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Social Studies Under Siege: Examining Policy and Teacher-Level Factors Associated with Elementary Social Studies Marginalization

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Abstract

Utilizing data from National Center for Educational Statistics Schools and Staffing Surveys, researchers examined the association between various teacher-level factors and state policy-level indicators associated with reported elementary social studies instructional time. Employing Hierarchical Linear Modeling, results suggest perception of professional autonomy, grade level-curriculum, and charter schools were associated with increases in reported social studies time. Among state-level policy indicators, testing in elementary social studies positively impacted instructional time. Researchers suggest, given the lack of emphasis on elementary social studies in the current educational climate and abysmal student results on national assessments compounded with the difficulty of defining teachers' professional beliefs; social educators support policy implementation of state-mandated tests to improve both the quality and quantity of social studies instruction.

Recently, the National Center for Educational Statistics released its report on US school-age children's performance on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in History, Civics, and Geography. NAEP results indicate that these tests reflect the poorest performance of American students (Dillon, 2011), suggesting insufficient preparation in social studies. Among elementary school students testing, 27% tested proficient in civics and only 20% in US history and 21% in geography, respectively (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Social educators suggests that negligence of social studies in elementary classrooms can be attributed to increased standardization and emphasis on state-tested curriculum—of which social studies is often left out (Brophy, Alleman, & Knighton, 2009; Houser, 1995; VanFossen, 2005). As such, state and national testing policies have been associated with core subject area prioritization (Center on Educational Policy, 2007, 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). In addition to testing pressures, researchers have suggested other moderating factors affecting social studies instructional time: teachers' content knowledge (Wineburg, 2005; Zhao & Hoge, 2005), schooling context (Pace, 2011b; Wills, 2007), perception of autonomy (Gerwin & Visone, 2006; Gradwell, 2006; Grant, 2003) and grade level curriculum (Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006; VanFossen, 2005). Given differences in states' testing programs (Au, 2007) and lack of research examining the connection between testing policy and other teacher/organization factors on instructional time, we evaluated the association between elementary teachers' perception of professional autonomy, school/classroom contexts, and state testing policy on reported social studies instructional time. Employing data from the National Center for Educational Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), we examined the association between elementary (grades 1-5) teachers' perceived autonomy, classroom/school

contexts, and state testing policies on reported time spent on social studies. We also analyzed the moderating effect of testing policy on teachers' sense of autonomy in relation to reported social studies instructional time.

Theoretical Framework

While social studies has traditionally maintained a subsidiary role in elementary education (Houser, 1995; National Council for the Social Studies, 1989), recent trends in standardization and statewide accountability measures have further decreased the subject's prioritization in many classrooms. Specifically, time spent on social studies education has decreased significantly over the last two decades—coinciding with the establishment of *Goals 2000* and more recently *No Child Left Behind* (Authors, 2010). Excluded from substantive educational policy over the last twenty years, social studies has been effectively overshadowed by other core subjects, math, English/Language Arts (ELA), and most recently science (Evans, 2004; Marx & Harris, 2006; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). Analyzing the impact of accountability and testing pressures on social studies instruction is complicated at any grade level due to variance in state curricula and mitigating factors which contribute to how and how much social studies is taught (Au, 2007; Grant & Salinas, 2008). As such, instructional time serves an important, and often utilized, indicator of social studies' curricular importance (Center on Educational Policy, 2008; Perie, Baker, & Bobbitt, 1997; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Linver, & Hoffereth, 2003; VanFossen, 2005). Furthermore, state testing policies, classroom-level milieu, and teachers' instructional outlook contribute to how time is operationalized, and by extension, the relative prioritization of social studies in elementary grades.

A rationale for time

Across disciplines, time has been associated with how much value teachers place on content and instruction (Pittman & Romberg, 2000). NAEP analysis (2010) indicates that fourth graders whose teachers reported over three hours per week of social studies instruction scored significantly higher than those students whose teachers devoted less time. Social studies-specific research suggests time (or lack thereof) is an essential quality of both good and bad social studies instruction (VanSledright, 2010; Wills, 2007). Yet, social studies has consistently been maligned with reports of the latter rather than the former; whereby content coverage overshadows inquire-based, higher-order instruction (Levstik, 2008; Ravitch & Finn, 1987; Shaver, Davis, & Helburn, 1979). Current research acknowledges that standardization and intensification of time constraints have contributed to superficial social studies instruction (Crocco & Costigan, 2007) and an ancillary role for social studies in elementary curricula (Hargreaves, 1994; Heafner et al., 2006; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). For many elementary teachers this high-stakes environment gives way to a form of "instructional triage" whereby social studies is ham-fisted through pejorative forms of subject-matter integration (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Sierrere, & Steward, 2008; Authors, in review; Pace, 2011a; Wills & Sandholz, 2009). Yet time is also an imperfect determinant of quality instruction. Increased time fueled by mandatory social studies instruction does not necessarily give way to better instruction. Findings suggest that in many cases teachers report feeling pedagogically restricted to teach content-specific, lecture-oriented instruction in order to prepare students for the test (Grant, 2008; Heafner et al., 2006; Vogler, 2006). Yet, this caveat should not understate the importance of more time, particularly in the elementary school where disciplines are not partitioned out, rather taught inclusively. In this sense, time becomes a quantifiable measure of learning opportunities. Hence, while an increased emphasis of social studies does not guarantee more vibrant teaching, such instruction is predicated upon more time.

Teachers' perception of classroom autonomy

Numerous qualitative studies (Gerwin & Visone, 2006; Gradwell, 2006; van Hover, 2006) have reported pedagogical examples of teachers going above and beyond the constraints of prescriptive curriculum and testing. Referred to as "ambitious teaching," these studies suggest teachers who enact instruction that is nuanced, complex, and contextualized do so "both because of and in spite of state social studies tests and the consequences they hold "(Grant, 2007, p. 253). Grant (2003) suggests that these practitioners make their pedagogical decisions autonomous of the content requirements of the curriculum and, as Pace (2011a) and Wills (2007) document, spend more time on social studies instruction. Nevertheless, it is important for researchers not to label ambitious teaching with the over-used best practices stigma. Essentializing the instructional strategies contextualized in various qualitative studies is both an unscientific and an inaccurate interpretation (Grant, 2007; VanSledright, Kelly, & Meuwissen, 2006). Instead, we have centered on a key disposition connected with ambitious teaching literature—perceived autonomy. Various research suggests a substantial schism between teachers' perceived instructional autonomy and their actual control over instructional time and instruction (Hargreaves, 1994; Werner, 1998). Teachers who believe they are instructionally autonomous allocate more time toward and engage in active instruction; whereas, teachers who perceive curricular or systemic limits on their classroom control eliminate what they view as superfluous content and instruction (Pittman & Romberg, 2000; Thornton, 2005).

Educational policy has further obscured the issue of autonomy. Previous research of SASS data infers that reported instructional autonomy to teach social studies among elementary teachers has significantly decreased as nation-wide standardization and accountability reforms have increased (Authors, 2010). Pressured by high-stakes testing programs that more often than

not exclude social studies, elementary teachers perceive less control over the content, making difficult decisions to eliminate social studies in favor of tested material (Rock et al., 2006; VanFossen, 2005; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Consequently, perceived autonomy has demonstrated in prior research to be a powerful indicator of the inclusion (and exclusion) of instructional time and content emphasis. Specifically, teachers' perceived autonomy, given states' unique testing policies, is an important consideration for examining the rationale behind reported social studies time.

Teacher professional characteristics

Ambitious and autonomous-minded social studies teachers repeatedly share similar professional characteristics. They often rely on substantial content area backgrounds from which to navigate instruction beyond the superficial scope of a prescribed curriculum (Grant, 2003; Thornton, 2001; VanSledright, 2011). In addition, autonomous teachers have sufficient preparation in the clinical/student teaching experience and teacher education to explore and practice their craft (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Social studies, with its multifaceted content areas and complex identity politics renders complete subject area mastery a seemingly insurmountable task (Wineburg, 2005). However, in tradition secondary (grade 6-12) environments, social studies' various disciplines are most frequently parsed out into separate, mandatory courses taught by individuals with a license in social studies education (Evans, 2004). Thus, while social studies teaching instruction in upper grades might be saddled with teachers lacking a holistic understanding of the social studies, it is at a minimumm being taught. Resarch at the elementary level (1-5) suggests the opposite. Zhao and Hoge (2005) in an examination of elementary teacher education, found preservice practitioners, having very little exposure to social studies content and methods, relying on textbooks and other passive teaching methods in order to cover social

studies content. Unintersested in social studies and experiencing a brevity of preparation, many preservice elementary teacher avoid it or minimalize its presence in the classroom (Owens, 1997; Yon & Passe, 1990). Other preservice teachers experience social studies negligence via their student teaching. In an examination of social studies marginalization at the teacher education level, Bolick and colleagues (2010) reported on elementary candidates who were not exposed to social studies at all during their student teaching due to pressure for greater instructional time in tested subjects. Inhbited by the amount of time social studies is emphasized in their own teaching and preparation, it is it is often difficult for elementary teachers to break away from the most simplistic modes of social studies instruction (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Passe, 2006; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). For greater instructional emphasis on social studies, researchers (Mathis & Boyd, 2009; Meuweissen, 2005; Thornton, 2001) argue that greater content area and pedagogical knowledge is necessary. In an effort to shoehorn social studies curriculum into the crowded school day and avoid the content deficiencies of many elementary practitioners, the subject is often subsumed by language arts instruction through integration (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnnson, Sierrere, & Stewart, 2008; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009). The Common Core Standards Initiative (2010), adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia, includes social studies (historical) content as reading-comprehension fodder for ELA standards. In the absence of specific models of support, traditional classrooms with high populations of ELLs skill development and content (i.e. social studies) instructional goals are often sacrificed for students' literacy and linguistic needs (Bunch, Abram, Lotan, & Valdes, 2001; Chamot, 1995; Chamot & O'Malley, 1996; Pace, 2011a). Not surprisingly, analysis of national data reveal that while time spent on social studies has significantly decreased, time in ELA has increased—suggesting that integration has become a de-facto remedy for social studies instructional inclusion (Authors, 2010).

Classroom and school-level characteristics

Further complicating how teachers spend their professional time are the various student and school factors that influence instructional decision-making. Grant (1996) refers to various "cross currents" of school demographics and organization further influencing curricular prioritization. Nationally, high-stakes testing and the accompanying accountability programs are used not only to assess students' knowledge base, but also to evaluate teachers' competency. Low-income schools are particularly targeted for having the subpar test scores and consequently, stigmatized with employing the least desirable teachers. Under these pressures, research suggests that low-income elementary schools, specifically the teachers who staff it, are less likely to spend time on non-tested subjects, which frequently includes social studies (Pace, 2008, 2011b; Segall, 2006; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Pace (2011b) noted that teachers of affluent schools spend considerably more time on social studies instruction due to preception among faculty that students' would inevitably score higher on the tested subjects. Conversely, in a study of working class elementary classroom, Segall (2006) found teachers less likely to teach social studies, instead pulled into the direction of tested subjects for fear of low student scores and professional reprisal. Among low income school populations, time directed for social studies is frequently re-allocated toward ELA, mathematics, and science eduation for remediation purposes (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009), sending an explicit message as to its curricular prioritzation.

Teachers' time on social studies is further mitigated by classroom accommodations. Social studies teachers in high concentrated English Language Learner (ELL) classrooms cite deficiencies in training and accommodations as major barriers toward instruction (Cho & Reich, 2008; O'Brien, 2011). Moreover, teachers encounter ELL students in mainstream social studies classrooms who: 1) lack early exposure to social studies curriculum in elementary grades (Szpara

& Ahmad, 2006), 2) posses a limited understanding of cultural contexts for academic content vocabulary (Antuez, 2002; Thornton, 2005), and 3) are unfamiliar with American cultural literacy (Cruz & Thornton, 2009). These instructional challenges indicate deficits in pre-requisite content knowledge and linguistic skills necessary for content learning (Cho & Reich, 2008). Similar barriers impede the amount and type of social studies instruction afforded special needs students (Maspoteri et al., 2005). In a survey of special educators, Litner and Schweder (2008) reported lack of resources and training to teach social studies. Respondents also noted that social studies lacked clear, direct objectives as opposed to ELA and mathematics curricula. Perceiving the aims of social studies as less applicable to life-skills, special education teachers viewed social studies instruction as less valuable than other content (Litner & Schweder, 2008). Furthermore, in classrooms with high concentrations of ELLs social studies instructional goals are frequently sacrificed for linguistic and literacy foci (Litner & Schweder, 2008).

The issue of curricular aim and purpose is a common dilemma for social studies (Evans, 2004; Thornton & Barton, 2010). Time spent on social studies is further influenced by traditional curricular emphasis resulting in grade level disparities. Often referred to as an "expanding communities" curriculum, elementary social studies traditionally progresses from emphasis on the family/community in the earlier grades (1-3) to state/nation in the intermediate grades (4-5) (Hanna, 1937). The rationale for this progression centers on a whole-child theory, which suggests that young people are more likely to understand social structures and institutions if they are gradually introduced from the locus of familiarity (i.e. family, neighborhood, city, state, etc.) (Alleman & Brophy, 2001). Given this scope and sequence, specific disciplinary content such as geography, history, and civics is more concentrated in the intermediate grades (3-5). Primary grades (K-2) focus on the family and community tends to be less content specific. Examination

of reported social studies time across grade level (Authors, 2010; Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006; VanFossen, 2005) denote greater time and emphasis in the intermediate grades than earlier grades. Analysis of national data suggested that intermediate social studies teachers reported 24 minutes (on average) more time on social studies than primary grades (Authors, 2010). Duplass (2007) suggests that the lack of specificity in earlier grade social studies curricula compounded by the attention toward basic literacy skills contributes to these differences.

While within building effects have been highly-scrutinized in social studies research, the recent proliferation of charter schools offers a unique between-building effect to analyze instructional decision-making. Charter schools, independent public school entities, were developed, in part, to offer greater choice for schooling for parents, children, and teachers. As such, charter schools tend to be hamstringed by the same level of bureaucracy found in a traditional public school setting (Gawlik, 2007). Research suggests that charters schools encourage participative decision-making and offer teachers greater curricular independence fostering pedagogical innovation and more emphasis on traditionally non-tested subjects (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003; Manno, Finn Jr., Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1998; Smylie, Lazarus, & Brownlee-Conyers, 1996). In a comparative case study of teacher autonomy in charter schools, Gawlik (2007) found that teachers in non-affiliated charter schools were granted greater organizational autonomy to develop and implement curriculum. Yet, other researchers claim that de-regulated schools might actually constrain teachers' instructional independence with increased administrative burdens (Smylie, 1994; Wohlstetter & Chau, 2004). While not directly tied to increased social studies instructional time, an autonomous classroom, or "democratic classroom" as described by Wade (2001, p. 25) affords teachers greater time to spend on meaningful and engaging social studies instruction.

State testing policies: An uncertain comparison

While teacher characteristics and school climate contribute substantially to the instructional prioritization, research indicates that recent state and national standardization policies have contributed to the exacerbation of elementary social studies (Center on Educational Policy, 2007, 2008; Authors, 2010). In their analysis of reported instructional time among elementary teachers, Heafner and Fitchett (2012) indicate that since implementation of NCLB, social studies instruction has decreased approximately 19 minutes per week. Moreover, the findings suggest that teachers are re-organizing instructional priorities in order to concentrate greater teaching time to tested subjects. In states that test elementary social studies, teachers are spending more time on the social studies content than states without a mandated test (Heafner, Libscomb, & Rock, 2006). Thus, top-down curricular control measures and high-stakes testing mandates directly influence content prioritization of social studies in the elementary grades.

Curiously, a large segment of social studies research suggests the contrary—testing is not driving or influencing social studies instruction. As pointed out earlier, numerous qualitative studies have illustrated example of independent-minded social studies teachers who, despite standardized testing, challenge students through insightful, meaningful instruction (Gradwell, 2006; Grant, 2003; van Hover, 2006). Grant (2007) suggests that these vignettes offer evidence that social studies teachers, empowered by their instructional purpose, are circumventing the professional constraints of accountability and high-stakes testing engage in "ambitious teaching." These qualitative studies, while contextually informative, lack generalizeability and are often situated in states that require testing, thus mandate content coverage (Au, 2007). Furthermore, some of these studies (Gradwell, 2006; Grant, 2003) examine secondary (6-12) classroom practitioners who teach social studies as standalone subject, an imperfect comparison with

elementary teachers who are individually tasked to teach social studies as one of many competing content areas over the course of an instructional day.

Method

Au (2009), in his meta-analysis of social studies education and high stakes testing, implies that the subjective research design of the "ambitious teaching" advocates fails to consider state policy and testing context. Thus, an important question to consider is, to what extent does testing policy moderate ambitious teaching (i.e. teachers' sense of autonomy)? Findings from an earlier study indicated that elementary teachers' perception of professional autonomy and state testing were significantly associated with teachers' reported social studies instructional time (in review). As an extension of previous research, we utilized a Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) to examine the following research questions:

1. How are elementary (grades 1-5) teachers' perceptions of autonomy associated with time spent on social studies instruction?
2. What is the association between classroom and school contexts on social studies instructional time?
3. Is there a significant difference in reported social time between teachers in states that test social studies at the elementary level compared to those states that do not test?
4. Does testing policy have a significant moderating effect on teachers' sense of autonomy in relation to reported social studies instructional time?

Sample

For this study, we utilized a sample of public, elementary (grades 1-5) school teachers (n=4080) from the National Center for Educational Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey 2007/08 database (SASS). The SASS survey database provides the largest and most

generalizable data on US teachers' characteristics, workplace conditions, and professional attitudes (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009). Schools, and teachers nested within schools, were sampled through a complex stratified protocol. Using inverse probability sampling techniques, data are assigned weights based upon diversity of school location and teacher characteristics. We self-selected for self-contained (teach all subjects in one class) practitioners as not to confound our results with subject area specialists.

Variables

At Level I, we examined a factor, Autonomy (range 6-24), as a measure of teachers' perception of professional autonomy—a disposition associated with dynamic, enduring social studies practice (Grant, 2007, VanSledright, 2011). We aggregated six branch Likert-type items from the SASS survey in developing the construct: How much actual control do you have IN YOUR CLASSROOM at this school over the following areas of your planning and teaching? (selecting textbooks and other materials, selecting content, topics and skills taught, selecting teaching techniques, evaluating and grading students, disciplining students, and determining the amount of homework assigned). A Cronbach's alpha test determined inter-item reliability to be adequate ($\alpha = 0.704$), thus we included the aggregated item in our model (see Table 1). We also included indicator variables of grade level (1 through 5), teachers' bachelors' degree background in social studies-related disciplines (SSBACH), and charter school distinction based upon previous research (authors, in review) and extant research (Bolick et al., 2010; Gawlik, 2007; Passe, 2006; VanFossen, 2005). The percentage of school population on free/reduced lunch was included as an indicator of socio-economic status (Pace, 2008, 2011b; Segall, 2006). We also included a number of ecological variables (i.e. "cross-currents) based upon previous research in our model (Grant, 1996; Litner & Schweder, 2008; O'Brien, 2011). Class size, number of

classroom students with Individual Education Plans (IEP), and number of classroom students who were limited-English proficient (LEP) were included in the model as control variables (see Table 1).

At Level II, teacher-level data was cross-listed with *Education Week's* 50-state report card to examine state testing policy ("Executive summary: 50-state Report Card," 2009) recognized as one of the best sources for information on social studies accountability measures (Grant & Salinas, 2008). We included indicator variables of social studies testing policy within a given state (test all grade levels, test multiple (middle/high), no test). We also examined whether states that tested all grade levels incorporated extended response questions (Extended). For a dependent (criterion) variable, we examined a single-item, opened-ended question, "*During the most recent FULL WEEK*, approximately how many hours did you spend teaching (history/social studies) at THIS school?"

Table 1
Variable descriptions

Level of Analysis	Context	Variable Name	Description
Level I	*Teacher characteristics*		
		SS Bachelors	Bachelors major/minor in a social studies related field
		Autonomy	SASS item construct measuring teachers' sense of autonomy
	Classroom/School context		
		IEP_CLS	# of students with individual education plans in class
		LEP_CLS	# of limited English proficiency students in class
		Class size	# of student in class
		Free/reduced	% of students eligible for free/reduced lunch at the school
		Grade Level	Grades 3-5 (reference variable grade 3)
Level II	*State Policy*		
		Social studies test[i]	State policy on testing social studies:
			No test (reference)

		All Test (Elementary, Middle, High Test)
		Multiple Test (at least two levels)
	Extended response [ii]	State social studies test has extended response items

Procedure

We conducted an HLM analysis to examine elementary teacher and school contexts as nested within states of varying social studies testing policy and their association with reported social studies instructional time. HLM controls for both atomistic and ecological fallacies (Hox, 2010), both of which have plagued previous social studies research (Au, 2007, 2009). Due to limitations of the data, we randomly selected one teacher from each school. Thus, classroom and school level variables served as Level I contextual variables (Hox, 2010). Level II variables are associated with state-specific educational policy regarding K-12 testing in social studies. At level II, we also sought to examine teachers' reported autonomy as a function of state social studies testing protocol. SASS datasets contain weights that were applied at Level I of the model to provide a more accurate estimate of teacher-level effects associated with reported social studies time. We incorporated robust standard errors to account for clustering and homosecedacity.

Level I model

$$Y_{(predicted)SStime} = ß_0 + ß_1 autonomy + ß_2 SSBACH + ß_3 IEP\_CLS + ß_4 LEP\_CLS + ß_5 ClassSize + ß_6 Charter + ß_7 grade1 + ß_8 grade2 + ß_9 grade3 + ß_{10} grade4 + r_0$$

Level II models

$$ß_0 = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} All\_Test + \gamma_{02} multi\_test + \gamma_{03} extended + u_0$$

$$ß_1 autonomy = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} All\_Test + \gamma_{12} multi\_test + \gamma_{13} extended + u_1$$

$$ß_2 SSBACH = \gamma_{20}$$

$$ß_3 IEP\_CLS = \gamma_{30}$$

$ß_4$LEP_CLS= γ_{40}

$ß_5$ClassSize= γ_{50}

$ß_6$Charter= γ_{60}

$ß_7$grade1= γ_{70}

$ß_8$grade2= γ_{80}

$ß_9$grade3= γ_{90}

$ß_{10}$grade4= γ_{100}

Whereby:

$Y_{(predicted)SStime}$= reported social studies instructional time

$ß_0$= mean reported social studies time among teachers within states

$ß_1$autonomy=reported perception of autonomy

Results

The intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) from the unconditional model was .065. This value indicates that approximately 6.5% of the total variance in reported instructional hours consists of between state variance. The remaining variance is between teachers within the same state. The reliability index for the estimation of the intercept in the level one model, the state average estimate of reported instructional hours, was .827.

Teacher-level effects

As Table 2 indicates, the following level one variables did not yield statistically significant associations with the teacher reported social studies instructional time: bachelor's degree in social studies-related disciplines, number of children in the class with an IEP, number of children in the class with limited English language proficiency, class size, and the percentage of the school population receiving free or reduced lunch. The autonomy measure was a

statistically significant correlate of instructional time (Table 2). For each level increase in autonomy, teachers' reported instructional time in social studies increased by 3.5 minutes (from 3.5 to 63.7 minutes). Grade level was also statistically associated with instructional time. Relative to grade 5, grade 1 teachers reported less time (42.6 minutes), as did grade 2 teachers (32.7 minutes) and grade 3 teachers (26.8 minutes). Grade 4 teachers did not significantly differ from grade 5 teachers, supporting previous research that suggests discrepancies in time prioritization among elementary grade levels (Duplass, 2007; Authors, 2010; VanFossen, 2005). Teachers in charter schools reported more hours than teachers in regular schools. All of these coefficients can be interpreted as a difference in instructional time, scaled as the proportion of an hour, which can be expected for every increase of one point on the variable in question. For example, charter school teachers reported on average approximately 26 minutes more instructional time than did non-charter school teachers. Concerned with possible multicollinearity between teachers' reported autonomy and schools' charter school identification, we conducted a one way ANOVA of charter*non-charter teachers' reported autonomy score. Post-hoc tests of multicollinearity yielded non-significant results [$F(1, 87) = 0.078$, $p > .078$]. Findings suggest that charter school organization offers a building-level independence unique from teachers' personal sense of autonomy (Ni, 2012).

State-level effects

In the level two model, social studies testing policy within a given state was used to predict both the intercept (state mean reported instructional time) and the autonomy slope (Table 2). A state policy to test all grades (including elementary) was significantly associated with the intercept. Holding all other variable constant, states that test social studies in elementary, middle, and high school grades reported 24.6 minutes per week of social studies instruction more on

average than states that do not test social studies. States that test at multiple levels (middle/high, except for WV (elementary/middle) and extended tests items were not associated with variability in state mean reported instructional time in social studies. A state policy to test all grades was inversely associated with the autonomy slope. Therefore, teaching in a state that tested social studies at all three grade levels (elementary, middle, secondary) significantly correlated with a decrease in reported autonomy. Multiple tests and extended response policies were not associated with the autonomy slope.

To illustrate these findings and to aid interpretation, the model was used to generate the expected level of reported instructional hours for various subgroups of teachers. Table 3 contains expected values for a few specific subgroups of teachers. Each of these values is based on teachers without a bachelor's degree in Social Studies and with the average values for the following variables: children with an IEP, children with limited English proficiency, class size, percentage of the school population on free/reduced lunch. The expected values range from as high as 3.506 for a high autonomy fifth grade teacher working in a charter school, to as low as 1.569 hours for a first grade teacher with low autonomy working in a non-charter school.

Table 3.
Model estimates of reported social studies instructional hours for various groups of teachers

		Regular School		Charter School	
	State Testing Policy	Low Autonomy	High Autonomy	Low Autonomy	High Autonomy
First Grade Teacher	No Grades Tested	1.569	2.273	1.999	2.703
Second Grade Teacher		1.729	2.433	2.159	2.863

Third Grade Teacher		1.827	2.530	2.257	2.961
Fourth Grade Teacher		2.270	2.974	2.701	3.405
Fifth Grade Teacher		2.274	2.978	2.704	3.408
First Grade Teacher	All Grades Tested	2.323	2.372	2.753	2.803
Second Grade Teacher		2.483	2.532	2.913	2.962
Third Grade Teacher		2.581	2.630	3.011	3.060
Fourth Grade Teacher		3.024	3.073	3.455	3.504
Fifth Grade Teacher		3.028	3.077	3.458	3.508

Discussion

Findings from this study indicate elementary teachers' perceptions of autonomy were associated with increases in reported social studies instruction time. Thus, teachers who perceive greater pedagogical freedom are more likely to teach social studies at the elementary level. For teacher educators, these results underscore the importance of developing efficacious and independent practitioners. Social educators often refer to curricular "gate-keeping" (Thornton 2001, 2005) as an instructional outlook, supporting innovation. Thornton (2005) describes gatekeeping, "…prior to and during its classroom enactment, teachers have great leeway to interpret prescribed curriculum" (p. 11). This disposition, which Thornton espouses, posits that teachers are not passive consumers of curriculum, rather they have substantial control over emphasis and delivery of curriculum content. A reprioritization of social studies, this finding also supports the work of the ambitious pedagogues detailed in the work of previous qualitative studies (Gradwell, 2006; Sierrere, Mitra, & Cody, 2010; VanSledright, 2011). Conversely, content-preparedness, school context variables (free/reduced lunch, class size), and classroom demographics (number of IEPs and LEP) were not significantly associated with variability in reported social studies time. In contrast to insular, qualitative studies, our findings indicate that traditionally researched school and classroom effects do not substantially influence social studies

instructional time when accounting for statewide policy, curricula, and teachers' perception of autonomy. Not to suggest that teacher credentials do not matter nor is the culture of the classroom irrelevant, our model illustrates that autonomy, among teacher-level indicator, eclipses ecological factors that often confound social studies teaching—once again suggesting the importance of autonomy as an important and essential attitude for elementary practitioners. Teacher education, in an attempt to promote social studies, should advocate this liberating disposition, providing preservice/in-service practitioners opportunities to manage their content priorities in creative and fulfilling ways.

Across grade-level, variability in reported instructional time reflects curricular traditions (i.e. expanding communities model) and call into question the substantiation of social studies in earlier grades, particularly with its limited content focus. Numerous critics of social education have lambasted expanding communities approach for being nebulous, unscientific and difficult to enact (Duplass, 2007; Ravitch, 1987; Thornton, 2005). Our findings confirm previous studies indicating greater social studies instruction in later grades (Authors, 2010; Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006; VanFossen, 2005). We posit that early elementary grade teachers are either minimizing social studies content in favor of core literary and mathematics education and/or dismissing the content-sparse expanding communities curriculum. Core social studies content and skills require literacy and numerical competence. To the chagrin of some social studies educators, we suggest that policy emphasis on social studies teaching might be better suited for later grades and their explicit content focus in geography, civics, and history. Conversely, earlier grades social studies should remain in the backburner, providing greater instructional time for the prerequisite aptitudes necessary for "doing social studies" in later grades. These recommendations are not to downplay the importance of early social studies learning. But rather,

they coincide with the prevailing national view that developing literacy skills first is a foundation to all future learning (Maeroff, 2006).

Organizationally, teachers within charter schools reported significantly more time on social studies instruction than their colleagues in traditional school settings. The freedom of choice offered by charter and private institutions, both at the administrative and curricular level, offer a unique counter to the top-down bureaucracy prevalent in traditional public education. Findings suggest that teachers working in "choice" school environments are less inhibited by prescribed curricular mandates (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Teske & Schneider, 2001) and perceive greater influence over school policies (Johnson & Landman, 2000; Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003 Ni, 2012). Given the recent proliferation of charter schools at the national level, this finding offers a key insight into the differences between traditional public school and the charter school organization and deserves further analysis as it relates to prioritization of elementary social studies. Moreover, charter schools may provide contexts in which ambitious teachers find working environments more suited to their instructional beliefs.

Among state level effects, findings confirm previous research that elementary testing policy is associated with significantly increased time spent in social studies (Heafner, Libscomb, & Rock, 2006). Dynamics of the test (extended response items) were not associated with instructional time variability. In support of Au's hypothesis (2007, 2009), elementary testing was a significant moderator of teachers' perception of autonomy. Teaching in a state that tested social studies at the elementary level is associated with a decrease in reported autonomy. Thus, while testing substantially improves the prioritization of social studies in elementary curricula, it is negatively associated with instructional independence of teachers, echoing the work of previous studies on the effects of testing policies and instruction (Heafner et al., 2006; Vogler, 2006).

Although ambitious teachers do have some control over how much time they spend teaching social studies, their discretion appears to be substantially constrained by state testing policies.

From a policy stand point; these findings generate the question whether teachers' pedagogical freedom should be sacrificed for increased emphasis in social studies content? Aforementioned NAEP results and previous commentaries (Dillon, 2011, Ravitch, 1987; Ravitch & Finn, 1987) have lamented as to the sorry state of history and social studies education. As pointed out by numerous historians of the field (Barton, 2011; Evans, 2004; Thornton & Barton, 2010; Wineburg, 2001), these findings are nothing new, reflecting years of lackluster performance by America's youth. Yet, settling for a status quo of mediocrity in student achievement, regardless of the historical trend is unsettling (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Furthermore, it is a poor rationale for dismissing abysmal national results. NAEP (2010) data reveal that increased time spent on social studies in elementary grades was significantly associated with increased scores. Concurrently, state-testing of social studies at the elementary level was associated with approximately 25 minutes (or one day on average) of increased exposure to social studies. From an organizational perspective, mandatory statewide testing is an appropriate and efficient approach toward improving the quality and quantity of social studies at the elementary grades.

Conversely, autonomy, offering a non-test solution is very attractive to education advocates opposed to yet another high-stakes assessment. While, we argue for autonomy in teacher education via the "gatekeeping" heuristic, defining and mandating teacher beliefs is difficult and not exact (Pajares, 1992; Raths, 2001). Teachers, both preservice and in-service, are shaped both by their professional training and their own education experiences as learners (Bruner, 1996; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Thus, while teacher education might successfully

shape practitioners pedagogy, it does not guarantee a sea change in instructional philosophy or content emphasis. Testing, on the other hand, holds teachers accountable for content coverage. As Machiavellian as this advocacy for elementary social studies might be construed, we also recognize that accountability eliminates teacher independence at a substantial cost. Yet, we argue the cost of social studies coverage, at any level, outweighs the current assault on elementary social studies instructional time at the national level.

In acknowledging the limitations of our study, we examined teacher reported data of their attitudes and perceptions of the schooling environment. While such data is traditionally biased by issues of internal validity, we argue that our large sample size and reputation of the NCES for collecting and validating data outweighs these potential biases. Moreover, given the limitation of data collection by the NCES, building level effects were included with teacher level effects, thus minimizing the impact of school demographic findings. Though imperfect, previous research and HLM techniques allows for building level variables (i.e. free/reduced lunch) to be included as contextual variables at the individual level—suggesting that building level effects would indirectly impact individual respondents (Hox, 2010). A final limitation to the study is the inability of HLM to include the SASS replicate weights for adjustment of standard errors. Thus, we interpreted our p-values very conservatively and used robust standard errors to account for the pooling of respondents.

Conclusion

Findings from our study challenge traditional notions of social studies teaching and teacher preparation. Autonomy, grade level, and charter school identification are significantly associated with an increase in reported instructional time for social studies. Results suggest that independent-minded teachers care about and emphasize social studies instruction. Moreover,

charter schools with their typically scaled-down professional bureaucracy offer a professional milieu unique from traditional public settings. Greater research in this domain is warranted. Grade level differences once again highlight the disparity in how social studies is emphasized in primary and intermediate grades. Given the frequency of this finding in elementary social studies research, we suggest that it is inevitable given the expanding communities curriculum and necessary for the development of key ELA and mathematics skills necessary for higher-order socials studies instruction in later grades. Yet, among respondents across states, the presence of an elementary social studies test was an overriding factor of teacher autonomy and significantly associated with increased social studies time. Logistically, we contend that advocating for accountability recognition in the form of a test in social studies is the most efficient and generalizeable method of increasing the quantity and quality of instruction at the elementary level.

In a recent accounting of history education, Barton (2011) cynically refers to the current research examining the marginalization of elementary social studies education as "crisis talk." Downplaying its importance, he suggests that social education has always assumed a subsidiary role to core subjects such as mathematics and ELA. We argue that minimizing this research fails to consider the curricular competition that social studies is currently losing in elementary classrooms. No Child Left Behind (2001) makes no mention of social studies and mandates no measures of accountability to ensure its teaching (Evans, 2004; Jennings & Stark, 2006). Conversely, science education, once treading the same troubled waters of social studies, is now buoyed by federal testing and curriculum mandates (Marx & Harris, 2006). Recent research implies that science will soon overtake social studies as the third most emphasized subject in elementary classrooms (Authors, 2012). Such research findings and those presented in this study

are more than a pejorative rhetoric, but a threat to how students are prepared to participate as democratic citizens.

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[i] State that do not test social studies: AK, AZ, AR, CO, CT, DC, FL, HI, ID, IL, IN IA, ME, MN, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, ND, OR, PA, RI, SD, UT, VT, WA and WY. States that test social studies at more than two levels (middle and high school): CA, KS, MI, and TX. WV (middle and elementary). States that test social studies at all three levels (elementary, middle, and high school):DE, GA, KY, LA, MA, NY, OH, OK, SC, TN, VA, and WI

[ii] Of the states that test elementary social studies, LA, WV, NY, OH, MA, DE, and KY have extended response items.