study.*

5. Confidentiality: Describe in adequate detail what measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the data to be obtained and the subjects' right to privacy. Be explicit if data are sensitive. Describe coding procedures for subject identification. Include the method, location and duration of data retention. (Federal regulations require data to be maintained for at least 3 years. Your professional society may require you to keep it longer). If video- or audio tapes will be used, indicate how confidentiality of the material produced by such devices will be protected, and what will become of the recordings after the data has been collected.

I will keep all participants names anonymous. For instance I will give fictitious names for all my participants. I will also keep the schools names anonymous, for instance instead of using the schools name I will just refer the school setting such as urban or suburban setting.

6. Informed Consent: Describe the process by which informed consent will be obtained. If the participant is a child or mentally challenged, explain how the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be contacted for consent and how the researcher will ensure that the participant understands and

assents to the research. Prepare and submit an appropriate consent form utilizing the attached Policy Concerning Informed Consent document. If using oral consent, please provide a copy (script) of the text you will use.

Script: *Dear Sir/Madam, My name is Kimeko McCray and I am a graduate student conducting a study on constructivism. I am conducting this survey to determine to what extent do you agree or disagree with the content on constructivism and improving students social studies skills. I would like to know would you be willing to participate in my study. I will keep your name and school confidential. In the event that you would no longer like for me to use your data, I will immediately remove your data from my research. In the event that you no longer wish to participate in the study your request would be honored. Also if you drop out of the research at anytime all your data will be destroyed and no longer considered data in my study.*

Federal regulations require that we have current consent form(s) being used on file. Omission of consent form(s) will delay the review process.

Revised 4/07

This page is to be signed by the principal investigator. If the PI is an undergraduate or graduate student, the faculty supervisor must also sign.

_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator	Date

NOTE: A research proposal by a graduate or undergraduate student **must** have the following statement signed by a faculty supervisor.

"I have examined this completed form and I am satisfied with the adequacy of the proposed research design and the measures proposed for the protection of human subjects. I will take responsibility for informing the student of the need for the safekeeping of all raw data (e.g., test protocols, tapes, questionnaires, interview notes, etc.) in a College office or computer file."

_____

_____

Print Name and Title of Faculty Supervisor Signature of Faculty Supervisor

_____

_____ Date

Office Phone