

The State of Elementary Social Studies Education in Texas

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Elementary Social Studies Education in Texas: An Endangered Species

When I was teaching in Houston, I was invited to join a group called the Pathways Initiative. This group is a collaborative effort among public schools, community colleges and four-year universities to both align instruction to the national standards and to improve student performance in the social studies across all levels. At the meetings I had attended, I noticed a glaring omission: there were no elementary level representatives who either had been invited or had attended these sessions. Throughout the course of the discussions, a frequent concern of those attending (from middle school through college) concerned the lack of student preparation to handle the subject, the general poor performance of students at all levels, and the inability to engage students effectively in the more sophisticated approaches that educators would like to implement. A fairly obvious variable that needed to be considered, especially in light of the concerns voiced by those middle school history teachers attending these meetings, was how frequently they noted the glaring lack of preparation by their incoming students.

Imagine the plight of the average sixth-grade social studies teacher. This is usually the first grade level that the majority of students receive an instructor that is solely dedicated to this subject. That has usually meant that for the first time, students will receive daily instruction in a subject that state law mandates should have been taught consistently for the previous six years. Four of those years are strictly centered on laying the foundation for understanding the major strands of social studies: a temporal understanding of how we organize our past; the importance

of collective memory and previous examples in informing current decision making; the structure and organization of basic human society and how and why it has evolved; and a recognition of the relationship between human society and the environment, as well as the positive and negative results of human interactions. Throughout those six years students are supposed to be given the opportunity to practice the application of those concepts in an ever widening circle starting with the self and ending with American history. Unfortunately, this is not consistently done and the average Texas sixth grade teacher is faced with the responsibility of implementing a curriculum designed with the implicit understanding that the previous six years of instruction have at the very least been honestly and consistently attempted. To illustrate the example well, imagine if a sixth grade teacher was expected to teach a sixth grade math curriculum to students who had not received competent and/or consistent instruction in the subject in the previous six years. Plug in any subject and the logic of this line of reasoning is undeniable. Trying to repair the façade of a crumbling structure is practically useless if the foundation is weak or non-existent.

Seemingly successful scores on state social sciences tests are not a reliable indication of student learning. Many teachers have learned how to prepare students to pass an exam without actually accomplishing what should be their main goal: preparing a new generation of citizens who have developed a sufficiently sophisticated command of a subject and the deliberative skills that serve as an internal guide for their successful and effective participation in our civic culture. Although we currently recognize the wisdom of placing an emphasis on higher order thinking skills, such approaches are hamstrung by the neglect accorded to the skill-building years at the elementary level. For instance, it is useless to have an intellectual discussion on the impact and meaning of western migration in American history if the students lack the basic geographic skills

to not only identify the places that are being discussed, but also the environmental, ecological and cultural factors that affected the movement.

Sufficient anecdotal evidence exists to support the view that at the elementary level social studies education is taking a backseat to language arts and math. Many teachers are quietly encouraged to shelve social studies instruction and use that time for more language arts instruction. While other states have conducted quantitative studies into the issue, an extensive internet and database search during early 2014 of accessible literature did not identify any study of teaching perspectives and behaviors of Texas elementary teachers with respect to social studies instruction. For this reason, I undertook the following study to learn more about the current situation in Texas concerning social studies instruction and to open up a dialogue about the role of the subject in elementary education.

As a constructivist scholar I believe that by neglecting the quality and consistency with which elementary social studies is taught we are ignoring the basic maxim of good educational practice: successfully applied knowledge stands upon the ground of a solid foundation. In doing so, we are ignoring an important element in Vygotsky's social development model, the importance of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). If educators engage in practices that hinder the knowledge development of teachers and students (i.e. the most obvious MKO's), this will deny subsequent generations of children the opportunity of being effectively mentored. Their natural mentors, whether teachers, adults or older children will be handicapped by their own educational inadequacies, thus replicating cognitive errors and misunderstandings that will persist as the child develops.

State Demographics

At the time that this survey was conducted, public school enrollment in Texas stood at 4,998,579. Of that number, 2,660,739 were K-6 or 52% of the total statewide public school enrollment. Hispanics constitute the largest number of those K-6 students at 1,376,409 or 51.7% followed by White students at 798,488 or 30% and African Americans at 329,405 or 12.3%. The vast majority of these students, 1,676,644 or 63% are classified as economically disadvantaged. The trend is toward a dramatic shift in a minority/ majority state.

State Level Curriculum

In the state of Texas, the social studies are an integral part of the elementary level curriculum. According to the Texas Administrative Code §74.2 which address the required curriculum:

*A school district that offers kindergarten through Grade 5 must provide instruction in the required curriculum as specified in §74.1 of this title (relating to Essential Knowledge and Skills). The district must ensure that sufficient time is provided for teachers to teach and for students to learn English language arts and reading, mathematics, science, **social studies**, fine arts, health, physical education, technology applications, and to the extent possible, languages other than English.*

Furthermore, Texas Administrative Code §74.1 identifies the social studies as one of four foundational subjects along with math, English language arts and science. Unlike the other subjects, the code specifies the exact areas that must be covered by that social studies curriculum to include the following: *Texas, United States and world history, government, geography, and economics, with emphasis on the free enterprise system and its benefits (TEC 74.2).*

Texas Administrative Code §113.10- 113.16 delineates the social studies concepts that must be covered from grade levels K-5. The social studies curriculum in grades K-3 lays the foundation of social studies skills. Student knowledge and understanding starts with the self and radiates outward as each grade level progresses. The emphasis is on such skills as temporal awareness, basic geographic and economic concepts and civic culture. A common thread for each of those grade levels is that students are expected to acquire information from a variety of sources and problem-solving, decision-making, and independent-thinking skills. Starting in grade 4, greater emphasis is placed on history while the other social studies concepts (geography, economics and government) are essentially studied in relation to the historical theme. Grade 4 is concerned with Texas history while grade 5 is a survey of American history. Although grade 6 is classified as a middle school grade by the Texas Education Agency, there are still elementary schools in the state that include that grade level and thus the grade level has been included in the study. The 6th grade social studies curriculum focuses on world history and geography.

Literature Review

There have been notable studies conducted about the nature and extent of social studies instruction in the last twenty years. This research, much of which focuses on the time dedicated towards teaching social studies has identified the following major points:

1. Instructional time for social studies instruction has been declining for the last two decades; (this finding is upheld by all the sources consulted for this article)

2. The time is being siphoned off to increase instructional time in other subjects, mainly language arts and math; (this finding is upheld by all the sources consulted for this article)
3. Testing pressures exerted by NCLB and the development of a test centered educational climate have a negative effect on social studies instructional time; (this finding is upheld by all the sources consulted for this article)
4. The testing regime affects a teachers creative and initiative when it comes to teaching social studies; (Boyle Blaise, Fry, Good, Vogler, Burstein, Leming, Lintner)
5. Declining instructional time in social studies has a negative effect on student teachers, since opportunities to observe the subject being taught are scarce and send the message that social studies instruction is unimportant; (Fry and Good)
6. Pressures from administrators play a role in the reduction of instructional time. (Lintner, Boyle Blaise)

Studies conducted in other states in the last seven years have noted the trend in the decline of social studies education at the elementary level. Burroughs, Groce and Webeck (2005) conducted a study in North Carolina to determine the impact of NCLB on, among other subjects, social studies. Their results indicated that an emphasis on standardized testing “pressures [teachers] to increase instructional time for the subjects that are tested [and] have resulted in a reduction of time spent on subjects that are not tested.” (Burroughs 14) Elementary teachers in North Carolina were notably concerned that the pressures of standardized testing have led to a reduction of social studies instruction and “appears to drive the curriculum and set the tone for elementary schools.” (Burroughs 15) Burroughs found that teachers were concerned that testing

had become the goal of education rather than a tool. While surveyed teachers recognized social studies as being of equal in importance to both mathematics and language arts, they perceived that NCLB was forcing the subject out of the curriculum. A component in this study surveyed Texas middle school teachers. Burroughs et al. (2005) reported that those teachers surmised that even though state law mandated an 8th grade assessment of social studies knowledge, the heavy emphasis on language arts and math in the elementary grades meant that students arrived in middle school notably deficient in basic social studies skills. (p. 16)

Timothy Lintner (2006) presented a study in the *Journal of Social Studies Research* in 2006 that concluded that social studies instruction at South Carolina K-5 campuses had been “more by necessity than desire... pushed off the back burner.” (Lintner 7) Lintner surveyed administrators rather than teachers, and his conclusions bear out an important part of the problem. Social studies was seen by these administrators as only the fifth most important subject area and that its primary mode of delivery should be through integration with other subjects. Administrators also reported that when teachers did instruct social studies, they tended to favor and use with greater frequency teacher centered instructional modes. In South Carolina, the implementation of the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) in social studies at the elementary level has forced these principals to promote instruction in the subject, but Lintner noted that “social studies gained importance through mandate. What is sadly missing is the belief that the PACT could in fact facilitate innovative and exciting social studies opportunities. Instead, Lintner noted, most principals approached social studies with resigned compliance rather than rejuvenated creativity.” (Lintner 7) In spite of administrator’s belief in the importance of Social Studies, the subject is just another task that must be efficiently instructed to pass a test.

Leming, Ellington and Schug (2006) conducted a national survey targeting elementary and middle school social studies teachers. The results, published in the journal Social Education in 2006, supported Lintner in determining that “schools place less importance on social studies than most other subjects” and that the “goal of civic literacy is not as valued as the rhetoric might suggest.” (Leming 325). The authors also found that teachers in two of the grades they had surveyed reported dedicating little of their classroom time to the instruction of social studies. The authors reported a notable cultural shift in the approach to teaching social studies (when it was taught), that placed greater emphasis on teaching cultural diversity and social justice as opposed to a hero centered curriculum. They expressed the belief that de-emphasizing the importance of cultural heroes stripped students of exemplar models of civic virtue. Finally, Leming noted that teachers placed a low importance on the instruction of economics, decrying this gap as being “especially troubling given the importance of economic and financial literacy to individual success and general prosperity.” (Leming 326)

Burstein, Hutton and Curtis (2006) conducted a survey in one urban district in California. The researchers found that in the case of the district they surveyed, the majority of the school day was dedicated towards “teaching subjects that are tested by standardized measures.” (Burstein 6) Close to 50% of the teachers reported dedicating less than an hour a week to social studies instruction with only 2% actually teaching the subject on a daily basis. Although teachers in the upper elementary grades (3-5) tended to dedicate more time to social studies, the numbers were still abysmal, with, 61% dedicating less than 2 hours a week on social studies. The numbers are worse for K-2, with 87% of teachers dedicating less than 2 hours a week. The authors also found that teachers were generally dissatisfied with their teaching of social studies, with large

percentages noting that time issues and mandated curriculums diluted the quality of their instruction. In terms of delivering content, they reported that the tendency was still centered on the use of lectures and text, and that teachers rarely engaged students through the use of primary documents or inquiry methods. Burstein concluded that the “emphasis on high stakes testing is impacting how the core subjects are being taught, with social studies curriculum being relegated to the background and only taught when there is time.” (Burstein 18) Notably, they did not find a correlation between teacher experience and the amount of time dedicated to social studies, thus eliminating the possibility, in this study, to link inexperience of the teacher as a causal factor influencing time spent instructing the subject. They did find that although teachers recognized the value of critical thinking and inquiry lessons, these same teachers opted not to use these “better” approaches to instruction. The author suggests that standardized testing is in essence encouraging teachers to ignore best practices in favor of test centered expediency.

Vogler and Virtue (2007) uphold Burstein’s conclusion by noting that the pressure of high stakes testing prompts teachers to default to teacher-centered instructional practices. The authors also noted that the lack of social studies testing in elementary school leads to the subject being ignored at the K-5 level. Vogler questioned the flawed, business-based model attached to standardized testing, noting that unlike products on an assembly line, the ability to completely control the means of “manufacturing” a better student are beyond the means of any human.(Vogler 57).

Boyle-Blaise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere and Stewart (2008) conducted a study of thirteen Midwestern schools and found that NCLB played an influential role in the diminishing profile of the social studies in those schools. One principal stated that once social studies became a part of

a school's report card, then it would receive attention, while another one said that she is not expending energy over the status of her school's social studies curriculum. Teachers in this same study, without exception, identified NCLB as a barrier to their teaching (Boyle-Blaise 239). Boyle-Blaise also found that the inflexible regimentation of teaching schedules decreased the use of "in-depth, constructive and investigative activity" (Boyle-Blaise 240). Ironically, as pedagogical specialists attempt to improve the quality of instruction (especially through teacher preparation programs), the very approaches that they advocate are being pushed aside by the expediencies of test preparation. No better example could be presented of the proverbial tail wagging the dog.

Fry (2009) completed a qualitative study following four pre-service teachers during their student teaching assignments. She noted that the pre-service teachers were given very little opportunity to instruct even interdisciplinary lessons due to the existing commercially produced literacy curriculum the mentor teachers were forced to employ. The protocols for the program severely limited time for other subjects and since mentor teachers were evaluated on the use of the commercially produced curriculum, they were unwilling to allow their student teachers to teach alternative lessons. (Fry 33) As a result, the pre-service teachers were unable to apply the strategies and ideas they were learning in their social studies methods classes. Fry (2009), in her investigation of four pre-service elementary teachers' experiences, noted that her subjects developed a marked aversion towards the use of standardized testing. (Fry 37)

A longitudinal study of social studies teaching at the elementary level in North Carolina found that pre-service teachers were not only finding it difficult to observe the subject being taught, but it also sent the message that the instruction of social studies were of less importance

than the other core subjects. Good, Heafner, Rock, O'Connor, Passe, Waring and Byrd (2010) surveyed 71 pre-service teachers. They completed a twenty question survey before commencing their clinical experience. After completing their clinical experience, the pre-service teachers provided written responses to three questions. Among the researcher's conclusions, they found that teacher candidates believed there was little time to teach the entirety of the curriculum and that the social studies were devalued as part of the curriculum. Furthermore, the teacher candidates recognized that integration of the social studies into other subjects was necessary in order to actually teach the subject. Good recommended "that solid actions in the form of research, advocacy and professional development with in-service and pre-service teachers is needed if social studies education is to be revitalized in our elementary schools." (Good 6)

Fitchett and Heafner (2010) conducted a national study comparing about 20 years of data from the National Center for Educational Statistics to determine the effects of high stakes testing and standardization on social studies instruction. The authors concluded that curriculum standardization and NCLB were seriously damaging social studies instruction by limiting instructional time devoted to the subject. Furthermore, the authors expressed grave concerns that the expected implementation of science testing at the 3rd and 5th grade level would further erode instructional time for the social studies.

Pace (2011) concluded in her study that NCLB has a negative effect on the time and quality of social studies instruction. She concluded that the negative impact of NCLB appears to be more pronounced in low performing skill as opposed to mid and high performing schools, but that "there still are significant consequences of NCLB in these schools." (Pace 57)

The Survey

The survey I designed to determine the state of elementary social studies education in Texas contained eighteen questions that gathered geographic, demographic and habitual information from respondents. Participation was requested from over twenty statewide districts of which ten responded and eight participated. The eight districts covered most of the important geographic and metropolitan areas of Texas except for the Rio Grande Valley. Although the use of online survey software facilitated the distribution and collection of surveys, many of the larger districts across the state have created significant barriers designed to limit outside research. The survey was distributed to the e-mail lists of elementary teachers across each participating district. In some cases the researcher was permitted to contact teachers directly, while in others the survey was distributed by district personnel. The great variety in campus types and the propensity for many sixth grade teachers to be assigned to middle school campuses affected the responses from sixth grade teachers.

Respondents Demographic Information

There were 373 respondents to the survey. Of that number, the participating Dallas-Ft. Worth area district contributed almost 40% of the responses, followed by the two El Paso area districts which contributed about 29%. Houston area responses came out to almost 14%, the Panhandle, 6%, East Texas, 6% and Central Texas, 5%. A higher number of responses had a direct correlation with a participating district's willingness to facilitate the efficient distribution of the survey. An even greater number of responses were garnered when the researcher was

permitted to contact the teachers directly. A final note- while the Panhandle and East Texas percentage numbers appear low, the number of responses from those participating districts represents a greater percentage share of their respective faculties.

The grade level distribution of responding teachers was fairly even across the grades surveyed except for sixth grade. Kinder teachers represented 17.4% of respondents, followed by first grade at 12.65%, second at 14.5%, third at 14.5%, fourth at 19.3%, fifth at 17.2% and sixth at 4.6%. Self-contained, general education teachers made up 37.8% of the respondents, subject specific teachers made up another 26.3% and bilingual teachers accounted for another 31.1%. Only 1.3% of the respondents were GT teachers, while 3.5% were special education teachers. The dearth of responses from special education is significant and merits further investigation.

Teachers were also classified by years of teaching experience. Early career teachers (less than 3 years' experience) made up only 14.2% of respondents. Mid-career teachers (less than 10 years' experience) made up 36.2% of respondents, while late career teachers (more than 10 years' experience) made up 49.6% of respondents. Some interesting trends can be discerned by the demographic information that was collected. The first was that veteran teachers answered in greater numbers to the survey with nearly half of the districts having more than 50% of their respondents with ten or more years of teaching experience. Fourth grade teachers responded in greater numbers to the survey followed by kinder and fifth grade. Five districts had zero responses in sixth grade, which is not surprising considering the preponderance of K-5 over K-6 campuses, but three districts had zero responses in first grade while one had zero in second and another had zero in fifth. Only two districts had responses at every grade level.

A further question gathered information on the respondents' teacher preparation program. Almost four out of five teachers (78.6%) were products of traditional, university based teacher preparation programs. The rest, 21.6%, were the product of alternative certification programs. Notably, two of the districts surveyed had a large percentage (43.8% and 32.4%) of their respondents who are products of alternative certification programs. Another interesting feature is the correlation between university attended and district employed. Respondents appear not to venture far from their alma maters when seeking employment. For instance, more than 80% of the respondents from the El Paso area graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso. Conversely, no respondents from any of the districts outside the El Paso area reported attending UTEP in spite of the fact that it has one of the better bilingual education programs in the state. Almost every graduate of Texas Tech teaches in the Panhandle and every graduate from TCU is employed in the DFW area.

Findings

The findings of the survey, pertaining to teacher perceptions concerning the instruction of social studies are presented in the following paragraphs as bold headings, followed by a detailed breakdown by percentages of teacher responses.

The Majority of Respondents dedicate less than 30 minutes a day teaching Social Studies:

Questions five and six asked teachers to determine how much time they dedicate to teaching social studies on a daily and weekly basis. The majority of the respondents, 72.3%, dedicate 30 minutes or less of daily social studies instruction. Only 25.5% dedicated between 30 and 45 minutes of instruction while 3.2% taught more than 45 minutes daily. The one remarkable

element is that 8.3%, or one out every 12 teachers reported dedicating zero time to teaching social studies. Question six asked about weekly time dedicated to social studies instruction. The majority of teachers (60.6%) dedicated less than two hours of social studies instruction per week while 39.4% dedicated more than two hours a week. Only 4.8% of the respondents reported that they never taught social studies and this creates a discrepancy with the daily percentage. It can be reasoned that the 3.5% difference is the result of respondents who should have actually answered in the less than 15 minutes daily category for question five.

Teachers believe that the Amount of Time Appropriated for Teaching Social Studies is Inadequate:

Question seven asked respondents if they believed that an appropriate amount of time is apportioned during the day or week towards the teaching of social studies. The responses were overwhelmingly negative as 42.4% of teachers answered no with another 18.2% answering rarely. In contrast only 6.4% definitely believed the time was sufficient while another 10.5% believed that it was mostly appropriate. The rest of the respondents, 22.5% were somewhat satisfied with the amount of time they had available to teach social studies. Every district with the exception of one had a clear plurality that identified their social studies instructional time as inadequate, while only one district expressed a majority of teacher satisfaction with the time allotted.

Only a Small Percentage of Teachers Feel that the Social Studies are Valued as Part of the Daily Curriculum:

When Texas teachers were asked if they felt that social studies was valued as part of the daily curriculum, 39.9% of teachers responded that it was not or rarely valued. Only 26.3% responded positively while 33.8% believed that it was somewhat valued. In other words, only about one in every four teachers surveyed believed that within their schools, social studies was a relevant and valued part of their daily curriculum.

A Large Majority of Teachers Responded that they Encountered Barriers to the Teaching of Social Studies:

Question 9 asked teachers if they encountered barriers that prevented teaching social studies in the classroom. Almost half of the respondents (49.6%) stated that they encountered barriers most or all of the time, while only 16.1% reported that they rarely or never encountered barriers. In conjunction with the previous questions it is clear that for a large percentage of Texas elementary schoolteachers, social studies, in spite of being an important component of the state curriculum is regarded as an optional subject. The time which is dedicated towards its instruction is inadequate for the scope of the curriculum and it is clear that certain factors intrude upon the availability of instructional time to adequately cover the subject. This response correlates to anecdotal evidence that identifies informal administrative pressure upon teachers to shelve social studies instructional time in favor of more “important” subjects like math and language arts. The responses to Question 9 appear to correlate with the conclusions that were surmised by the following question.

Texas Teachers Overwhelmingly Identify Standardized Testing as a Significant Culprit in the Reduction of Instructional Time for Social Studies

Manzo (2005) asserted that “the unintended consequences of No Child Left Behind have been to put history into an even more marginal position.” (Manzo 1) Responses to Question 10, which asked teachers if they believed that standardized testing took away time from teaching social studies, concurred with Manzo. An overwhelming 61.4% reported that standardized testing always or on most occasions affected the time they had available to teach social studies. Another 25.7% reported that standardized testing affected instruction some of the time. Only 12.8% of respondents felt that standardized testing rarely or never affected instructional time for social studies. In other words, seven out of every eight teachers who responded to this survey squarely identify high stakes testing as a significant factor in the reduction of social studies instructional time.

The Amount of Professional Development Opportunities and Resources for Teaching Social Studies were Variable in their Access and Consistency

Teachers were also asked whether their districts provided social studies oriented professional development opportunities. Results indicated that 13.9% of teachers could count on always having access to professional development opportunities while another 36.7% could sometimes count on them being made available. Only 12.1% of respondents reported that professional development opportunities were never made available while another 37.3% stated that such opportunities were rarely made available. When it came time to ask about the availability of social studies materials, respondents were less satisfied with the performance of

their districts as 9.4% stated that no materials were made available while another 47.5% reported that few resources were provided. Those who reported an abundance of materials accounted for 11.5% of the respondents while 31.6% reported having access to some materials. Certainly the trivialization of the social studies is made more apparent by the lack of material and educational support that the subject receives. If a school district or school does not invest in material or professional development for their personnel, that is relevant towards social studies instruction, then they are sending the message that the subject is of secondary importance to others in the elementary core.

Teachers were Split on whether their Teacher Preparation Programs adequately prepared them to teach Social Studies.

Three questions in the survey were dedicated to gathering information about the respondents' pre-career preparation and their general comfort in teaching the four root subjects that comprise the social studies curriculum. The findings speak towards the perceived inadequacy of a teacher's preparation towards instructing the subject and indicate that of the four major divisions within the social studies, only one is being addressed adequately.

Respondents were asked whether they felt that their college or alternative certification courses adequately prepared them to teach social studies. The results were fairly even across the survey, with 30.3% stating that their courses definitely prepared them, 35.4% believing that their courses were somewhat effective and 34.3% believing that the courses were not effective. Notably, El Paso area school districts expressed some of the highest levels of dissatisfaction with their preparation while those in East Texas had the highest level of satisfaction. Only one district

had significant discrepancies between the three categories and that district's response sample was too small to draw any significant conclusions. The results themselves require further study since the question does not allow respondents to distinguish between their content and methods courses. Respondents may have solely evaluated their content or their methods courses when answering the question. It is not uncommon for students to have difficulty distinguishing between courses designed to teach methods and those that deliver content. In addition, alternative certification and bilingual programs may not include specific courses on social studies methods. Another factor to consider is whether respondent's dissatisfaction includes their student teaching semester. If students encountered resistance to teaching a social studies lesson and rarely or never saw their mentor model such lessons during their internship, then this certainly constitutes an important variable that would have affected the way they answered the question.

The Majority of Teachers only feel comfortable teaching History, and most are not confident teaching Economics.

Questions 15 and 16 identified the four major fields within elementary social studies (History, Geography, Government and Economics) and asked respondents to gauge their general level of comfort and confidence in teaching each one. An overwhelming percentage of teachers, 60.9% feel the greatest confidence in teaching history. Geography is a distant second, with 28.7% expressing the greatest confidence in teaching the subject. Only 7% of teachers felt the greatest comfort in teaching government while a paltry 3.5% expressed similar confidence in teaching economics. The inverse question, which asked which subject respondents felt the least comfortable teaching, predictably had 62.7% answering that they felt the least amount of

confidence teaching economics. The results for the other three subjects are more even as 15.5% identified government, 11.3% identified geography and 10.5 identified history as the subjects they felt the least amount of confidence in teaching. These findings merit further study and indicates a potential flaw in our teacher preparation efforts that require the immediate attention of all Texas teacher preparation programs.

Teachers continue to favor traditional methodological approaches and resources as the main vehicle for delivering social studies instruction.

The final pair of questions asked respondents to identify their preferred methodological approach to deliver social studies content and the type of resources they used. Question 17 asked respondents to identify what percentage of the time they dedicated to social studies instructions using a particular method. This question had a great deal of overlap, since many of the respondents employ varying methods. Regardless the findings indicated that traditional, teacher-centered approaches were employed with greater frequency than more student-centered methods. For the purposes of this study, respondents who indicated 30% or higher usage of a method or resource were considered to employ that resource or methodological approach frequently. Those who responded between 10%-30% were considered to occasionally employ those resources and methods. Anyone indicating below 10% was regarded as not employing the method or resource. I deliberately used this percentage breakdown in consideration that most teachers employ a great variety of approaches and resources in their teaching. The percentage breakdown favors a positive interpretation, thus the findings of these statistics are quite revealing.

The first notable finding is that traditional lecture format is used consistently (over 30% of the time) by about 60% of respondents surveyed while another 50% used question and answer approaches with equal consistency. When examining approaches that develop higher order thinking skills, the numbers would indicate that their use is rare among the respondents. More than 53% of respondents rarely or never employed research methods in their classes while another 66% rarely or never employed dramatic play. Oral history projects had even lower use, as 78% of respondents reported that they never or rarely used this approach in their teaching. On a positive note, 30% of respondents indicated that they employed an inquiry based approach in their classes.

The findings appear to correlate with the type of resources teachers use to instruct social studies in their classroom. Question 18 asked respondents to identify the frequency and use of available social studies resources. More than 50% of respondents employed the textbook consistently. Another 38% reported that they used worksheets. Trade books were consistently used by 36%, while videos were at 53% and computer resources came out 46%. On the other end of the scale, 67% of respondents rarely or never used primary documents in their instruction, while models (66%), games (63%) and field trips (85%) were similarly under used. The lack of primary document use is quite notable considering that Texas state standards 21A (fourth grade) and 24A (fifth grade) specifically mandate teaching students to differentiate between primary and secondary sources. When the responses to the question by these two specific grade levels is filtered, the percentage who do not use primary documents is more than 68%.

One can surmise that even though social studies specialists are emphasizing more student-centered instructional methods and the use of resources that will stimulate higher-order

thinking skills, the actual practice in the classroom is far from meeting this ideal. One notable fact is that student-centered approaches tend to require more time to implement and in an age where a larger number of temporal and financial resources are being diverted toward high stakes testing, teachers end up making choices that they believe will function within the ever narrowing options they are given. One of the most telling statistics from question 18 is that more than 50% of respondents never use field trips as part of their social studies instruction. Considering that responses were gathered from districts located in areas of Texas with great historical and cultural wealth and significance, this number is an alarming commentary not only on the decline of social studies education at the elementary level, but on the paucity of resources that are dedicated toward providing Texas school children a well-rounded education.

Conclusion

I encountered a pair of former students on the way to my office. Both were in the middle of their student teaching semester and they were recounting their varied experiences. One was fairly satisfied with her mentor while the other was concerned that her mentor's main mode of instruction was through worksheets. Regardless of their individual experiences, both students shared one similarity in their student teaching experiences. Six weeks into their internship, neither had yet to witness a social studies lesson being taught. The first student reported that her teacher was willing and able to assist her in putting together a social studies lesson for observation. The mentor teacher quipped to my student that her class would finally know the intended use of those books gathering dust in the corner. The second student reported that she was unsuccessful in negotiating a time to teach a social studies lesson since her cooperating

teacher was reluctant to interrupt her usual worksheet regimen. In the end I was left wondering about the future of a subject which is never modeled for student teachers and is equally disregarded by both good and bad mentors. The future of social studies looks bleak considering children are not properly taught the subject and future teachers are not adequately prepared to instruct.

This study upholds much of the research that has been conducted over the previous decade on the erosion of social studies instruction in the elementary classroom. In spite of the warnings and the research that has been presented over the years, it appears that policy makers are either not listening or not interested in considering the possibility that their decisions are causing more damage to American education than the problems that were supposed to be addressed by the implementation of such reforms like NCLB. Clearly policy makers need to reconsider the manner in which a standardized test centered mode of assessment is negatively affecting the quality of education in the public schools. Policy makers must also consider whether current curricular demands can be realistically implemented under NCLB. If the preservation of the testing system is the primary priority of Texas education, then the curriculum, as mandated by the state, is not aligned to the realities of what teachers must do to meet those standards. If the goal is to provide a balanced education, then the current emphasis on high stakes testing is having a detrimental effect on achieving that vision. Policy makers then must confront the reality that the tool they use to assess learning in this state (or at least the way they use that tool) and the purported goals for educating the youth of this state are not compatible. College educators and school administrators need to consider the long view of the current crisis. Education is an additive process, and the current generations that are being affected by the

diminishment of social studies will in time reap the negative effects of having part of their education neglected. Not only will the deficiencies in social studies make a student's passage through middle school through college more difficult, but those who will one day become teachers will have significant gaps in their knowledge that will affect their ability to teach effectively when they go to the classroom.

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Appendix 1: Survey

Dear Teaching Professionals,

The following survey is designed to provide information on the teaching of social studies at the elementary level, the preparation of teachers, the professional development opportunities available and the difficulties associated with teaching the subject. The intent of the survey is to provide basic information on the challenges that confront elementary teachers in the instruction of social studies.

Please identify your school district _____

1. Please identify your current teaching grade level?
K 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. Please identify your current teaching position? (If you do not fit one of the categories, please do not continue with the survey)
 - a. General Education Teacher (Please circle: self-contained/social studies/other subject)
 - c. Bilingual or ESL Teacher
 - d. GT Teacher (self contained)
 - e. Special Education (Please circle: Inclusion/co-teach/self-contained)
3. How many years have you been a full time teacher?
0-1 yrs 2-3 yrs 4-6 yrs 7-10 yrs 10-15 yrs 15 yrs +
4. How much time do you dedicate towards teaching **Social Studies** per day?
None. Less than 15 min. 15-30 min. 30-45 min. More than 45 min.
5. How much time do you dedicate towards teaching **Social Studies** per week?
None. Less than 1 hr. 1-2 hrs. 2-3 hrs More than 3 hrs
6. Do you feel that an appropriate amount of time is apportioned during the day/week towards the teaching of **Social Studies**?
Definitely Mostly Somewhat Not Really No
7. Is the instruction of **Social Studies** valued as a part of the daily curriculum in your campus?
Definitely Mostly Somewhat Rarely No
8. Do you encounter any barriers to the teaching of **Social Studies** in your classroom?
Always Most of the Time Some of the time Rarely Never
9. Does standardized testing take away time from teaching **Social Studies**?
Always Most of the Time Some of the Time Rarely Never

10. Please identify the university from which you obtained your teaching degree (if you obtained your degree through Alternative Certification, please write Alt. Cert.)_____
11. Do you feel that your college or alternative certification courses adequately prepared you to teach **Social Studies**?
 Definitely Somewhat Not really
12. Of the following four basic disciplines within **Social Studies** (History, Geography, Government, Economics) which do you feel the most comfortable teaching? _____
13. Of the following four basic disciplines within **Social Studies** (History, Geography, Government, Economics) which do you feel the least comfortable teaching?
14. Do you feel that your university/certification program adequately prepared you to teach special population students (special education, honors, gifted and talented)?
 a. Definitely b. Somewhat c. Not really
15. Does your district provide elementary **Social Studies** oriented professional development opportunities?
 Always Sometimes Rarely Never
16. Does your district provide adequate and sufficient teaching materials for **Social Studies** instruction?
 Plenty of materials Some materials Few materials None
17. Please mark the following methods that you use for **Social Studies** instruction as well as their frequency of use.
- | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| Lecture_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Q and A_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Research_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Inquiry_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Dramatic play_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
18. Please mark the resources that you use for **Social Studies** instruction as well as their frequency of use.
- | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| Text Book_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Worksheets_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Trade Books_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Videos/Movies_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Computer Resources | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Primary Documents_ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Models_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Games_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |
| Field Trips_____ | / Use: >75% | 50%-75% | 30%-50% | 10%-30% | <10% |

Appendix 2: Survey Results

Question 1:

Answer Choices	Responses	
0	17.43%	65
1	12.60%	47
2	14.48%	54
3	14.48%	54
4	19.30%	72
5	17.16%	64
6	4.56%	17
Total		373

Question 2:

Answer Choices	Responses	
General Education Teacher (self	37.80%	141
General Education Teacher (subject	26.27%	98
Bilingual or ESL Teacher	31.10%	116
GT Teacher (self contained)	1.34%	5
Special Education Teacher (self c	3.49%	13
Total		373

Question 3:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Austin ISD	4.83%	18
Ft. Worth ISD	39.68%	148
Pasadena ISD	8.58%	32
Veleta ISD	26.54%	99
El Paso ISD	2.68%	10
Ft Bend ISD	5.09%	19
Lubbock ISD	6.17%	23
Tyler ISD	6.43%	24
Total		373

Question 4:

Answer Choices	Responses	
0-1 years	2.14%	8
2-3 years	12.06%	45
4-6 years	15.82%	59
7-10 years	20.38%	76
10-15 years	18.77%	70
15+ years	30.83%	115
Total		373

Question 5:

Answer Choices	Responses	
None	8.31%	31
less than 15 min	19.57%	73
15-30 min	43.43%	162
30-45 min	25.47%	95
More than 45 min	3.22%	12
Total		373

Question 6:

Answer Choices	Responses	
None	4.83%	18
Less than 1 hr	22.25%	83
1-2 hrs	33.51%	125
2-3 hrs	28.69%	107

More than 3 hrs	10.72%	40
Total		373

Question 7:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Definitely	6.43%	24
Mostly	10.46%	39
Somewhat	22.52%	84
Rarely	18.23%	68
No	42.36%	158
Total		373

Question 8:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Definitely	14.75%	55
Mostly	12.60%	47
Somewhat	33.78%	126
Rarely	16.62%	62
No	22.25%	83
Total		373

Question 9:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Always	18.77%	70
Most of the Time	30.83%	115
Some of the Time	34.32%	128
Rarely	10.99%	41
Never	5.09%	19
Total		373

Question 10:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Always	34.85%	130
Most of the Time	26.54%	99
Some of the Time	25.74%	96
Rarely	5.63%	21

Never	7.24%	27
Total		373

Question 11:

Answer Choices	Responses	
University of Texas at Austin	1.61%	6
Texas A&M	1.88%	7
Texas Tech	4.56%	17
University of Houston	4.02%	15
Texas State	0.80%	3
University of Texas at El Paso	24.40%	91
University of Texas at Arlington	3.49%	13
University of Houston Downtown	0.27%	1
University of North Texas	1.61%	6
University of Texas Pan Am	0.27%	1
Baylor	0.54%	2
T CU	4.29%	16
Angelo State	0.54%	2
Texas Women's University	1.34%	5
Sam Houston State	0.54%	2
Lamar University	0.27%	1
Stephen F. Austin	1.07%	4
Other UT System	2.14%	8
Other A&M System	1.34%	5
Other Texas State System	2.14%	8
Other Texas Private University	6.70%	25
Other U of H System	1.88%	7
Attended an out of state university	12.87%	48
Alternative Certification	21.45%	80
Total		373

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