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Social Studies Instruction in Elementary Classrooms following NCLB and CCSS

A Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Graduation in the Honors College

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Literature Review

In order to discuss the issue of the disappearance of social studies education in the elementary setting, it is vital to understand the definition and importance of social studies education. A common misconception of social studies education is that it is synonymous with history. This, however, is far from the reality. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines social studies as “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence” (Schneider, et al., 1994). In essence, the goal of social studies education is to prepare students to become valuable citizens (Pace, 2007; “A Vision of Powerful Teaching,” 2008; Sapon-Shevin, 2009). This is done by teaching students how to identify and understand the challenges and issues facing our world (“A Vision of Powerful Teaching,” 2008) in order to make informed decisions for the good of the public (Schneider, et al., 1994). Similarly, John Dewey (1909), a well-respected philosopher and educational reformer, argues that the purpose of public education in general is to train children to function as citizens and to “adapt to...shape, and direct” the changes that are happening around them (p. 11). In order for democracy to thrive and for children to function powerfully in the world around them they need social studies education to learn how to be valuable citizens (Dewey, 1909; Schneider, et al., 1994; Sapon-Shevin, 2009).

Two important landmarks have had a major impact on social studies instruction in the elementary classroom: the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was signed into law in 2002; however, it is technically a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Applequist, 2007). The goal of NCLB was to close the achievement gap between groups of students and to increase accountability of teachers and schools (“The new

rules,” 2002). To do so, states must demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP), as defined by each state, in regard to math and reading (Applequist, 2007). To measure this, states are required to create state tests to be delivered annually to all students in grades 3 through 8 (“The new rules,” 2002). These tests have to align with challenging state standards that NCLB required states to develop and implement (“The new rules,” 2002). Furthermore, NCLB also imposed new requirements for teachers, calling for states to develop a plan to ensure that all teachers would be *highly qualified* by 2005 (Applequist, 2007). Essentially, NCLB dramatically increased the role the federal government plays in public education.

It is also important to understand what the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are about in order to understand why the implementation of them has had such a big effect on instruction time for social studies in elementary classrooms. The Common Core is a set of standards for mathematics and ELA that outline what a student should be able to do by the end of each grade from K-12 (“About the standards,” 2015). The standards are designed to prepare students for success after graduating high school whether that is in college, entry-level careers, or workforce training programs (“About the standards,” 2015). In 2009, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) collaborated to develop these standards (“About the standards,” 2015), released them in 2010 (Porter, 2011), and since then 43 states along with the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the standards (“About the standards,” 2015). .

NCLB requires states to administer high stakes testing that is aligned with state standards, such as CCSS, in order to demonstrate adequate yearly progress.¹ However, high stakes tests do not necessarily cover every subject. NCLB only mandated high stakes assessments for the subjects of ELA and mathematics (Applequist, 2007) and according to the 50-State Report Card (2009) only twelve states assess social studies. Many researchers (Center on Education Policy, 2008; McMurrer, 2007) report that there is a direct link between high stakes testing and instruction time of core subjects in the elementary classroom.

In a study on the impact of NCLB, the Center on Education Policy (2008) reported that 44% of districts nation-wide have increased time for ELA/math and decreased other subjects and specials. They report that more than half of these districts (53%) reduced social studies time by at least 75 minutes per week while increasing ELA and/or math by a range of 75-150 or more minutes per week. Heafner and Fitchett (2012b) report that social studies instruction time has reduced by 60 minutes per week from the years 1993-2008; however, in a similar study of the same time span they found that social studies instruction time reduced by only 56 minutes (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012a). Regardless of the exact number of minutes Heafner & Fitchett (2012a, 2012b) and The Center on Education Policy (2008) both agree that social studies time has decreased since the initiation of NCLB and high stakes testing. In a counter-claim, Judith Pace (2011) reported that when interviewed directly, teachers indicated little frustration in regard to instruction time as a result of NCLB and more specifically high stakes testing. However, because this qualitative study only included five subjects, four of which all taught in the same district (Pace, 2011), the scope and sample size of the study is too limited to be representative of nation-wide opinion.

¹ According to Eric Groce, et.al (2007), high stakes testing refers to assessments that determine whether a student graduates, a teacher is sanctioned, and/or whether schools receive federal funds under NCLB.

Many researchers (Au, 2007; Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008; McMurrer, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007) also pinpoint high stakes testing as the culprit for curricular control. Reporting for the Center on Education Policy, McMurrer (2007) found that “84% of districts reported that they have changed their curriculum “somewhat” or “to a great extent” to put greater emphasis on tested content” (p.2) in regard to elementary reading since the implementation of NCLB. The Center on Education Policy (CEP), an independent nonprofit organization, studied 349 school districts nationwide during the first five years of NCLB (McMurrer, 2007). In a more in depth study, Valli and Buese al. (2007) reported that due to the need to reach AYP, faculty meetings were spent aligning curriculum to the high stakes tests. These findings, however, were based on a much narrower sample: 150 teachers from 25 schools within the same district (Valli & Buese, 2007) so their findings cannot necessarily be generalized nation-wide as CEP’s findings can be. Supporting CEP’s findings, in a qualitative meta-analysis of 49 qualitative studies covering 96 schools, 38 districts, and 19 different states, Wayne Au (2007) found that high stakes testing has led to a “narrowing of curriculum, or curricular contraction to tested subjects” (p.262). Boyle-Baise, et al. (2008) confirmed Au’s (2007) findings and took them one step further by conducting an interactive qualitative analysis on the effects of high stakes testing specifically in regard to social studies curriculum. After studying thirteen classrooms in six elementary schools in the Midwest, they found that social studies curriculum became much more broad and blended into other subjects (Boyle-Baise et al., 2008). Social studies content was deemphasized and the emphasis was placed rather on practicing literacy skills (Boyle-Baise et al., 2008). Although the sample was quite narrow, Judith Pace (2011) found similar effects in lower income schools in California. She found that high stakes testing caused schools to transform social studies curriculum to focus on less content and more text book

and skills based formulaic responses. These researchers have all found that high stakes testing has caused curriculum to narrow to focus on tested content (Au, 2007; Boyle-Baise et al., 2008; McMurrer, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007), and has caused social studies curriculum to move away from in depth study (Boyle-Baise et al., 2008) and to move away from creative thinking to formulaic responses and textbook based content (Pace, 2011).

Because many states only just recently adopted the Common Core State Standards, there is little research on the effect of the standards on instruction of the core subjects: ELA, mathematics, social studies, and science. I make comparisons between research on the effects of standards in general under NCLB to how CCSS are likely effecting social studies instruction in particular. Valli and Buese (2007) found that under NCLB, teachers were encouraged by administrators to write curriculum using the state standards as a base thus causing a narrowing of the curriculum (p.531). While Hamilton (2007) found that only some teachers reported concerns over “excessive narrowing of curriculum and instruction” (p.111), in a majority of cases teachers reported that standards-based accountability affected their practices in positive ways. These findings, however, should be considered with caution due to the fact that it only covers years 2003-2005 (Hamilton, 2007) and likely could have missed major changes made in the first two years of the NCLB era as well as changes in the last 10 years. The overall theme of standards-based accountability under NCLB is aligning curriculum with standards. But what happens to subjects that are left out of the standardization movement? The utter lack of social studies standards in the Common Core State Standards speaks to devaluation of social studies instruction in elementary classrooms. One teacher in the study done by Boyle-Baise et al. (2008) stated "If it's not a standard, then it's wasting our time. We are not encouraged to do things

outside the standards" (p.240). This begs the question, if social studies standards under the Common Core do not exist, will social studies even be taught at all?

This idea of the devaluation of social studies education has been researched by many. In a study of teachers in Indiana, VanFossen and McGrew (2008) found that a striking 1.2% of K-3 teachers ranked social studies as the most important subject. Even fewer 4th and 5th grade teachers, less than 1%, felt social studies was the most important subject. Vogler et al. (2007) found a higher, yet still worrisome, percentage of teachers in South Carolina, 20.9, ranked social studies as the most important subject. The difference in these statistics could possibly be accounted for by the fact that social studies is tested in South Carolina thus potentially leading teachers to place higher value on it than teachers in states where social studies is untested. Even though this percentage is markedly higher, only 6.1% of teachers in South Carolina felt their faculty considered social studies to be the most important subject thus leading to low commitment to social studies in comparison to other content areas (Vogler et al., 2007). Nevertheless, these two studies both limited their sample to teachers within Indiana and South Carolina, respectively which indicates that their findings cannot be easily generalized nationwide. However, Ellington, et al. (2006) conducted a nation-wide survey and found that only 29% of teachers felt that civics and government were thought to be important by their schools. This percentage is shocking when taking into account the fact that over one hundred years ago John Dewey (1909) stated that the sole purpose of schools in general is to teach students to function as citizens.

Some researchers (Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; VanFossen & McGrew, 2008) have found that many schools argue that they do in fact teach social studies through the use of integration with other subjects. While integration is certainly a strategy to counter the issue of limited time

in the school day, it can lead to the further devaluation of social studies and its content. For example, when observing a 5th grade teacher in California who set aside a 75 minute block two times per week for social studies, Pace (2011) found that the teacher used this time to integrate literacy. However, the instruction focused more on teaching literacy skills using historical passages (Pace, 2011). Because the focus was on literacy skills rather than the social studies content, the unit went quite slow and curriculum ended with the Declaration of Independence and did not even touch on the Revolutionary War or the Constitution (Pace, 2011), two very important parts of the foundation of our country. Integration may be a way to connect subjects together and use time efficiently; however, it is often at the cost of devaluing social studies content.

It is clear that research indicates that social studies has lost critical instruction time and valuable in-depth curriculum in exchange for broad content and focus on literacy skills. However, much of this research has been done through wide-scope surveys. The studies that did focus on the situations in particular states or districts that involved interview and observations with teachers are quite outdated. Previous research does not address the effect of the new nationwide Common Core Standards in combination with high stakes testing under NCLB. The purpose of this study is to take a closer look at how NCLB and the Common Core Standards have affected social studies instruction in one elementary school in Western New York.

Methodology

The status of social studies as low on the totem pole in comparison to ELA and Math in terms of instruction time is a well-researched phenomenon (Au, 2007; Marilynne Boyle-Baise, Ming-Chu Hsu², Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2011; Marilynne Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008; Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012a,

2012b; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; McMurrer, 2007). Researchers have used a variety of methodologies including quantitative (Fitchett et al., 2014; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012a, 2012b), qualitative (Au, 2007; Marilynne Boyle-Baise et al., 2008; Pace, 2011), and mixed methods (Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; McMurrer, 2007).

To study the association of teacher, classroom, and state policy characteristics on grades 3-5 social studies teachers' instruction time, Fitchett (2014) used a hierarchical linear model to examine quantitative data collected from 1,540 teachers. Meanwhile, Heafner and Fitchett (2012a) used the same set of data from the National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) to analyze the impact of the reauthorization of NCLB on elementary social studies and later to analyze the effects of national policy mandates on instruction time allotments of the core subjects (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012b). However, while quantitative research is easily generalizable, it does not necessarily give an in depth look at what is going on inside the classroom.

To get a close look at post-NCLB social studies, Boyle (2008) utilized a case study interactive qualitative analysis method. This study was limited to seven elementary schools in the Midwest. Data were collected from focus groups, questionnaires, observations, and interviews (Boyle-Baise et al., 2008). Similarly, to analyze the impact of high stakes testing on social studies where it was not tested by the state, Pace (2011) observed, interviewed, and collected relevant documents from five classrooms grades 4-7 in four schools located in two urban districts. While these qualitative studies are very limited in scope, as is typical for a qualitative study, Au (2007) used a qualitative meta-analysis design to analyze data collected from previous studies covering a broad scope of 96 schools in 38 districts in 19 states. The purpose of this study was to investigate how high stakes testing affected curriculum. The data included interviews with

teachers and administrators and evaluation of curriculum from a variety of subjects (Au, 2007). Qualitative studies allow for a closer look at what is actually going on in the classroom while quantitative studies are more useful for investigating generalizable patterns.

In order to combine the best of both worlds, Holloway (2009) and the Center on Education Policy (reported by McMurrer (2007)) used mixed methods designs to study the implementation and effects of NCLB in its first five years (McMurrer, 2007) and to study if and how social studies was being taught in elementary schools (Holloway, 2009). The Center on Education Policy surveyed 491 school district officials from all 50 states and interviewed 43 school district administrators (Mc Murrer, 2007). However, because interviews were limited to district administrators and not teachers, this data does not give the best look at what actually goes on in the classroom. On a much smaller scale and utilizing teachers as participants, Holloway (2009) surveyed 100 elementary teachers in one southwestern district and subsequently interviewed ten of the surveyed teachers.

Although research on social studies instruction time and delivery exists, all of these previous studies are not particularly current, with the most recent study occurring in 2009 (Holloway, 2009). More importantly, these studies do not take into account the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards which were released in 2010 (Porter, 2011). There was a dearth of published literature on the effects of NCLB in combination with the CCLS on social studies instruction. To address this gap in the research, the present study focuses on the impact of NCLB and CCLS on one teacher's instruction in a classroom in a school district in Western New York. This analysis uses a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews. This approach allows me to examine how this teacher feels that NCLB and CCLS have impacted her delivery of social studies instruction.

Setting

The study was conducted in Ericsson School District, located in Western New York. To protect the anonymity of those involved pseudonyms were used for names of districts, schools, and participants in this study. According to the 2011-2012 New York State School Report Card which was the most recent one available, Ericsson School District (ESD) consisted of approximately 3,700 students in grades K-12 (“New York State Report Card 2011-2012). According to this report, 38% of these students were reported to be economically disadvantaged, with families who participated in economic assistance programs such as free or reduced-price lunch programs. The students in ESD were reported to be 85% white, 5% black or African American, 5% Hispanic or Latino, 2% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 3% multiracial. Also according to the NYS Report Card, only 3% of 297 teachers were teaching with fewer than 3 years of experience while 9% of ESD’s teachers had Master’s degree plus 30 hours or Doctorate. The teacher turnover rate in ESD was relatively low at 11%.

Ericsson School District made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in both ELA and Math in the year 2011-2012 (“New York State Accountability Report 2011-2012”). However, according to the previous year’s report card (2010-2011), ESD did not make AYP in ELA. This rating came as a result of one accountability group, students with disabilities, out of seven failing to meet AYP. In order to achieve AYP, this group was expected to meet standards of performance. The performance objective score for this group of students was 148 while their actual performance score was 135 which resulted in their failure to meet AYP (“New York State Accountability Report 2010-2011).

New York State was one of the 43 states to adopt the Common Core Learning Standards. According to the Assistant to the Superintendent of Elementary Instruction for ESD, the district followed directives from the state in regard to the timeline for implementing the Common Core Learning Standards. New York State officially adopted the Common Core State Standards in July, 2010 (New York State Department of Education, 2010). New York State Department of Education (NYSED) created a set of modules as an example of how to implement the standards in the classroom. However, they left it up to the individual districts to determine which approach they would choose for implementing the CCLS by adopting, adapting, or not using the modules. According to the Assistant to the Superintendent for Elementary Instruction for ESD, the district chose to adapt the modules by using a combination of the modules, BOCES regional curriculum, and rewritten curriculum to address the CCSS.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is defined as identifying individuals who are especially knowledgeable about a topic are available and willing to participate in a study (Palinkas et al., 2013). This method was useful for my study because it allowed me to find participants who teach 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade and have been teaching for four years or more. Because of my time frame and limited reach, this method allowed me to reach out to specific people to participate in my study. I first contacted an instructional coach at ESD who then reached out to teachers who teach 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade and have been teaching for four years or more.. My contact gave me the names of three teachers who were receptive to being interviewed for my study. One teacher, Dave, responded to the request for interviews and was the sole participant in this case study.

Dave taught fourth grade in a team-teaching setting with another teacher. In their classroom, Mary taught math exclusively while Dave taught science, social studies, and health and the two shared ELA instruction. Dave was certified to teach grades K-6 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a master's degree in education. He has 21 years of teaching experience, 18 of which have been in the ESD. Over the years, Dave has taught 4th through 7th grade but has been teaching the 4th grade for the longest amount of time. Dave's appears to enjoy teaching and his class website further reveals his enthusiasm. The picture posed on the homepage of the website features Dave in a goofy wig as he stands in front of the chalk board, appearing to be amid a math lesson in the year 1979 as the date on the board suggests. It was clear that Dave's enthusiasm for teaching has not waned over his many years of teaching.

Data Collection

To collect data for this study, I used a semi-structured interview process. This process utilized a format of general questions for the interviewee but allows the interviewer the flexibility of asking further questions as they arise during the interview (Lichtman, 2006). This was important for my study because it allowed me to inquire further into effects of NCLB and the Common Core Learning Standards that I had not predicted. The interview was conducted in a face-to-face session and a follow-up email correspondence at a later date. Prewritten interview questions were about time allocation for the instruction of different subjects, changes in instruction time allocation over the past few years, factors that influence instruction time allocation, changes in delivery of social studies instruction, and the participant's opinion on the importance of social studies. The interview questions can be found in the appendix. Spontaneous questions included (LISTEN TO INTERVIEW TO RECORD SUBSEQUENT QUESTIONS) Dave was provided with the initial interview questions prior to the face-to-face interview session.

Although Dave came prepared with notes on each question, he did not appear to refer to his notes during the interview. The interview took place in the participant's classroom after the school day ended. This allowed the participant time to plan lessons and to debrief after the long school day. The interview lasted about 20 to 25 minutes and was audio-taped using an audio recorder app for the iPhone. The phone was placed on the table directly in between the interviewer and the participant so as to record the best quality of both speakers in order to ensure accuracy when transcribed. After interviewing the participant, follow-up questions were sent to the participant to clarify his exact certifications and years of teaching.

Plans for Analysis

The interview for this study was audio recorded, transcribed, and coded using a combination of an open coding and hierarchical axial coding. I began coding using the process of open coding. In open coding, the researcher begins by "sweeping" the data and marking sections of text with codes created on the spot (Charmaz, 2006). I initially found approximately 30 to 35 codes; some examples include "cutting down content," "teaching is personal," "lack of connection," "focus on ELA," among many more. Next, I coded the data using hierarchical axial coding. This is a process of coding in which the researcher divides the codes into categories and sub-codes (Charmaz, 2006). After coding the transcript of the interview, I compared the data I found to what the research previously discussed in the Literature Review section found.

Analysis

Coding Process

In order to begin to analyze my data, it was necessary to transcribe the audio recording of my interview with Dave. This allowed me to read through the interview several times, applying codes, or labels, to the data. The first cycle of coding consisted of open coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Open coding means to apply labels to words or phrases found in the transcript (Charmaz, 2006).

During this process I read the entire interview and came up with codes for the data as I went along. This resulted in approximately 30 to 35 codes; some examples include “cutting down content,” “teaching is personal,” “lack of connection,” “focus on ELA,” among many more.

During the second cycle, I engaged in categorization. Categorization means to examine the codes as a whole to see if there are any connections. I sorted my codes into categories based on connections I made. For example, the codes “teaching is personal,” “teachers control classroom atmosphere,” and “sense of obligation” went under the category of “role of the teacher.” Next, I examined the categories I created and reflected on the interview as a whole to create five overarching themes of the interview. The themes were: “Shifting focus to ELA and Math and away from Social Studies,” “Issue of time,” “Degree of teacher control,” “Instruction delivery,” and “Stress on teachers.” I found that some statements from the interview often applied to more than one theme showing that these themes are connected with one another.

Shifting focus to ELA and Math and away from Social Studies

One of the themes that arose throughout the interview was the shifting focus to ELA and Math and away from Social Studies as a result of both NCLB and the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). It became clear as I spoke with Dave that ELA was at the forefront of his mind and the district’s. The value placed on ELA was evident in Dave’s statements about the schedule breakdown of the day: “For ELA it’s about 90 minutes a day, which I really strive to get that. Whether it’s something as simple as read-alouds, anything for 90 minutes...for math it’s about 50 minutes a day.”

According to Dave, there was a divider in the classroom which allowed both teachers to teach different lessons simultaneously. During the day, the students switched between the two

teachers for math and science or social studies. By looking at the numbers it was clear that ELA was perceived as the most important subject; students get 30 more minutes of ELA than they do any other subject. Furthermore, Dave's comment, "I really strive to get that," stressed the importance placed on achieving the full 90 minutes of ELA. This was also evident in Dave's comments about the layout of the students' report card: "If you were to look at my report card, say it's three pages, two pages are just ELA and math alone. Science and social studies is just two lines...In fact I think on our report card, there are 3 descriptors for social studies, where on ELA you might have 25."

Later in the interview Dave discussed the role the report card, which was based on Common Core Learning Standards, played in guiding classroom instruction. Because the Common Core Learning Standards placed more value on ELA skills than on Social Studies, this school must follow suit in order to meet all of the standards. According to Dave, this wasn't always the case. When asked how instruction has changed over his almost 21 years of teaching Dave replied "The increase in ELA is probably the biggest push, whether it's a new reading skill, inferencing, drawing conclusions, going in depth...It just changes, and changes, and changes every year so you need to spend time on it." It appeared that ELA received so much attention the past few years but had yet to find consistency in teaching methods causing even more time to be spent on teaching the subject.

Coinciding with a shifting focus to ELA came a devaluation of Social Studies. A close examination of instructional time showed how social studies was not valued as highly as ELA. As noted previously, 90 minutes was spent on ELA in Dave's classroom while 60 minutes were devoted to math and social studies or science. Note the importance of the word "or." In Dave's classroom, social studies and science units were taught for 4-6 weeks at a time. He related that

“The way we do it here is we alternate units. So for example I’ll start with Native Americans and then I’ll go into plant and animal life. Then I’ll go into geography, and then I’ll go into electrical circuits. It alternates.” Although 60 minutes may have been spent on Social Studies per day, it was only every 4-6 weeks. If we say there were 36 weeks in a typical school year, then that means that for approximately 17-19 weeks students were not learning about social studies. Whereas, all 36 weeks were spent learning ELA skills.

It was not clear whether this schedule was controlled by Dave or by Ericsson School District; however, this schedule was clearly one way that this classroom was dealing with pressure from the district and the state to focus on ELA. According to Dave this schedule posed a challenge come report card time. He pointed out that “come report time, you know, you might not have a grade for social studies. And the parents look at it, ‘what, you haven’t been doing anything?’” The content of the report card reflected the diminished value placed on Social Studies in comparison to ELA. In addition, the devaluation of Social Studies was apparent in how instruction on the subject was delivered. This idea will be discussed at greater length in the section labeled “Instruction delivery;” however, essentially, Dave reported that the “blending of ELA and Social Studies” was a result of NCLB and CCLS. He stated that “The big difference is it used to be ELA was ELA and social studies was social studies, now it’s together... the way they’re doing it now is they have the modules for ELA, they’re taking SS stories and putting it into ELA. So yes they’re teaching vocabulary they’re teaching reading skills but they’re using SS text.” Thus, the focus was not on the Social Studies content but rather on teaching ELA skills using Social Studies stories.

Issue of time

One of the recurring topics of the interview was the issue of time. For example, it was apparent that the pressure to cover more content for ELA caused other subjects to suffer. As mentioned previously, the report card played a role in guiding the curriculum in Dave's classroom. He stated, "So you really want to have a grade for each of those when you can, so of course your gonna spend more time with ELA." Because there were exponentially more descriptors for ELA on the report card, a proportionate amount of instruction time was spent on ELA. Furthermore, Dave states,

But now because there's so much ELA, there's so many things we have to cover...you can't. Like this year we look at our unit and go nope, nope, nope, cut out, cut out, what do we really have to teach? And in science it might be 4 or 5 concepts. So then you're short, which is not teaching.

Because there was so much pressure on Dave to cover a vast amount of ELA, and not a similar pressure to cover other subjects, there was not enough time to cover it all so content for subjects like Social Studies was cut down to the bare minimum.

Another issue of time that Dave discussed was that there was not enough time to, in his words, "Do it like you should." What he meant was that he was feeling pressured to deliver information to the students without allowing them the time to really learn it. He related back to the beginning of his teaching career, before NCLB and CCLS, saying, "If I were to look at a unit I created 15 or 20 years ago, it was in-depth, it was time for questioning, it was inquiry, it was more time to really do it like you should." He argued that pressure to cover all of the ELA standards left him without enough time to teach using methods of inquiry and questioning which typically take more time. "It comes down to time," Dave said, "A child asks you, who is Saddam Hussein? I read about this. It used to be you could take time to talk about that. But in the back of

your mind you're like, it's not one of the standards, it's not on the test." Those teachable moments that were so valuable were overlooked because the pressure of high stakes tests, a result of NCLB, and standards, from the CCLS, were taking up the time in the classroom. Dave stated that "There's a difference between going to my principal and saying yes I covered variables and controls and the difference between do my kids know it. And in order to know it you have to have more time." What Dave was saying was that pressure to cover a broad scope of material in a limited amount of time meant the teacher cannot go in depth on the material, thus hampering the students' opportunity to truly learn.

Degree of teacher control

A theme that came to light after examining the interview transcript is the issue of the degree of teacher control over the classroom and the curriculum. Throughout most of the interview, the main theme was the lack of control teachers had; however, Dave also stressed that teachers did have a lot of control over classroom environment and impact on students' lives. When discussing his experience as a 4th and 5th grade teacher, Dave cited that one of his favorite things about this age was that "[the kids] are quick to forgive—me or the other kids, and if it's a bad day it's usually my fault. I didn't plan well or that kind of thing." This showed that the teacher had a remarkable degree of control over the classroom atmosphere and success of the day. With thoughtful planning often came a positive classroom atmosphere conducive for learning. Furthermore, Dave explained that what really matters is that "you're going to influence [your students], you're going to give them a safe place, you're going to love them, and you have a chance to make their lives better." Teachers have a remarkable degree of control over how they impact students' lives; according to Dave that was the most important part of the job.

However, having a safe place was not all that goes on into a classroom. Another point that arose from the interview was that teachers had varying degrees of control over the curriculum, but it wasn't very much. When asked what factors influenced the amount of time spent on each subject per week, Dave replied that it was "the state tests and the report card." According to him, the report card reflected the test, both of which were aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards. Therefore, it was safe to say that instruction and curriculum were heavily controlled by NCLB, which mandated high stakes testing and greater teacher accountability, and more directly the Common Core Learning Standards. If it were up to Dave, curriculum would be guided by the children's interests which would give it a "natural flow." However, he related that "because 50% of our grade (the teacher's) is going to be based on the state test" that was the way that curriculum was controlled now.

New York State issued a set of modules as a way to implement the Common Core Learning Standards. As discussed in the Methodology section, ESD encouraged teachers to adapt the modules how they saw fit. Therefore, this gave Dave a degree of control over the curriculum that some teachers in New York did not have. He stated that

"Every teacher does their own thing. Some teachers open up that module and it will say Lesson 1 Day 1 whatever and they do exactly what that is... what I do is I read the modules and I read the standards and I made a list of the standards that have to be covered. So I know what I have to cover in September, October, November and December. And I look at those standards and I say 'how is it best to teach that?'"

Therefore, Dave was able to use the children's interests to influence the topics of texts he used to teach various skills. This gave Dave a sizable degree of control over how to carry out the curriculum. However, that was not the case in every district. Dave related that at ESD,

teachers “still have some freedom,” whereas in some districts, “the principal can ask you ‘what module are you in?’ ‘what lesson are you on?’” He believed that wanting every teacher to do the same thing was not good. Although Dave has some control over the curriculum he argued that the state tests are the driving force in curriculum planning: “Is it going to be on the test? If it is, they better not just be introduced to it, they better know it.”

Instruction Delivery

Another theme that arose throughout the interview was the consequences NCLB and CCLS have had on instruction delivery. Dave, who started teaching before NCLB and CCLS were implemented, discussed how instruction delivery has changed over the years. According to him, instruction today is more about presenting information than ensuring that the students are really learning it. His reasoning for this change in instruction delivery was the issue of limited time, as discussed previously, which has come as a result of the push for ELA as evident in the CCLS and the implications of NCLB.

Dave stated that he has noted a change in instruction delivery for Social Studies in particular. He related an anecdote about a typical social studies lesson he would have planned years ago:

“I used to do social studies plays for example, what was it like to live in colonial times? And every child would split in groups and we have like this is the church, this is the jail, this is the baker, this is the blacksmith and they would act out what it’s like...”

This lesson allowed students to connect to the material in another way, aside from through documents and lectures, likely reaching students of various learning styles and helping to engrain the content in the students’ memories. However, when asked how Social Studies instruction delivery has changed since NCLB and CCLS, Dave simply stated that “yes, it’s less.” He went

on to explain that “it’s less discussion, less getting involved,” stating that lessons like the one he described cannot be done any more because there’s no time. When asked what the importance of Social Studies education in elementary classrooms is, he stated, “It teaches American culture: why do we have flag day, why do we say the pledge, why did we go to the war in the Gulf War or World War II? We don’t have that because it’s so shortened. We can’t get into those discussions.” It appeared that valuable aspects of Social Studies education such as teaching American culture and engaging students in discussions weren’t being given the same attention they were prior to NCLB and CCLS.

According to Dave, since the Common Core Learning Standards have come into play, the biggest difference in instruction was “the blending of ELA and Social Studies.” He described that the modules designed by the state teach ELA skills using Social Studies or Science stories. Thus, there wasn’t much differentiation between Social Studies and ELA. Although this past year Dave had a designated time set aside for social studies in his classroom, he said that next year designated time for social studies won’t exist. He explained that “all of the reading is going to be taught through Social Studies modules. It’s not going to be kids switch to Mary for math and come to Dave for Social Studies it’s going to be Math and ELA.” By eliminating Social Studies from the daily schedule and blending it with ELA, it appeared as though Social Studies was hardly valued as a core subject as a result of pressures from NCLB and modules designed for CCLS.

Stress on teachers

The final theme that came out of this interview was the increase in stress on teachers. According to Dave, pressures surrounding high stakes testing were a major source of stress. He stated that 50% of his grade was based on the state test and pointed out that “I had a kid this year

who missed 46 days of school. So his test score is going to count?! That's where the stress comes in." It appeared as though Dave felt like his score was not accurately representative of his performance in the classroom. Dave was not the only teacher feeling the effects of stress. He related that "It's really bad now. We're having people retire that weren't planning on it. We're having teachers take leave of absences for stress. We had a teacher leave probably two months because of stress related issues." Another source of this stress was the constant changes in directives on how to teach ELA. Dave stated that:

"New writing strategies, like we'll use a program called Letter Answers and you'll start to get good at it and all the sudden now you have to use Lucy Calkins, which is another program. So it just changes, and changes, and changes every year so you need to spend time on it."

He informed me that his reading list was already at 100 hours for the summer "because you have to relearn how to teach everything." These new strategies were coming from the modules provided by the state that coincided with the Common Core Learning Standards. Thus, it was clear that pressures from NCLB and CCLS were placing stress on teachers.

Conclusions

I embarked on this study to investigate how social studies instruction has changed since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). More specifically, I wanted to know whether or not teachers in the Ericcson School District (ESD) feel NCLB and CCLS have affected Social Studies instruction in their classrooms. I began by examining previous research; however, there was very limited research on the combined effects of NCLB and CCLS on social studies instruction. Although intending to interview five teachers of 3rd, 4th, and/or 5th grade in ESD, only one teacher responded to my

call for participants. Through one semi-structured interview with a fourth grade teacher named Dave, I discovered numerous findings.

A number of my findings related to findings from other studies. For example, this study confirmed that high stakes testing is linked to a decrease in instruction time for social studies. Many researchers found a linkage between high stakes testing and instruction time for all subjects in general (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012a, 2012b; “Instructional Time in Elementary Schools,” 2008; McMurrer, 2007). However, Heafner and Fitchett (2012a & 2012b) and The Center on Education Policy (“Instructional time in elementary schools,” 2008) focused on social studies and found that social studies time has decreased since the initiation of NCLB and high stakes testing. This study confirmed those findings and also found that in Dave’s classroom social studies has lost even more time since the adoption of CCLS. In fact, Dave related that for the 2015-2016 school year, distinct social studies time in the schedule will be eliminated in favor of strictly ELA and Mathematics.

This study also confirmed that high stakes testing and standards based accountability has led to a narrowing of social studies curriculum. A number of researchers found that high stakes testing has caused curriculum to be narrowed to focus on tested content (Au, 2007; Boyle-Baise et al., 2008; McMurrer, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007). This study confirmed those findings and also found that the CCLS have also contributed to a narrowing of curriculum. In regard to how social studies curriculum in particular has changed since NCLB and CCLS Dave stated simply “it’s less.”

Furthermore, this study also confirmed that high stakes testing and standards based accountability has lead to a devaluation of social studies content through issues with integration. Since NCLB, researchers have found that social studies was being integrated with ELA (Boyle-

Baise et al., 2008; Pace, 2011). Boyle-Baise (2008) found that the focus was on teaching literacy skills and not the social studies content. Pace (2011) found that social studies curriculum was more textbook and skills based than based on creative responses. This study found a similar phenomenon. Dave no longer had time to use inquiry, questioning, and discussion based teaching methods but rather students simply read social studies texts to learn ELA skills. As discussed previously, Dave related that for the 2015-2016 year, distinct social studies time will be eliminated from the daily schedule. This placed the value on ELA and diminished the value of Social Studies.

This study also revealed other findings not discussed in previous research. For example, this study found that the CCLS have played a major role in the devaluation of social studies. According to Dave, the CCLS and the state modules call for ELA to be taught through social studies stories, thus devaluing the social studies aspect and placing the emphasis on ELA skills. The large amount of ELA and Mathematics content needed to be covered in order to meet the CCLS causes teachers to spend more class time on those subjects rather than other subjects such as social studies, which are not addressed in the CCLS.

Additionally, this study also found that NCLB and CCLS in particular have caused an increase in teachers' stress levels. This was a result of the pressure to cover more content in order to ensure their students performed well on state testing which affected the teachers' evaluation grade. Moreover, because the district and state changed the programs teachers' should use to teach ELA skills quite often, the teachers struggled to keep up with learning how to implement these programs and spent a lot of time outside of work hours studying. Dave related that his summer reading list was already at least 100 hours.

There were a number of limitations to this study. To begin, the findings from this study were not generalizable. Although this study was designed to interview five 3rd-5th grade teachers in ESD, only one teacher was interviewed which meant that the findings were biased based on one participant's views. Having only one participant certainly weakened the validity of my study; however, the findings of this study still lead to questions to guide future research. Furthermore, because this was a very brief study, only one interview was conducted with no observations or other method of data collection which means that this study was not in-depth and the participant's answers could have been affected by daily factors. Therefore, these findings are simply a great starting point for conversation and further study regarding the effects of NCLB in accordance with CCLS on social studies.

Through interviewing Dave, a number of areas for further research came to light. For example, one could take an in-depth look at integration of ELA and social studies and how it can be done without devaluing the Social Studies Content. Another area of future research could be how the CCLS are affecting teachers' stress levels. Overall, this study shows that social studies has in fact been pushed aside since NCLB, and is being pushed even farther aside by the implementation of the CCLS. To paraphrase John Dewey (1909), the function of social studies is to teach children how to become valuable citizens. Without social studies education America's youth will grow up unprepared to participate in a global community.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching elementary education?
2. What grade are you currently teaching? How many years have you been teaching that grade?
3. During the most recent FULL WEEK of teaching, approximately how many hours did you spend teaching ELA? Math? Science? Social Studies?
4. Have you noticed any changes in the amount of instruction time you spend on each subject per week over the past few years? Please explain.
5. What factors, if any, influence the amount of instruction time you spend on each subject per week?
6. Do you feel the amount of instruction time and instruction delivery of social studies has changed since the implementation of the Common Core standards? Please explain.
7. What is your opinion on the importance of social studies instruction in the elementary classroom?
8. In your current classroom, do you imbed social studies instruction in other content area instruction (for example ELA), or do you have a separate time in the day to focus directly on social studies instruction? Has this changed over the past few years?
9. Any other relevant questions that arise from the participant's responses during the interview