To Test or Not to Test?: The Role of Testing in Elementary Social Studies
A Collaborative Study Conducted by NCPSSSE and SCPSSE

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Abstract

There are growing concerns among social studies professionals that social studies instruction is disappearing from elementary schools. These concerns have become more pressing as educational policies emphasize core curricula of reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Questions arise as to how social studies can resume its traditional role as one of these core curricula. One possibility is to have social studies included in the accountability movement through testing. This article contemplates the role of testing in impacting social studies instruction in the elementary curriculum through a comparative analysis of data collected from a study of practicing elementary teachers in two states: one in which social studies instruction is tested and the other in which social studies instruction is not tested.

Authentic voices from the classroom teachers involved in this study indicate the severity of dwindling social studies curriculum instruction, and according to two teachers from North Carolina:

The [elementary] curriculum at present is so concentrated towards English/language arts, reading, and math that social studies has really been put on the “back burner,” so to speak. This is especially common in 4th grade where the writing test has become such a priority. After the reading and math block, covering technology, character education, and health and science, it is impossible to get to social studies everyday.

We are trying to prepare our students for life not just to pass a test. I feel we need to teach social skills and citizenship to students to get them ready for real life events. When I am old, the children that I am teaching will be running the world. I want them
prepared for that time.

Will our children and tomorrow’s leaders be prepared when current trends have forced social studies to take a backseat to tested curricula? The accountability, high-stakes testing, and educational policy pressures are narrowing the curriculum in our schools to focus only on those content areas emphasized by these policies. This is of great concern as the excluded curricula are disappearing from the curriculum for the sake of providing more time for instruction and preparation in tested curricula. Social studies is often one of those curricula being squeezed out of the curriculum and has been left behind by current policy objectives. This has caused many educators to express concerns with the state of social studies. The reduced emphasis on social studies is especially widespread in the elementary grades where social studies is often taught when time permits.

**Literature Review**

Instructional time in elementary grades centers on core curricula of language arts and mathematics with limited attention given to social studies and science. Social studies, in particular, has often been regarded as a content area that was taught if time allowed (Turner, 2004). Ripley (2004) suggests a passivity toward teaching social studies as an occasional indulgence is common among elementary educators. This devalued role of social studies has been exacerbated by political policies which have omitted social studies (e.g., Goals 2000 Educate America Act and No Child Left Behind Act). Squeezing out the social studies from the curriculum is becoming more prevalent as schools shift their emphasis to science, math, and language arts to address these national and subsequent state policies of accountability. Consequently, researchers (Gross, 1977; Hahn, 1977; Lintner, in press; Ochoa, 1981; Rock, Heafner, Olendorf, Passe, O’Connor, Good, Byrd, in review; VanFossen, 2005) continue to raise concerns about the diminishing time and emphasis spent on elementary social studies. This trend has become widespread as states report the marginalization of social studies for the promotion of tested curricula (Rock, et al., in review; VanFossen, 2005).

The effect of the marginalization of social studies is of great concern. As social studies educators, we advocate for the teaching of social studies, yet the reality is that social studies is often absent from the curriculum. Turner (2004) suggests that standardized testing is adversely impacting the quality of social studies instruction and greatly reducing the amount of time that students are taught social studies. While state legislation promotes policies of a balanced curriculum which include the teaching of all core content (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies), administrators and teachers willingly sacrifice social studies instructional time for the additional preparation of students in tested curricula. This decline in the quantity and quality of social studies instruction is supported by the findings of a recent study involving over 900 principals by the Council for Basic Education on the effects of No Child Left Behind. The researchers concluded that schools are spending more time on reading, math, and science while at the same time squeezing out social studies, civics, geography, languages, and the arts (von Zastrow & Janc, 2004). Pressures to raise test scores and threats of school closures or takeovers by state teams lead to emphasis on only tested curricula. As Alfie Kohn observed, “Teachers often feel obliged to set aside other subjects for days, weeks, or…even months at a time in order to devote themselves to boosting students’ test scores” (Kohn, 2000, p. 29).
Thus, the challenge social studies educators face is finding a way to shift the political and educational pendulum in favor of teaching social studies. It has been suggested that the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) should develop a new policy statement regarding the necessity and value of teaching social studies in elementary schools (VanFossen, 2005) by increasing the role of social studies educators as proactive advocates for the teaching of social studies (Rock, et. al., in review) and by increasing communication with policy makers and parents about the current state of social studies in elementary schools (Rock, et al., in review). The remaining possibility for change is that of testing. If tested curricula are what is taught, then should social studies be tested? Is testing a necessity to mandate that students receive social studies instruction? What are the effects of testing, and are these positive? The question of testing needs to be addressed, since research and current practices suggest that teachers and administrators emphasize the content that is tested. VanFossen (2005) found in a statewide evaluation of the state of social studies in Indiana that teachers would teach social studies and devote more time to the instruction of social studies if social studies was tested. To better understand the complexity of testing, this article presents a comparative analysis of two states: one that tests social studies instruction in elementary grades (South Carolina) and one that does not test social studies instruction in elementary grades (North Carolina). These states are not only close neighbors but also share similarities in populations, geography, socioeconomic status, educational structures, and regional culture.

State Contexts

North Carolina Testing Background

The ABCs of Public Education is North Carolina’s primary school improvement program. The 2005-06 school year marks the tenth year of the ABCs program for K-8 schools and the ninth year for high schools. A hallmark of the ABCs of Public Education is an accountability program that focuses on the performance of individual public schools in the basics of reading and mathematics. The State Board of Education annually sets challenging growth expectations for each school. Rather than comparing different students from one year to the next, The ABCs of North Carolina holds schools accountable for the educational growth of the same groups of students over time. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal education law, requires an additional accountability measure called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). To meet AYP, a school must meet target goals for each subgroup of students that numbers forty or more. The growth of all students is determined by scores on the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests of Reading Comprehension and Mathematics. To expand the scope of accountability and to meet expectations of NCLB, a Science End-of-Grade Test will be added in the 2006-07 academic year (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2005).

This high-stakes accountability system offers monetary rewards and public recognition to schools achieving specified levels of growth, while the lowest-performing schools are faced with public humiliation and the introduction of school-assistance teams. In addition, student grade-level advancement is based upon academic success on benchmark tests in grades 3, 5, and 8. Benchmark End-of-Grade Tests currently emphasize content of language arts, reading, and mathematics and will include science in 2006-07. Social studies is missing from this list of subjects by which teachers and students are held accountable. Consequently, a de-emphasis on social studies and the marginalization of social studies is being promoted in North Carolina as
necessary for supporting student remediation and subsequent success in tested curricula. Data from the third year of a five-year longitudinal study indicate the devaluing of social studies by schools and teachers in favor of teaching language arts, mathematics, and science (Rock, et al., in review). Rather than maintaining its historical situation of third among core content areas, social studies content is being moved to fourth behind science. Additionally, time devoted to social studies is declining. Data suggest that elementary social studies teachers teach social studies approximately thirty minutes a day for half the year, and when social studies is taught through integration rather than stand alone, subject instruction is the preferred methodology. This limited attention and time allocated for social studies are significantly less than the time required by the North Carolina’s Department of Public Education’s Balanced Curriculum Guidelines and the National Council for the Social Studies recommendations. Social studies is left out of the accountability formula in North Carolina in grades K-9. Emphasis on social studies in North Carolina does not appear until tenth and eleventh grade in high school when end of course tests are administered in civics and economics and in U.S. History.

South Carolina Testing Background

In 1998, the legislature passed the South Carolina Education Accountability Act, which set into motion a review process for evaluating K-12 schools across the state. Much of this work is done through the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), an eighteen-member, non-partisan panel charged with the duty of evaluating schools and guaranteeing that standards are met in individual subject areas. The primary instrument for measuring student process according to this law is the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT), which was first administered in 1999 to students in grades 3-8. The tests first included only sections in math and English, but in 2002, tests were expanded to include science and social studies. Student scores are then categorized as Advanced, Proficient, Basic, or Below Basic. These individual scores are also used to help determine a ranking for a School Report Card that rates schools as Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, and Unsatisfactory.

Soon after the Education Accountability Act was passed, a panel of social studies educators helped draft curriculum standards to assist teachers in planning social studies instruction. These standards were passed in 2000, and PACT questions were created around these standards. The first time social studies was tested in spring 2003, only 61% of students met standard. State Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum noted that math and English had similar results when first tested and expected that “Teachers are getting more comfortable teaching the new standards…but these numbers will go up” (My SC Schools). At this point, the statement has proved accurate as 79% of students met standard on the social studies portion of the PACT in spring 2005. Revised Social Studies standards came into effect in the 2005-06 school year and will be used on this year’s PACT.

While the majority of the testing in social studies at this point has been in grades 3-8, 2006 will also see the introduction of an End of Course U.S. History Test to be administered to 11th grade students in selected areas of the state. This test will be expanded across the state in spring 2007 and counts towards the School Report Card. Discussions are also underway for possible end-of-course tests in economics, government, and global studies.

A number of individuals, particularly teachers and parents, have voiced concerns about test fatigue and the enormous costs associated with the PACT and have advocated reducing the amount of testing currently administered in grades 3-8. A bill currently circulating through the
SC House and Senate advocates certain testing of science and social studies so that these subjects may only be tested randomly each year. Proponents of social studies education are keenly aware of what happens in states like North Carolina where social studies is not tested, so efforts are currently under way to encourage legislators to maintain the current system of accountability.

**Methods**

This research study is comprised of a two-state comparative analysis of elementary teachers’ perceptions of social studies instructional time as well as beliefs about the role of social studies in the elementary curriculum and instructional practices for teaching social studies in both North Carolina and South Carolina. The comparison of these states was purposeful since these states are similar in demographics, population, and geography. Additionally, North Carolina does not test social studies in grades K-6, while South Carolina tests social studies in grades 3-6.

The mixed method design of this study draws from survey research and qualitative interviews. The purpose was to provide a large scale picture of the state of social studies in North Carolina and South Carolina while trying to understand teacher perceptions in greater depth. The data collection instrument was based upon a survey and administered as a face-to-face interview by preservice teachers. The data collection instrument consists of seventeen questions and takes approximately forty-five minutes to be administered during an interview. Questions are structured to quantify teacher responses, but the interview format allows for elaboration and explanation of teacher responses. This method enabled teachers to explain their perceptions, provide examples, and ask for clarification. A copy of the data collection instrument is available in Appendix A. Strict interview protocols were developed, utilizing social studies professional educators at both the university level and in K-8 schools to guide all interviews. Pre-service teachers were trained in interview methods and in the use of the survey instrument. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B. Validity and reliability of the survey instrument were established for use in a longitudinal study in North Carolina, which began in 2003 (Rock, et al, in review).

Interviews were administered at each of the participating universities as part of a clinical requirement for all elementary social studies methods courses. There are currently seven universities in North Carolina and six universities in South Carolina participating in this study, and all are members of their prospective social studies professors’ state organizations. University students enrolled in these courses conducted interviews with their clinical teachers in spring and fall 2005 (n=374; nNC=224 and nSC=150). The response rate was 100% as all interns were required to complete these interviews as part of their methods course. The teachers selected were a purposeful sample of teachers across the state that served as partners with the university and agreed to accept a clinical intern for the semester. A combined total of 374 interviews were conducted using the survey instrument in 2005.

**Findings**

In determining the impact of testing in social studies, the following themes emerged: priority and valuing of social studies, time allocated to social studies, teacher satisfaction with
amount of time devoted to social studies instruction, and teachers’ rationale for teaching social studies. Each will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

**Priority and Valuing of Social Studies**

The first question posed in the study is for teachers to rank order on a scale of 1-4 (listing 1 as most important and 4 least important) how their schools value and how they value each of the four content areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Valuing is operationalized as the perceived importance of the content within the academic curriculum. Consequently, valuing is defined as one’s commitment to the content in terms of instructional time, resources, and personal investment. The latter applies to time and effort invested in instructional planning for the content. The conceptualization of valuing evolved from the development of the survey instrument through a pilot study in North Carolina and subsequent feedback from teachers and university faculty (Rock, et al., in review).

Reflective of national trends, teachers from both states overwhelmingly ranked reading/language arts as most important, and mathematics was ranked as second in priority. In addition, comparisons indicate little difference between the states in the role that social studies has in the elementary curriculum (Table 1). Teachers in both states ranked social studies as third ($M_{NC}=3.2$, $M_{SC}=3.2$) in their own commitment to the content areas but perceived their schools to rank social studies as less important than science ($M_{NC}=3.44$, $M_{SC}=3.7$).

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Teachers’ Ranking of Social Studies</th>
<th>Schools’ Ranking of Social Studies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>M=3.2 52% rank social studies 3rd 34% rank social studies 4th</td>
<td>M=3.44 42% rank social studies 3rd 51% rank social studies 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>M=3.2 40% rank social studies 3rd 37% rank social studies 4th</td>
<td>M=3.7 27% rank social studies 3rd 65% rank social studies 4th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were differences in the perceived value of social studies as indicated in qualitative responses. North Carolina teachers often commented about frustrations with limitations due to the devalued importance of social studies:

It is very difficult to allot time for social studies…. Most of our day is focused on phonics, reading, writing, and math.
The school day is broken up by many different programs. Social studies is scheduled at the end of the day; it is often missed or condensed, and only taught when time allows. We are forced to teach reading and math for specific amounts of time, which often I run over. Social studies is then put off to complete activities in other (content) areas.
Social studies should be taught all day every day, but in the “real world,” you’re expected to teach required content (i.e., reading and math as separate subjects), and
because these are tested, they will remain as “what is important.”

South Carolina teacher responses did not indicate limitations of scheduling constraints but rather emphasized testing as a driving factor influencing teacher and school commitments to social studies. Comments such as these exemplify teacher perceptions:

I teach social studies because it is interesting. the kids enjoy it, and it has to be taught due to the standards. It is on the PACT test.

Students need to have social studies as much as they need to have the language arts, math, and science.…

I teach social studies for many reasons; it is a required subject area, and it is an area that is tested on our PACT…

Social studies is a subject that is required to be taught. The standards are written to cover it, and it is tested on the PACT.

Although teachers in both states perceive the commitment to social studies as third in importance in elementary curriculum, there are different motives for this valuing. Testing in South Carolina is a driving force for maintaining the social studies role as one of the core subjects that must be taught. In the absence of accountability, elementary teachers in North Carolina face scheduling and time constraints that question the role of social studies as a vital part of the curriculum. Even though teachers value social studies, they see external factors driving social studies from the curriculum. This is captured well by one teacher’s comments,

Social studies is a window to our past. I feel students need to know where we have been to better prepare them for our future. In addition, our students enjoy social studies. Often it seems they enjoy the subjects that are pushed to the back burner for reading, writing, and math skills.

Time Allocated to Social Studies

The next objective of the study was to determine if there were differences in time allocated to social studies. Instructional time is defined as the time that teachers allocate to teaching the required social studies curriculum as identified by state standards. There were no differences in teacher input in decision making regarding the usage of instructional time with the majority of teachers in both states indicating that either they determine how instructional time will be used or have some flexibility within established school policies (NC=89%; SC 83%). However, testing does seem to have had an impact of how frequently students receive social studies instruction. The majority of teachers in North Carolina reported teaching social studies less than the teachers of South Carolina. There were significant differences in the frequency of social studies instruction in that more South Carolina (40%) than North Carolina (19%) teachers reported teaching social studies all year. Additionally, when social studies is taught, South Carolina teachers spend more time each day teaching social studies than North Carolina teachers (SC=75% indicate 30-45 minutes or more; NC=67% report 30-45 minutes). The key point in interpreting these data is to demonstrate the large percentage of South Carolina teachers who teach social studies daily for 30-45 minutes, while social studies is most often taught two to three times a week for 30-45 minutes in North Carolina. These data show that more instructional time
is devoted to social studies in South Carolina schools. This translates into 21% of North Carolina students receiving only half as much social studies instruction as South Carolina students yearly, and North Carolina students are more likely to receive 15-30 minutes less each day when social studies is taught than South Carolina students. See Table 2 for explanations of time allocations by state.

**Table 2**

*Time Allocated to Social Studies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Frequency of social studies instruction students receive</th>
<th>Time allocated (in minutes) to teaching social studies curriculum when it is taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| North Carolina   | 19% daily all year  
74% half the year (either 2-3 days per week all year or alternating time i.e. 3 weeks on, 3 weeks off) | 4% 0-15  
27% 15-30  
51% 30-45  
16% 45 or more |
| South Carolina   | 40% daily all year  
54% half the year (either 2-3 days per week all year or alternating time i.e. 3 weeks on, 3 weeks off) | .7% 0-15  
21% 15-30  
53% 30-45  
22% 45 or more |

Although there were no stark differences between states in overall percentages, it is important to mention the role of pull-outs during social studies instructional time. Pullouts in North Carolina (29%) were more frequent than in South Carolina (24%). Teachers in South Carolina reported less daily frequency of pullouts even suggesting that pullouts were not often used. South Carolina teachers also indicated that the occurrence of pullouts “used to be more before PACT.” In contrast, North Carolina teachers emphasized the use of pullouts for student remediation of tested curricula of reading, writing, and mathematics. North Carolina data suggest that almost a third of North Carolina students are not given the opportunity to learn social studies as students are consistently pulled out during social studies instructional time.

Of even greater significance, when teachers were asked whether the time allocated to social studies had increased or declined, the majority of North Carolina teachers (41%) stated that they were spending less time teaching social studies today as compared to five years ago; whereas, the majority of South Carolina teachers (55%) identified the opposite trend with increases in time allocated to social studies over the past five years. The difference in time allocations can be attributed to two factors: the introduction of testing in social studies in South Carolina within the last five years and the implementation of testing in science in North Carolina in 2006-07. While trends in South Carolina have moved toward increased importance of social studies as defined by time allocation, North Carolina has experienced a de-emphasis of social studies as time has shifted in favor of tested curricula.

*Teacher Satisfaction with Time Allocated to Social Studies*
Testing does appear to have an impact on teacher satisfaction with the time allocated for teaching social studies. In North Carolina, 44% of teachers are satisfied with the time for teaching social studies, and they attribute this to the ability to integrate social studies in other curricula (66%), while 56% of teachers are not satisfied, and the main reason for dissatisfaction is the redistribution of time for tested curricula of math and language arts (83%). South Carolina teachers were split (50% yes; 50% no) on their satisfaction with the amount of time allocated for teaching social studies despite that this time is almost double that of North Carolina. Reasons for satisfaction were similar to North Carolina teachers, in that South Carolina teachers (60%) were able to use integration for teaching of social studies.

Overwhelmingly, South Carolina teachers (84%) reported dissatisfaction in time allocations due to the need to spend time for teaching reading, writing, and mathematics. Teachers in both states indicated that the main barrier for teaching social studies was the lack of time devoted to social studies (NC=55%; SC=45%) with an emphasis on other tested curricula (NC=49%; SC=38%). Teachers agreed that increased integration would lead to a greater satisfaction in social studies time allocations (NC=45%; SC=53%).

Rationale for Teaching Social Studies

The most significant difference between the two states surfaced in the qualitative analysis of open-ended responses in which teachers explained why they teach social studies. The top three reasons that North Carolina teachers teach social studies: 1) teachers value social studies and feel it is important for students to learn (47%); 2) it is part of the state’s elementary curriculum (36%), and 3) to teach citizenship and character education (24%). For South Carolina teachers, the driving forces behind why they teach social studies: 1) It is required (40%); 2) It is part of the elementary curriculum, and 3) It is tested (34%). They indicated an additional reason for teaching social studies in that they value social studies (25%).

Interpretations and Recommendations:

Data indicate the possible impact of testing in that it can increase time allocated for the teaching of social studies; yet, even with South Carolina teachers having approximately double the instructional time for social studies, there are still similar barriers that exist between states in teaching social studies. A teacher involved in this study stresses, “Social studies is a subject that is required to be taught (in South Carolina). I find it quite interesting that social studies does not carry the same weight on PACT as ELA (English/language arts) and math.” Data suggest that this might be an outcome of the continued devalued role of social studies in comparison to the core elementary curricula of reading, writing, and mathematics.

Testing did not seem to have an impact of the perceived commitment to social studies; in both states, teachers ranked social studies third among core content. The distinction that needs to be drawn is the difference in motives for valuing social studies. In North Carolina, the majority of teachers indicated that they teach social studies because they like it, love it, enjoy it, or value it. Comments such as these capture North Carolina teacher motivations for teaching social studies:

I teach social studies because I value it.
I enjoy teaching social studies and students often enjoy learning about it. I try to
incorporate these concepts into my everyday teaching as much as possible.
I like to teach social studies because social studies is an important and interesting subject.
I try to integrate social studies as much as possible into other subjects.

Data suggest that teachers who value social studies are more likely to teach social studies and will make efforts to find ways to provide their students with social studies learning experiences. Therefore, the teaching of social studies in North Carolina is dependent upon the individual teacher’s perceived value of social studies and his or her commitment for teaching social studies.

In contrast, social studies instruction in South Carolina is driven by the PACT and the mandate to address required standards. Most teachers indicated this type of reasoning behind teaching social studies:

It [social studies] is required, and it’s tested on the PACT.
Social studies must be taught; it’s my job to teach what is tested.
Because the district says language arts teachers have to [teach social studies]. It’s not really by choice.

There are still many teachers in South Carolina who teach social studies because they value it and believe that it is important for students to learn. For example, many teachers reflected:

Social studies is important, and that’s why I teach it.
Social studies is as important as any of the other content area subjects, and I feel that it needs more light shed on it. I teach social studies to help students become more productive citizens.
I like social studies, and I want to teach kids how to be good citizens. I love the subject [social studies].

The significant difference in motives for valuing social studies is that there are many teachers that would not teach social studies or value social studies in South Carolina if it were not for the test. Teacher responses such as “I teach social studies because it is required. However, the more I learn, the more I enjoy it. I want my students to remember, value, and embrace social studies. I teach it [social studies] to address the standards only. I really don’t like it, but I might…suggest that mandated curriculum can impact teacher valuing and perceptions of commitment to the curriculum. Given that students in South Carolina receive twice as much instruction in social studies as students in North Carolina, the test can have a positive impact in increasing the importance of social studies for those who have previously de-valued or avoided the content. Since social studies instruction is not limited to those who value social studies, there is a greater chance that more students in South Carolina than North Carolina will have an opportunity to learn social studies.

Data indicate that testing did not have an impact on teacher satisfaction for time allocated to social studies; although there were stark differences in the role of valuing and in teacher motivations for teaching social studies. It bodes to question why social studies continues to remain low in importance despite the emphasis testing can generate. This may be attributed to the perception of mandated curricula. Meeting expectations for accountability does not necessarily generate an appreciation for the content teachers are required to teach. Although it is
possible to have some positive impacts as suggested above, it is more likely that testing can have a negative impact as well. This is evidenced in two South Carolina teachers’ rationale for teaching social studies, “because it is part of my job, and I’m required to. It [social studies] helps reinforce language arts skills….” “Because it is a standard, and standards must be met in order for students to be prepared for the PACT…. Resentment for teaching content does not necessarily translate into quality social studies instruction. Additionally, there are questions of whether these motivations to teach the test will undermine the quality of social studies instruction. This study falls short of understanding the ramifications of testing in terms of the type of social studies instruction that students in South Carolina received versus those in North Carolina. We recommend future research be conducted to evaluate these potential negative impacts of testing. We also intend to follow-up with teachers in South Carolina to understand their perceptions of the social studies test. Questions about the test cannot be answered with the data reported in this study. What we can report is that South Carolina has seen an increase in curriculum resources, professional development in preparing teachers for teaching social studies, fewer administrative barriers to teaching social studies, and an increased allocation of instructional time for social studies. All of which are scarcities for North Carolina social studies instruction.

To ponder the question of whether to test or not to test, results from this study would suggest that testing does increase time allocated to social studies. Despite potential concerns about testing, the fact remains that students in South Carolina receive almost double the amount of social studies instruction than students in North Carolina. The trend toward increased emphasis on social studies in South Carolina, as a result of the introduction of testing in the last five years, is much more positive than what the data suggest in North Carolina, where five-year trends indicate the reduction of time allocation for social studies. The concern for the marginalization of social studies in North Carolina may even be greater as testing in science in elementary grades begins 2006-07. These trends or data cannot be ignored. Lintner (in press), in a study of South Carolina elementary principals’ perceptions of social studies and the impact of the PACT, found similar results suggesting that testing does, in fact, raise the importance of social studies and increase instructional time for social studies because it is mandated. Without testing, social studies will lose the battle for the most precious resource in the elementary school day instructional time. Testing does bring social studies into the realm of core content, and it will be taught if it is tested. We offer this suggestion with much caution as testing might not provide the outcomes that social studies educators envision.

The broader analysis of testing needs to fall in the realm of evaluating accountability and possible alternatives to testing. Consider the second South Carolina teacher’s rationale. Although the teacher recognizes motivations for teaching social studies because it is required, the teacher continues with the explanation, “If it was my choice, I wouldn’t teach what was required of me but would include other social studies topics like Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, anthropology, cultures, and how they have changed.” Another teacher provides the rationale that, “Though I know that the teaching of social studies is important and necessary, the actual content I teach is due to the standards written for each grade level; with more freedom, I feel that my social studies instruction would improve….” These comments suggest that testing is confining and limiting and may not be the best method for promoting student learning and understanding.

We also have to consider the negative effects of teaching to the test. Jesus Garcia, past president of the National Council for the Social Studies, states,
Testing takes the creativity out of teaching in our effort to show kids are learning....We ought to do some testing to make sure kids know the subject, but we need to find different ways to do that. Not just paper-and-pencil national kinds of tests (Pascopella, 2006, p. 939).

Lintner (in press) found that although PACT testing mandates did, in fact, increase the importance of social studies, this was only achieved forcibly and was reactionary compliance rather than through the intrinsic desire to promote social studies instruction. Lintner (in press) concluded that the PACT fell short of facilitating “innovative and exciting social studies opportunities…. Lost was the opportunity to purposefully and enthusiastically move social studies—not by dictate but by desire—off the back burner in South Carolina’s elementary schools” (p. 12). Research is needed to determine if there are more effective ways of measuring student understanding other than testing. The role of testing as a whole should be called into question. Does testing effectively promote quality instruction be it reading, writing, math, science, or social studies?

However, in the current age of accountability and with the pressures of national and state legislation which equate testing with importance and value, we need to ask ourselves if the long term costs of not advocating for social studies as part of this accountability formula will be worth the sacrifice. If our efforts to resist testing diminish social studies in the current curriculum, then what will be the future role of social studies? Until the tide turns, social studies must be included in the accountability formula or it may, if it has not already, become inconsequential in the elementary school curriculum. It is our recommendation that the role of accountability in social studies and in the elementary school be revisited, but the dialogue must include alternatives to testing and the consideration that the reduction of testing in all core content areas might promote a higher quality of instruction.

Additional research is needed to build an understanding of the national state of social studies and the role of accountability in the elementary social studies curriculum. Research should be guided by studies that provide a comparative analysis of states which are testing and those that are not testing social studies as well as studies which address the effectiveness of alternative measures of assessment in social studies. A final recommendation for future research is for the evaluation of the outcomes, impacts, and ramifications of various methods of accountability on the quality of social studies instruction.
References


Appendix A

Use of Instructional Time in the Elementary School Social Studies

Structured Teacher Interview

Interview conducted by (initials only) ___________________________________________

School system ______________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester (circle one)</th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Summer 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you completed this questionnaire before? (circle one)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(If yes, please only complete the questionnaire once during a school year.)</td>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade (circle all that apply)</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total teaching experience in years? (circle one)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4 years</td>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>25-29 years</td>
<td>30-34 years</td>
<td>35+ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do you teach over 80% of the school day? (check one)

☐ Self-contained (teach all subjects) ☐ Departmentalized (teach individualized curriculum)

If you checked departmentalized, please identify the content you teach. (check all that apply)

☐ Social Studies
☐ Science
☐ Math
☐ Language Arts/Reading
☐ Other ___________________________________________

Directions: Please respond to the following questions by selecting the most appropriate response. Feel free to expand on any answers that you provide.

1. Rank-order your school’s commitment to the following subject areas in order from (1) Most Important to (4) Least Important

   ____ Reading/Language Arts
   ____ Mathematics
   ____ Social Studies
   ____ Science
2. Rank-order your commitment to the following subject areas in order from (1) Most Important to (4) Least Important
   ______ Reading/Language Arts
   ______ Mathematics
   ______ Social Studies
   ______ Science

3. How are decisions made regarding how instructional time is used for social studies?
   ______ Administrators determine how instructional time will be used.
   ______ Teachers determine how instructional time will be used in their classroom.
   ______ A set policy exists for the school, but teachers have some flexibility.
   ______ Other (please explain) ________________________________

4. Is social studies instructional time used as a pullout for other activities and/or student remediation work?
   ______ Yes. How often? ________________________________
   ______ No.

5. How often do your students receive social studies instruction?
   ______ daily all year
   ______ daily for one semester
   ______ 2-3 days per week all year
   ______ 2-3 days per week for one semester
   ______ one day a week
   ______ rarely/never
   ______ other (please explain) ________________________________

6. When you teach social studies, approximately how many minutes of instruction out of the school day are focused on the North Carolina Standard Course of Study goals and objectives for social studies?
   ______ 0-15
   ______ 15-30
   ______ 30-45
   ______ 45 or more
   ______ other (please explain) ________________________________

7. I have read the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for Social Studies
   ______ carefully
   ______ moderately
   ______ briefly
   ______ have never examined it

8. In your estimation, how well do you think you address the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for Social Studies?
   ______ fully address the standards
   ______ adequately address the standards
9. As compared to five years ago, the time allocated to teaching of social studies has
   _____ increased significantly
   _____ increased slightly
   _____ remained the same
   _____ decreased slightly
   _____ decreased significantly
   _____ I have not been teaching for 5 years

10. How do you teach social studies?
    _____ integrated with other content areas
    _____ as a stand alone subject
    _____ combination of both integrated and as a stand alone subject
    _____ rarely/never teach social studies
    _____ other (please explain)____________________________________________
    ____________________________.

11. How prepared do you perceive your students are for the next grade level in social
    studies?
    _____ well prepared
    _____ adequately prepared
    _____ poorly prepared
    _____ unprepared

12. How many semester hours of undergraduate/graduate training have you had in the social
    sciences, e.g., history, anthropology, sociology, political science, geography, economics,
    etc.?
    _____ less than ten
    _____ ten to fifteen
    _____ fifteen to twenty
    _____ twenty to thirty
    _____ more than thirty

13. Are you satisfied with the amount of time that you currently allot for social studies
    instruction?
    _____ Yes (please answer #14)  ______ No (please answer #15)

14. If you responded yes in question #13, please indicate your reason(s) for your contentment
    with the time allocated for social studies instruction. (Check all that apply).
    _____ I am able to integrate social studies across the curriculum.
    _____ I integrate social studies in reading, writing, math, and science, and I teach it as a
      stand alone subject.
    _____ I alternate instructional time with science.
15. If you responded no in question #13, please indicate your reason(s) for your discontentment with the time allocated for social studies instruction. (Check all that apply).

- There is insufficient time to teach social studies because instructional time is spent teaching reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Social studies is pushed aside to prepare for End-of-Grade Tests.
- Interruptions, pull-outs, mandatory, and special programs interfere with social studies instruction.
- Increased integration of social studies with other content areas would lead to more satisfaction with the limited instructional time given to social studies.
- Other (please explain)

16. Which of the following are barriers that might inhibit you from teaching social studies? (Check all that apply).

- Lack of instructional time devoted to social studies.
- End-of-Grade tests in other content areas.
- Reading, writing, and mathematics need more instructional time.
- There are few resources available to teach social studies.
- Social studies is an overloaded curriculum, and there is too much content to teach.
- I do not have the training necessary to effectively integrate social studies.
- I do not feel prepared to teach social studies because of lack of content knowledge.
- There are not barriers that keep me from teaching social studies.
Open-ended Question

17. What are the reasons that you teach social studies? Please explain your reasoning.

Would you be willing to be contacted for further discussion of your responses? Sometimes we find a need for follow-up questions for clarification of the data. Your participation would be greatly appreciated in understanding your responses. If you are willing, please provide your phone number.

Name___________________________________ Phone (      )_____-________ and

Email___________________________________.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Marginalization of Social Studies Research
Instructions for Structured Interview

In order to participate in this study please follow the following steps:

- Please obtain IRB approval for your institution to participate. You will need to retain IRB approval for your records.

- The instrument is to be used as an interview conducted by a preservice teacher with a practicing teacher. The instrument is to be used as a structured interview with the opportunity for teachers to expand upon their responses. It is NOT intended to be used as a survey. It is to be administered in a face-to-face interview. Teachers are to be given the opportunity to explain all responses and to ask questions of the interviewer. The interviewer is to write all responses and additional comments provided by the participating teacher. The interviewer should also ask for clarification and explanation of all responses. Preservice teachers are to be trained how to use the instrument, how to conduct face-to-face interviews, and how to record interview responses. Please do not adapt and/or change the instrument or the mode of delivery.

- A cover letter is provided. You may adapt the cover letter for your institution.

- Please collect data from participants once a year or do not have the same teacher complete the interview more than once in one year's time.

- The face-to-face interview is a required assignment that preservice teachers complete in social studies methods. Preservice teachers are also required to respond to a reflective writing assignment at the end of the clinical experience.

Protocol for Administering the Face-to-Face Interview

- Preservice teachers are expected to interview their cooperating teacher. The interview should occur early in the semester. This is to ensure that preservice teachers can verify that responses given to questions are verified during observations throughout the semester.

- Preservice teachers are to observe during the clinical experience and respond to open-ended questions at the end of the semester to validate interview responses.

- Preservice teachers are to read the questions of the data collection instrument to cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers may ask for clarification.

- Once cooperating teachers have responded to the question, preservice teachers are to ask cooperating teachers to explain their response, to provide examples, or to expand on their understanding of the situation at their school or in their classroom.
• Preservice teachers are to record cooperating teacher responses on the data collection instrument.
• Completed interviews are to be submitted to the social studies methods instructors.

Preservice Teacher Reflective Assignment

At the end of the clinical experience preservice teachers are to reflect on their observations and teacher responses to the interview questionnaire. They are to provide written responses to the following open-ended questions which are to be submitted to the university supervisor and methods instructor:
• Did the amount of instructional time used for social studies, as conveyed by the cooperating teacher in the interview, correspond with what you observed in the classroom this semester? Explain.
• How did the time you spent in this elementary school classroom impact your thinking about the teaching and learning of social studies?