TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT TEACHERS
by
DANIEL CASEY BYRD
(Under the Direction of Todd Dinkelman)
ABSTRACT
Educational policies, mandated curriculum standards, professional organizations, teacher education programs, school administrators, and teachers all potentially influence social studies instruction in elementary schools. However, curriculum standards coupled with high stakes testing have significantly shifted the balance of power so that school administrators and teachers are continually evaluated based on their adherence to federal and state mandates. This arrangement creates challenges which student teachers must negotiate as they begin learning about their mentor teachers, students, placement schools, and teaching in general. The perception of their success often depends on replicating what is currently emphasized in schools. With this in mind, I designed a qualitative study which investigated student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. Research questions for this study were: (a) what is it like to teach social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher? (b) what, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies? (c) what do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools? and (d) how do
elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they encounter around teaching social studies?

This study used a phenomenological methodology, and included six participants who volunteered from a group of approximately 60 student teachers, all within the same university teacher education program. These six participants were placed in five elementary schools, which represented three county school districts. Each worked with a different mentor teacher, and the placements reflected four separate grade levels.

Multiple transcript readings revealed seven themes and additional meanings of the student teachers’ experiences. These themes included: (a) expectations and purpose in social studies; (b) personal experiences and influences; (c) adherence to state standards; (d) scheduling and time constraints; (e) relationships with mentor and grade level teachers; (f) improving social studies education; and (g) reactions to the end of student teaching.

Finally, conclusions from the four research questions were: (a) student teachers experience a continual process of prioritization and negotiation around elementary level social studies instruction; (b) the dominant influence on student teachers’ orientations towards elementary level social studies is their experience of the requirements and structure of student teaching; (c) purpose in social studies is generally conceived by student teachers as broad citizenship objectives but actual content coverage is tied to mandated curriculum standards; and (d) student teachers process their experiences of teaching social studies mostly through a reluctant acceptance of dominant narratives.

INDEX WORDS: Social studies, Elementary, Early childhood, Student teaching, Teacher Learning, Teacher education, Curriculum standards
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to educators and policy makers at all levels who are committed to improving schools in meaningful ways, and who possess an orientation to education that is grounded in fairness and respect for all people. For all those who see social studies as a means to understand and uphold basic human rights throughout the world, your vision and efforts are absolutely essential in creating a just society.
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CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF SOCIAL STUDIES LITERATURE

Introduction

Educational policies, mandated curriculum standards, professional organizations, teacher education programs, school administrators, and teachers all potentially influence social studies instruction in elementary schools. However, curriculum standards coupled with high stakes testing have significantly shifted the balance of power so that school administrators and teachers are continually evaluated based on their adherence to federal and state mandates. This arrangement creates challenges which student teachers must negotiate as they begin learning about their mentor teachers, students, placement schools, and teaching in general. The perception of their success often depends on replicating what is currently emphasized in schools. With this in mind, I designed a phenomenological study which investigated student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies.

Background of the Problem

The field of social studies education, in both its aims and practices, reflects a historical pattern of “struggles over content and approaches to teaching” (Evans, 2004, p. 175). Competing ideas and theories about the purpose of social studies have produced a body of literature that reveals multiple perspectives on what and how teachers should go about their work as professional educators. Unfortunately, the resulting lack of congruence among policy makers, professional organizations, teacher educators, and
elementary social studies teachers often creates a “continuing failure of curricular reform and the operation of school social studies at a low level” (Evans, p. 177). Although a unified, or at least complementary, philosophy around the teaching of social studies would seemingly foster an ideal space for meaningful instruction, Goodman and Adler (1985) found in their study with pre-service elementary teachers that “official conceptions of social studies have little to do with students’ beliefs and actions in the classroom” (p. 15). Similarly, Haas and Laughlin (2001) stated in their analysis of 98 practicing elementary teachers, all of whom identified as members of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), that “the most disturbing finding of this survey, whose respondents belong to an organization that has long made citizenship education its highest priority, is how little attention is devoted to civic ideals and values in elementary schools” (p. 126). Despite the concept of citizenship education remaining as a generally agreed upon goal of social studies via knowledge, skills, values, and performance of some kind, Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) noted that “when educators are pushed to explain these core objectives, the 100-year-old contradictions and concerns become once again all too evident” (p. 52).

Although there may be no better forum than public schools in which to foster productive and democratic deliberation around important issues (Parker, 2003), it seems that disagreement about the purpose of social studies has created a “gap between the written and taught curriculums” (Parker, 1991, p. 79). Increased pressure to improve test scores in other areas, which results in more time being devoted to those same subjects, potentially means “the entire area of social studies is disappearing from the school day” (Passe, 2006, p.189). Or perhaps, as Tanner (2008) contended, social studies “has lost its
place as a core academic subject” (p. 42). With these perspectives in mind, the following sections explore the numerous and often conflicting accounts of the nature and implications of social studies education, both generally and specifically regarding elementary level instruction. Included are a variety of suggestions and ideas posited as position statements, content objectives, instructional rationales, and curriculum standards.

*The Purposes of Social Studies*

Any conception of appropriate social studies content carries with it a position about purpose, if only implicitly. However, the following ideas speak to purpose alone, perhaps with implicit notions of what content should follow. Given that prospective elementary school teachers might encounter any combination of these works in their teacher preparation programs, each can be viewed as having the potential to affect teachers’ views of why they teach social studies. At the same time, however, any prospective teacher may encounter only one or a few of the works mentioned, and in doing so may only experience a fraction of the ideas currently seen around purpose within this field.

In their often cited framework, Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) described social studies as generally conceived within three traditions: (a) citizenship transmission; (b) the social science disciplines; and (c) reflective inquiry. Citizenship transmission refers to the proposition that students need to learn certain knowledge, behaviors and values that are central to the culture in which the teacher and student participate. Although an emphasis is placed on participation in society, this approach generally advocates conforming to the norms and expectations of society as they currently exist. The interpretation of these norms and expectations need not be identical, and in some cases may leave room for
departures in mainstream thinking, but an adherence to the transmission or indoctrination into certain ways of seeing the world tends to be a distinguishing feature in this categorization. The social science position, on the other hand, advocates a form of citizenry in which students learn modes of thinking central to the disciplines which have come to comprise social studies…history, economics, political science, geography, sociology, etc. According to Barr et al., proponents of this approach believe that knowledge gathering skills learned through these disciplines allow students to view the world from a more objective, scientifically grounded perspective. Lastly, social studies taught as reflective inquiry seeks for students to engage in a continual process of clarifying their own values as a basis for making socio-political decisions. The acquisition of facts and details acts as a base of knowledge and is integral to this process. However, the primary objective is a commitment to questioning assumptions about individuals and society. All three approaches are said to promote citizenship education of some sort, but in obviously different ways. This framework can be useful towards evaluating the positions taken by other authors on the purpose of social studies, but of course there are many ways to describe any orientation and this framework represents only one.

According to NCSS (1994, p. vii), the “primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.” This statement not only provides a characterization of the society and world in which young people live, it also suggests that the primary purpose of social studies is to assist them in making decisions for a conception of the public good. In other words, the
ability to *make decisions* within a framework of adequate information and justifiable reasoning is the stated objective. As a means of organizing standards, curriculum, and classroom lessons, NCSS also created the following ten themes: (a) culture; (b) time, continuity, and change; (c) people, places, and environments; (d) individual development and identity; (e) individuals, groups, and institutions; (f) power, authority, and governance; (g) production, distribution, and consumption; (h) science, technology, and society; (I) global connections; and (j) civic ideals and practices. These curriculum strands are promoted as “especially important” (NCSS, p. 15) because they are interrelated and are drawn from what are generally regarded as the main social studies disciplines. Worth noting is despite the supposed usefulness and intent of these themes, teaching content related to each may not, by itself, achieve the goal of young people *making decisions*. It is at least conceivable, if not likely, that students could be exposed to these ideas in ways that do not ask them to prioritize competing claims of justice or determine what is rightfully meant by concepts such as the “public good.” Related to this critique is Parker’s (2003) notion that the citizenship education literature is limited by a reliance on assimilation into an already defined system which tends to minimize social and cultural diversity and creates a type of civic voyeurism, or watching other people, such as elected representatives, participate in that system.

Certainly, content is inevitable when communicating ideas, regardless of any particular philosophy or aims that one might claim. Hoge (1996) claimed “it is impossible to be a good citizen without learning content gained from the social studies. This content does more than open students’ eyes to the world; it gives them the thoughtful perspectives they need to become productive, caring citizens” (p. xvii). The point of
contention becomes what content should be taught, in what ways it should be taught, and what teaching it should accomplish. Whereas one educator might feel it is important that students memorize the state capitals and know the names of every U.S. president in the correct chronological order, another may feel the only defensible content is that which teaches about the structures of society which need to be improved. However, “social issues and contemporary challenges that confront society do not always fit neatly within subject matter boundaries of a social science discipline” (Jarolimek & Parker, 1993, pp. 223). And in this sense, teachers are always making decisions, both about content and purpose, some of which that fit neatly into prescribed standards and curriculum and some that do not.

Another useful distinction can be found in the ways that an educator might approach teaching about democracy. An overly simplistic version would be telling students that democracy is a form of government where citizens are able to elect representatives. Another way of teaching about democracy might begin with defining it as an “ongoing way of shared living rather than an achievement that needs only protection and celebration” (Parker, 2003, p. 24). In the second example, Parker focused on the act of creating a democratic society rather than an approach which treats the concept as something that has already been achieved, with no need for citizens to continually participate in its creation and improvement. Both conceptions of teaching about democracy can be linked to the NCSS themes, but one adheres to a passive form of learning content and the other involves students making decisions about democratic living. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) detailed similar distinctions among personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens, and justice oriented citizens. These
conceptions of what it means to be a democratic citizen range from exhibiting individual virtues and helping community organizations to taking leadership positions and actively seeking systemic solutions to social problems.

Generalizing ideas about society from the classroom to students’ lives outside of school is a theme that also appears frequently (Brophy, & VanSledright, 1997; Fertig, 2005; Lintner, 2005; Savage & Armstrong, 2005). Here, purpose is not necessarily about memorizing content, rather the focus is on the application of what is learned. Lintner (2005) claimed that a “fundamental objective of social studies instruction is to link students’ lives and experiences to the lives and experiences of others” (p. 37). Clearly, Lintner likened the importance of relating to others’ lives as a primary purpose for teaching the subject. However, other reasons are offered which tend to the purpose of generalization. Rather than focusing on the connections among others’ lives for its own inherent worth, Fertig (2005) said, “elementary students can learn how to take an interpretive approach to learning history so that they can construct knowledge about our collective experience in ways that provide a meaningful context for understanding present experience” (p. 2). This approach combines the disciplinary approach of a historian with an appreciation for understanding experience in its current forms. Brophy and VanSledright recommended curriculum center on “the principles involved in teaching school subjects for understanding, appreciation, and application to life outside of school, especially…structuring content around key ideas developed in depth” (p. 259).

With the multitude of topics and objectives often seen in national and state standards, teaching any particular idea in depth may prove difficult unless teachers decide on that purpose for themselves, and then structures their lessons intentionally around
those same concepts. Taking action on what is learned might also fall into this category of generalization as when Savage and Armstrong argued that social studies “ought to promote the active involvement of students and engage them in doing something with social studies content. Getting beyond the walls of the classroom gives social studies a reality base and helps promote student motivation and interest” (p. 65).

Whereas the generalization of what is learned to the outside world forms one notion of purpose, the development of particular skills can also be a primary focus (Darling, 2006; Jarolimek & Parker, 1993; Fertig, 2005; Turner, 2004; Welton, 2005). The particular skills and justifications that different authors advocate can vary greatly, and in some cases may overlap, but purpose, in these cases, is still framed as the development of skills. Jarolimek and Parker noted that “poorly developed reading skills, vocabulary, poor studying skills, and an inability to use reference materials” (p. 48) often hinder a student’s ability to attain greater understandings of what can be learned in social studies.

Similarly, the development of cognitive skills is sometimes seen as a means to another end. Citing the need for children to better think about their opinions, ideas, and their relationships to others, Welton (2005) focused on types of thinking (critical, creative, reflective) and meta-cognition in an effort to teach against racism and sexism. Darling (2006) stated, “it is the teacher who introduces young students to the practice of offering and asking for reasons for their opinions, and to model the habits of mind that are necessary for thoughtful, respectful, and responsible engagement with others” (p. 269). We also see a focus on problem solving for the purpose of understanding multiple perspectives and opposing viewpoints (Fertig, 2005), as well as a living in an ever
changing world (Turner, 2004). Separating the emphases found in the literature can be difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, when purpose seems to involve more than one objective. For example, Fertig asserted that “problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making about issues that affect the power and prosperity of contending groups provide opportunities for people to collaborate in the process of establishing laws and creating public policies that benefit a common good” (p. 2).

Lastly, the most prevalent purpose identified in this review can be placed into an interrelated category which promotes various forms of social justice and democratic education (Griffiths & Davies, 1995; Jarolimek & Parker, 1993; Parker, 2003; Stanley & Nelson, 1986; Thornton, 2005; Wade, 2007a, 2007b; White, 1997). Building on most children’s desire to be treated fairly, Wade (2007b) believed if “students are to develop a commitment to social justice ideals, this work should begin in the elementary years when children are concerned with fairness and when their empathy and perspective-taking abilities are in the formative stages” (p. 1) This focus on fairness can be directed toward the individual as well as society in general. Regarding the impact of schools, we move “towards creating a fair society. Schools where children are treated with fairness and justice and where they learn to treat others in the same way, are an important part of the creation of a better world for everybody” (Griffiths & Davies, p. 3). Jarolimek and Parker distinguished between two seemingly counteracting goals, fostering socialization and social criticism. The dilemma here “is how to socialize children in ways that ensure social tranquility without repressing the necessary dissension that must, on occasion, be unpleasant and socially unacceptable” (p. 8). Similarly, Thornton stated, “social aims, for
example, may result in priorities for fitting the child into the existing social order, for educating young people to act as social reformers, or somewhere in between” (p. 47).

This concept of how schools should be structured is at once pervasive in the literature and also seen as uncommon in practice. Wade (2001) imagined a school named Justice Elementary School where democratic education, social justice, and community service learning are commonplace. She envisioned such a school as a response to the current inequities of society, and “because these problems are so pervasive and persistent, service learning for social justice should begin in the earliest years of schooling” (Wade, 2007a, p. 158). A related but somewhat different strand of teaching for social justice and democratic education incorporates values as a part of the standard social studies curriculum. Values can be interpreted as both general and personal, and can include the teaching of concepts such as “liberty, justice, honesty, consideration for others, individualism, human dignity, and truthfulness” (Jarolimek & Parker, p. 65).

Returning to the application of these ideas on both an individual and societal level, Parker stated that educating children to become “enlightened and engaged democratic citizens” necessarily means educating just citizens “who refrain from harming or exploiting others, and who believe it is their duty both to protect just institutions and to prevent injustice” (p. 54). White (1997) criticized the manner in which these ideas are generally taken up in social studies standards and prescribed curriculum, noting that “much of civic education in the United States focuses on democratic institutions and structures, rather than on acceptance of key principles and the formation of character” (p. 36). He distinguished between the formation of moral habits, which in some cases could be construed as simple indoctrination, and the development of moral reasoning which
enables children to understand the basis for choosing certain actions over others.

According to White, “the issue is not, then, whether values should be a part of the school curriculum, but whether they will be taught haphazardly or systematically, unreflectively or thoughtfully” (p. 37). Purpose does not exist in a vacuum, however, minus any notion of content. And to this end, White claimed “the most sensible approach is one that recognizes the need for both process and content…this means maintaining high expectations for academic and moral behavior, while capitalizing on opportunities to explore the reasons that underlie these expectations” (p. 44).

*Social Studies in Elementary Schools*

Suggestions on what content should be covered within elementary social studies span a wide spectrum. The reasoning behind these choices is not always discernable, especially with regard to lists of curriculum standards, which are often mandated by law yet published without explanation or a comprehensive rationale. The following descriptions once again come from many sources, any number of which a prospective elementary school teacher might encounter during a typical university preparation program. What is chosen by any teacher or teacher educator can be referred to as “gatekeeping” (Thornton, 2005, p. 1) and necessarily involves decisions about what is most important to teach and do within a given school system. Thornton went on to say that the same curriculum can be taught many different ways, depending on the individual approach of any particular teacher. And in this regard, “gatekeeping seems more crucial to curriculum and instruction than the form the curriculum takes” (Thornton, p. 10).

Arguably, one of the most influential sets of ideas about what content should be taught often comes in the form of state standards. Content standards can be considered
“influential” for various reasons. For example, they may be viewed by teachers as inherently worthwhile. They are also easily accessible, highly visible, and sanctioned by the state. In nearly every state educational system, adherence to standards is mandated by law, thereby forcing teachers to integrate them into their instruction, regardless of any perceived usefulness. The Georgia Department of Education (2008) developed the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS, see Appendix H) for social studies and stated they were designed to “develop informed Georgia citizens who understand the history of the United States and our place in an ever increasing interconnected world. It is essential that students understand their past and how that past influences the present day and the future” (https://www.georgiastandards.org/Standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/SocialStudiesStandards.aspx).

This brief rationale seems to prioritize the understanding of history in so far as it connects the past, present, and future from the standpoint of “our place” in an interconnected world. The idea of “our place” is not explained further. However, we can turn to the standards themselves in order to see what is emphasized and what is not. Here, each grade level has its own set of standards, divided among the various disciplines of history, geography, government/civics, and economics. Beginning with kindergarten, the GPS for social studies promote “understandings” of national holidays, American symbols, chronological terms, American celebrations and culture, map skills, good citizenship (as defined by following rules), character traits (ex: honesty, patriotism, loyalty), career choices, and purchasing power because people “cannot have everything they want” (GPS, SSKE4, p. 2). The GPS for first grade focuses on American heroes, topographical features of the earth’s surface, more character traits, patriotic songs (ex:
My Country ‘Tis of Thee, America the Beautiful), and personal finance. The standards for grades 2-5 frequently return to these same themes of identifying or describing particular people, places, and events, basic map skills, and economic scarcity. Interestingly, out of 79 standards listed for elementary social studies, only two explicitly mention the concept of natural or human rights, once in grade 4 (GPS, SS4CG1, p. 3) and once in grade 5 (GPS, SS5CG1, p. 3).

Whereas the state standards in Georgia often focus on knowing specific people, places, and events for content objectives, those provided by NCSS (2004) tend to be more general in nature. The NCSS standards are aligned both with the thematic strands mentioned earlier, and the disciplines of history, geography, civics and government, economics, and psychology. The disciplinary standards were compiled by “various expert groups who have identified what they believe K-12 learners should know and be able to do” (NCSS, p.13). To this end, however, the NCSS standards leave great room for individual educators to decide how they want to accomplish these particular goals, assuming this is even a priority. Given that most states mandate their own standards, rather than those published by NCSS, it is debatable how much attention is paid to these ideas by social studies teachers (Haas and Laughlin, 2001). More than anything, these standards focus on general skills and understandings within each discipline, and if used, would allow teachers to structure their curriculum in a variety of creative ways. Tanner (2008) found that showing preservice teachers the NCSS standards caused them to “1-develop a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and purpose of social studies, 2- view social studies as an essential part of the elementary curriculum, and 3- gain considerable interest in teaching social studies” (p. 43).
Looking at the standards provided by any particular state department or professional organization provides just a fraction of the ideas concerning content, however. The following excerpts regarding social studies content were all found in teacher educator textbooks and scholarly journals. Included is a brief analysis of the “expanding communities” model, generally attributed to the work of Paul Hanna (1966) which is often referenced as a mainstay of elementary social studies curriculum (Brophy, 1996; Brophy & Alleman, 2008; Brophy & VanSledright, 1997; Duplass, 2007; Farris, 2004; Wade, 2002).

Addressing the place of content as a starting point, Jarolimek and Parker (1993) suggested that any “social studies program should be built on what the child already knows” (p. 12). Here, the content is necessarily connected to whatever the child’s prior knowledge might be. With whatever is chosen as content, Saxe (1994) recommended, “the needs of children are placed far ahead of the demands of content objectives that tend to support passive learning over active learning, unreflective citizenship over fostering individual freedom, and stagnating conformity over individual growth and self expression” (p. 45). These ideas suggest the extent to which content is understood and positively affects students’ lives is more important than the content itself.

In contrast, teaching with specific disciplines at the forefront of instruction is often prioritized. Farris (2004) stated that “history is the thread that ties social studies together with people, places, and things” (p. 348). Fritzer (2002) believed “every child should have the opportunity to develop his or her knowledge of the nation and world, in history, geography, government, and basic economic concepts” (p. 157). And Huff envisioned “social studies [as] that part of the kindergarten through grade 12 school
curriculum concerned particularly with history, geography, and civic education” (p. 2). Expanding Huff’s idea to include other subjects, Zarillo (2000) claimed “units should be cross curricular and integrate the social science disciplines, language arts, the visual arts, the performing arts, science, mathematics, and physical education” (p. 240). History often dominates other subjects within social studies but can be taught with a variety of intentions. Instructors might require a basic recognition of people, places, and events or they can trace the evolution of current social problems through a historical framework. Students might be asked to know information for the sake of passing a test or they can develop inquiry skills that are useful in assessing both past and current political decisions (Levstik & Barton, 1997). Brophy and Van Sledright (1997) viewed “history as a discipline [that] should be developed within an overall emphasis...[on] citizen education rather than primarily as disciplinary socialization” (p. 254). The interaction with content can also serve as a process of inquiry about the world students live within, which focuses on human nature, values, ethics and the relationship teachers and students have to knowledge (Hausfather, 1998).

Content that focuses on multicultural and global understandings is a prevalent theme as well. Alleman, Knighton, and Brophy (2007) advocated understanding the human condition by “organizing early social studies around cultural universals” (p. 169). Typically speaking, this focus centers on commonalities that all people share in their day to day lives, such as producing and eating food, caring for families, working, transportation, and living within some form of government. By studying other cultures in their community, nation, and world, the idea is that children will develop a greater appreciation of themselves, their beliefs, and an appreciation for the beliefs of others
(McEachron, 2001). Lintner (2005) recommended challenging bias and prejudice through the use of photographs as content. Parker (2003) conceptualized multicultural education and citizenship education as one thing instead of two, emphasizing that content dealing with living and belonging in a world of diversity need not be arbitrarily separated. And in an attempt to connect this approach with prescribed curriculums, McCarty (2007) stated that elementary social studies teachers can use “multicultural literature to support social studies concepts, connect its usage to NCSS standards for social studies, and help children become more culturally literate” (p. 52). Parker (1991) also emphasized that teaching values related to cultural diversity should not wait until later, but should begin in the primary grades. Socialization is seen to some degree in every society as a means for young learners to understand traditional customs and behaviors. However, social studies also provides an equally needed opportunity for counter socialization, where independent thought and a commitment to improving democratic life is the primary objective (Engle & Ochoa, 1988).

Content that explores children’s values offers the chance to deal with moral dilemmas in ways that are developmentally appropriate (Ellis, 2007). This can be done through children’s literature, expressive arts, role play, simulation, and primary sources (Wade, 2007b). The most common values mentioned as being well suited for younger children are honesty, respect, care, responsibility, and respecting the rights of others (Suh & Traiger, 1999). Another avenue to explore values and decision making is the incorporation of current events into regular classroom content. Jarolimek and Parker (1993) felt current events should be used because they promote interest in news developments, ask students to take positions on issues, and returning to an earlier goal,
they help children relate learning to life outside of school. According to Koeppen (2003), the “key is to present complex issues to young students using readily understood language” (p. 262).

As stated before, the expanding communities model (Hanna, 1966) of instruction has enjoyed a prominent place in elementary social studies for many years. Brophy (1996) attributed its prominence not to any particular virtue, but to a lack of viable alternatives. Wade (2002) offered a different view, saying this model persists because it’s already well known, it makes logical sense and can be understood by educators and lay people, and because it’s safe and avoids controversy. Duplass (2007) believed elementary teachers are more reliant on textbooks than secondary teachers due to their relative lack of training in specific social studies content. In his review of textbooks, most followed a similar scope and sequence based on the expanding communities model which progressed from school and family to neighborhoods to communities. Duplass felt that children were much more isolated from information about the rest of the world when this content structure gained its initial popularity, and hence, most lessons from that approach are now trivial, focusing more on information knowledge rather than procedural knowledge. Despite its criticisms, however, Brophy and Alleman (2008) suggested the expanding communities model is just another way of arranging content and attempted to reframe the debate by saying, “the traditional curriculum is mostly about fundamental social aspects of the human condition related to satisfaction of culturally universal needs and wants, not about expanding communities” (p. 36). An examination of Paul Hanna’s book, Geography in the Teaching of Social Studies, revealed an approach that is less concerned with an arbitrary model of expansion and more concerned with connections
made in elementary schools between the conditions of one’s environments and the human activities carried on therein. This limited or inaccurate knowledge, according to Hanna, prevents children from understanding the responses of people living in places that are strange to those in the U.S. He suggested that children must understand the distribution of resources around the world in order to rationally deal with the roots of poverty, disease, and despair that lead to violence. And in this sense, we see a curriculum that might very well be aligned with ideas of social and distributive justice, if only those who teach it understand its author’s intent.

Regardless of the orientations that elementary level teachers bring to their social studies instruction, the lesson time and scheduling needed for realizing their objectives is becoming non-existent. In one of the larger studies of its kind, Leming, Ellington, and Schug (2006) conducted telephone interviews with 1,051 second, fifth, and eighth grade social studies teachers. Among the key findings were that 70% of second and fifth grade teachers spent less than 4 hours per week teaching social studies, but only 11% of those same teachers spent less than 4 hours teaching math and 8% spent less than 4 hours on reading. A disappointing finding for advocates of social studies education was that only 29% of all teachers said their schools thought civics and government were important. When rank ordering “often cited” (p. 3) rationales for teaching social studies, teachers rated the acceptance of cultural diversity as the most important goal and learning about American heroes as the least important goal.

With regard to their own teacher preparation and professional education courses, Leming et al. reported less than 40% rated their history and social science course work or professional education as being of high quality. Teachers at all levels selected “subject
matter knowledge” and “presenting content effectively” as their top needs (p. 4). Lastly, 65% said their views on moral, political, and social issues affected their approach to teaching social studies some or all of the time. In another survey, this time with 562 elementary education students, Owens (1997) found that 40% of the participants rated their past experiences with social studies as uninteresting, 33% had a low interest in teaching social studies, and 33% said their cooperating teacher was uninterested or very uninterested in teaching social studies.

Statement of the Phenomenon

Given that student teachers in elementary education typically take only one social studies methods and curriculum course in their teacher preparation programs, their orientations to the field may be substantially influenced by other life experiences. The previous section described longstanding debates on the purpose of social studies, yet many of these important ideas may remain unknown to pre-service teachers if the time they spend studying and practicing social studies is delegated to the periphery of their training, field requirements, and student teaching experience. In other words, even the most meaningful ideas on what social studies might accomplish are potentially wasted if beginning teachers do not have the opportunity to try them out in actual classrooms.

Many people, including university supervisors, mentor teachers, friends in the same teaching cohort, and elementary students all interact with student teachers on a regular basis during the formative times of when social studies is taught. Student teachers experience this phenomenon of teaching social studies not only by interacting with all of these individuals, but also through interpreting their own expectations and adjusting to challenges along the way. Dewey (1938) stated there is an “organic connection between
education and personal experience” (p.12). However, he warned that “any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 13). And in the event that student teachers’ experiences create negative or apathetic attitudes about teaching social studies, an undesirable scenario may develop where meaningful learning and creativity is replaced with rote memorization and “standardized testing is not simply an evaluator of a curriculum but its creator” (Segall, 2003, p. 321). With this in mind, I plan to consider all relevant theories of teacher learning, conceived as critical parts to a more comprehensive theory of human learning, as well as the first hand accounts of beginning student teachers, before, during, and after they complete their teaching placements.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. The methodology is directed towards the following research questions: (a) what is it like to teach social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher? (b) what, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies? (c) what do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools? and (d) how do elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they encounter around teaching social studies?

Significance of the Study

Research suggests a “strong relationship between teachers’ educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices” (Pajares, 1992, p. 326) but the influence of student teachers’ experiences on the way they teach social
studies during their placements at elementary schools has not been studied adequately. Teachers commonly rate their field placements and student teaching as highly influential in shaping their views when compared to other university courses and experiences (Goodlad, 1990; Ross, 1986). Given these findings, it is critical to investigate and understand this transformative period in every teacher’s career.

Goodman and Adler (1985) recommended that more research is needed which investigates how childhood experiences, significant individuals such as family members, cooperating teachers, university instructors, and social forces or demands outside the classroom affect student teachers’ perspectives. A more comprehensive perspective on the ways student teachers process their experiences and potentially integrate them into their classrooms should benefit teacher educators, the student teachers themselves, and the students these beginning educators will eventually teach. Teacher educators who integrate self reflection and making connections between school and life can use this as an opportunity to promote close examination of student teachers’ instructional decisions. A better understanding of how these choices are made can potentially improve the ways teacher educators structure their own courses, and may lead to student teachers who are enrolled in these programs feeling better prepared for the work they will eventually undertake. The participants in this study had numerous opportunities to think about and discuss their decisions and experiences teaching social studies, which also holds potential for improvement of their own work. With the interrelated nature of teacher preparation and the actual work of teachers, a better understanding of student teaching experiences will ideally improve the ways students interpret and interact with all that is considered social studies. Of course, there are no guarantees that any of these benefits will be fully
realized. Many of these possibilities hinge on the overall quality of the study and the extent to which any results are found to be useful by the individuals mentioned.

To what degree do student teachers receive adequate preparation for creating meaningful instruction from taking one social studies course? The answer to that question, in my best estimation, varies greatly from one individual to another and from one course to another. Despite this wide variance in possibilities, teacher preparation programs are faced with a significant dilemma. Either the claim is made, explicitly or implicitly, that beginning teachers learn everything they need to effectively teach social studies from just one course or the acknowledgment exists that they likely do not. If they do not, universities and teacher preparation programs are sending student teachers into elementary schools with a distinct possibility that other factors will influence their instruction as much, if not more, as their formal training. What is this experience, this phenomenon, like for student teachers?

Interwoven throughout this account are my own assumptions that one usually does not absorb all that would be ideally learned around teaching social studies from one course. Perhaps that is an unwarranted assumption. Or perhaps no one learns as much as is “possible” regardless of how many courses are taken in teacher preparation programs. This study seeks to reveal the experiences of student teachers who find themselves making important decisions around what to teach and how to teach it. To this end, I am intrigued by the notion of discovering the relationships that exist among teachers and the discipline of social studies. What purpose do teachers see? What other factors influence their instructional decisions? How much do other life experiences influence and determine this relationship? In order to utilize a research perspective that attempts to
articulate biases as clearly as possible, I continually interrogated my own preconceptions around this process. My hope in conducting this research was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of student teachers and to improve social studies instruction for all teachers and students at the elementary level.

Chapter Summary

Current literature illustrates a wide range of ideas about what should be taught as social studies and why teaching any particular way is preferable over another. Student teachers face a considerable challenge when taking just one course that is supposed to convey the most important aspects of teaching social studies at the elementary level. But complicating matters further, most of the research that addresses this issue seems to be at odds with the standards most teachers are expected to follow. If this were simply a matter of conflicting opinions, teacher educators might begin with weighing the claims of various academic scholars, professional organizations, and those making curriculum policy decisions. However, the influence of state mandates and high stakes testing often shifts the balance of power towards those who make educational policy and away from university teacher education programs and the body of literature this community produces.

Teacher education programs must actively address these challenges and contradictions between competing visions of social studies. Doing so will help student teachers see how their work is integral to the human experience and the development of young citizens concerned with basic rights and the public good. To this end, and unless an argument is made that social studies involves a moral obligation of sorts, ideas and opinions about what content and methods should comprise the field may never be
resolved. To do so is to successfully describe what responsibility, if any, social studies programs possess as part of a public institution, situated within a democratic society. Currently, however, student teachers receive conflicting messages about the types of social studies instruction that lead to meaningful, transformative learning.
CHAPTER II
TEACHER LEARNING AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. Research questions for the study included the following: (a) what is it like to teach social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher? (b) what, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies? (c) what do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools? and (d) how do elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they encounter around teaching social studies?

This chapter reviews perspectives of teachers and researchers as an indicator of learning around elementary level social studies, learning related to teaching, adult learning, experiential learning, and the experiences of student teachers. The first section synthesizes the findings of related studies on categorizing elementary level social studies. Learning theories follow that describe some of the more common ways teaching can be framed. The third and fourth sections consider teaching as one of many life endeavors involving learning. The purpose here is to examine the ways in which beginning teachers are influenced by factors beyond their teacher education programs. The last section provides an overview of existing research on the ways student teachers describe their own learning experiences and processes of becoming a teacher.
Perspectives on Elementary Level Social Studies

The pedagogical orientations of pre-service and practicing teachers have an immediate impact on the way social studies education is experienced by elementary level students. In an attempt to better understand how teachers’ ideas and opinions about social studies shape the practice of teaching, the following research investigated these perspectives and their implications.

Goodman and Adler (1985) studied 16 elementary preservice teachers and formulated the following categories representing the ways in which these teachers viewed social studies: (a) as a non-subject; (b) as human relations; (c) as citizenship; (d) as school knowledge; (e) as the great connection; and (f) as social action. The authors noted that “similar conceptions of social studies education are held by many educators” (p. 15).

Mills (1988) sought to replicate these findings and interviewed 14 elementary school teachers to see if their views paralleled these same categories. He found that “none of the teachers…emphasized the aims and goals most often stated by leading social studies educators. Little critical thinking and problem solving skills were stressed” (p. 85) because teachers in the lower grades felt students were not cognitively ready for such an endeavor. Similarly, Barton, McCully, and Marks (2004) found “the idea that students’ lack of experiences represented a major hurdle, even an insurmountable one, was a recurring theme in discussions” (p. 78) with teachers they interviewed. Mills also recommended that “further study is needed to address the problem of incongruence between these aims and the beliefs and practices of classroom teachers” (p. 86). Echoing the suggestions of Jarolimek and Parker (1993) however, the beginning teachers
interviewed by Barton et al. “learned the importance of asking students what they already knew in an effort to build on those experiences and knowledge” (p. 85).

Haas and Laughlin (2001) sent surveys to elementary school teachers who identified themselves as NCSS members. Of the 98 who responded, 70% were considered veteran teachers with an average of 16 years experience. Here, researchers found that instruction for first and second grade stressed cultural universals such as housing, food, traditions, cultural and environmental geography through studies of community and other nations. History was usually taught beginning in grade 3 and the entire elementary curriculum followed an expanding communities model. When asked what their greatest concern was regarding social studies, the most frequent response was that social studies held a very low priority compared to other school subjects.

The studies cited here paint a largely negative picture of social studies, in terms of its conception, delivery, and past recollections by preservice as well as practicing teachers. Sweeping generalizations need not be made, but clearly there are factors at work which cause many educators either to dislike or devalue the teaching of social studies. Obviously this is not true for all elementary school teachers. However, so many seem to express negative feelings about the field that an acknowledgement of this reality should warrant concern for those involved in social studies education. Many of these same teachers experienced social studies prior to the current era of standards and high stakes testing, however. I will now summarize more recent explanations for the current state of affairs regarding social studies.

Much of the current criticism surrounding schools and curricular expectations relates to the effects of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In Sunal and Sunal’s (2008) study
of 60 preservice teachers’ journals, NCLB was often cited as a reason why social studies has recently occupied such a minimal role at the elementary level. The authors go on to claim that “the trend in the first decade of this century is toward the marginalization of social studies rather than toward its centrality in the curriculum” (p. 46). Chapin (2006) agreed saying, “the most serious negative impact of NCLB has been that in many classrooms the social studies program has been neglected” (p. 11). According to McCall (2006), NCLB forces teachers to prepare students for tests in reading and math, not social studies. Olwell and Raphael (2006) also said that NCLB forces schools to focus on math and reading, eroding time and energy for social studies. Mandated, high stakes testing is a fundamental aspect of this particular legislation, however, “tests do not assess the skills and dispositions that matter most, the ability to carry out extended analyses, solve open ended problems, and display command of complex relationships” (Libresco, 2006, p. 193). Given that social studies topics often deal with a wide spectrum of social problems and basic human rights, the reliance on rote memorization and testing as a fundamental goal falls short of the discipline’s greatest potential. Savage and Armstrong (2004) offered the recognition that agreement cannot be found on the claimed advantages of standards and high stakes testing, and any assertion of agreement is unsubstantiated. With regard to the effects on social studies, Wade (2007a) asserted that “state tests and required curricula do not support elementary teachers involving their students in service learning or examining the root causes of inequity in our society” (p. 164).

Aside from NCLB and standards based testing, criticisms of elementary social studies abound for other reasons. Brophy (1996) stated that in the early grades (K-3), “much of the content … is trite, redundant, and unlikely to help children achieve
significant social education goals” (p. 13). Regarding textbooks, he said they “are not usually written by experts, not revised through field testing, and are driven by adoption guidelines from state departments with disconnected knowledge and skills objectives” (p. 20) where “much of the primary curriculum [is] ‘happy talk,’ [and a] celebration of the benign, supportive world that we all supposedly live in” (p. 27). Fertig (2005) further cemented this point by acknowledging that history is usually taught to elementary students as famous people, events, and dates to memorize. “Rather than an inquiry and issues centered approach to instruction, the current trend is toward an emphasis on content acquisition” (Evans, 2004, p. 175). And perhaps most notably, “the elementary curriculum has changed little since the 1960s” (Brophy & Alleman, 2008, p.33). Given these concerns, anyone with an interest in social studies and its place in elementary schools must address the magnitude of these claims on all levels. To do so may require a complete overhaul of content and a revitalized conceptualization of purpose, but to do nothing will only worsen an already grave situation.

Teacher Learning

“Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time” (Dewey, 1938, p. 49). In other words, a student may also develop ideas, beliefs, or attitudes beyond the intended lessons within any academic setting. These forms of learning can be congruent with the intentions of an instructor or completely unrelated. Because “we can no longer assume the role of the university is necessarily a liberalizing one” there is an increased need for research in teacher education to analyze “the impact of university courses, symbols, procedures, and rituals upon the professional perspectives of prospective teachers” (Zeichner &
Tabachnick, 1981, p. 10). This interaction among individuals’ perceptions, their learning, and their experiences holds important implications for the work of teacher educators and will be discussed later.

Looking outside the context of schooling, it may be that all people are potentially learning in any number of ways, at any given time, throughout the course of their lives. These personal experiences and their implications can occur across all contexts, and contribute to an understanding of learning that will be the focus of this research. Briefly stated, experiential learning “is a holistic concept…in that it seeks to describe the emergence of basic life orientations as a function of dialectic tensions between basic modes of relating to the world” (Kolb, 1984, p. 31). When conceived this way, the ideas that comprise experiential learning theory provide “conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work, portraying learning as a continuous, lifelong process” (Kolb, p. 33).

If learning to teach is framed as a life experience, and not only as a career endeavor that might be generally isolated from the multiple influences shaping every individual’s orientation to the world, then perhaps a theory that addresses these complexities is as appropriate, and even necessary, to discuss teacher learning as is any which focuses on the particular work of teachers. This is not to say that we cannot learn from or should not embrace those theories which are firmly situated within the specific work of teaching. A comprehensive theory of learning ought to address all relevant aspects of becoming a teacher, focusing both on the specific ways learning to teach is conceptualized, and as a life experience which is potentially influenced by a wide variety of factors outside the purview of most teacher education programs.
Ideas about how, where, and under what circumstances people best learn to teach range from nuanced positions on the complexities of the discipline to quite simple prescriptions for teacher educators to follow. Regardless of the perspective, the question of how teachers learn is important “because answers to this question may result in recommendations for the improvement of both initial teacher education and the further professional development of teachers” (Beijaard, Korthagen, & Verloop, 2007, p. 105). Even more importantly, perhaps, are the learning environments created by these teachers and the effects they have on children. By most accounts, social studies deals with the nature and structures of society and in a related manner, the ways in which all people deserve to be treated. How teachers learn to involve children in these considerations is therefore of utmost importance.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) concluded the authors of No Child Left Behind had a clear image of teacher learning which is best defined as training rather than learning. Included in this conception of learning is a “limited and narrow view of knowledge as something that can be given to teachers to give to their students; the assumption that beyond subject matter, what teachers need to know can be picked up on the job” (p. 685). In fact, a significant portion of the literature on teacher learning often oversimplifies the process or quickly eases into recommendations for teacher education without first establishing how learning supposedly occurs. One example is Proefriedt’s (1994) book, How Teachers Learn, which addresses numerous aspects of teaching and teacher education but in contrast to the title, offers very little towards understanding learning. Feiman-Nemser (2008) described learning to teach simply as learning to think, know, feel, and act like a teacher. Compartmentalizing learning even further, the author
states that settings where teachers learn are “university courses, student teaching, schools and classrooms, [and] mentoring relationships” (p. 700). These locations seem plausible as traditional learning environments for teachers. However, learning may be just as likely to occur in places not often associated with teacher education. Watching the nightly news at home, witnessing an encounter between two strangers on the street, attending a concert with a colleague, or having dinner with friends are all places where people, and teachers, learn about the worlds they occupy and how people interact with each other. Offering another simple definition, Kelly (2006) suggested “teacher learning is the process by which teachers move towards expertise” (p. 514). This notion assumes that learning will produce experts of some kind, but seems rather linear and does not account for learning that could move a teacher towards less desirable outcomes, such as poor classroom management, unfair treatment of students, or unfounded assumptions about entire groups of students.

In assessing current research, the National Research Council (2000) assumed that “what is known about learning applies to teachers as well as their students. Yet teacher learning is a relatively new topic of research, so there is not a great deal of data about it” (p. 204). Although it is unclear what is meant here by “data,” this group does recognize that practicing teachers learn about teaching in many ways, namely from their own practice, through interactions with other teachers, from teacher educators (in schools, teacher education programs, or professional development) and through informal ways such as being a parent, a coach, or participating in other youth related work. Building on this same publication, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) outlined three principles of learning: 1-prospective teachers come to the classroom with
preconceptions about the world and teaching, developed in their apprenticeship of observation; 2-in order to develop competence in an area of inquiry, teachers must develop, understand, and organize factual and theoretical knowledge; and 3-a metacognitive approach can help teachers better understand and control their own learning. The authors continue by saying, “clearly, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for optimal teaching are not something that can be fully developed in preservice education programs” (p. 358). However, further reading suggests this statement is meant to promote lifelong learning, and is not recognition of all the influences prior to and outside the realm of formal teacher preparation. Within the framework of teaching experiences, Hammerness et al. suggested that “new teachers learn to teach in a community” which leads to “dispositions about how to use this knowledge, practices that allow them to act on their intentions and beliefs, and tools to support their efforts” (p. 385). Perhaps from this example, we might abstract the notion that people often learn effectively in communal and supportive environments where they can act on their beliefs. This facet of learning, if true, would seemingly apply to a number of life experiences, not only those that take place within the framework of learning to teach.

Evidence of teacher learning is also conceived as the precursor to elements of teacher development, where accomplished teachers demonstrate a strong vision of their practice, motivation, understanding, reflection, and a commitment to community (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Regarding the development of community in schools, Westheimer (2008) viewed “teacher learning among colleagues [as] a promising area for teacher development and reform” (p. 777). Although learning to become an accomplished teacher seems self-evident as an acknowledgement of learning, the question of how and
why beginning teachers prioritize potential learning opportunities over others remains to be answered. It may be that teachers develop implicit theories about their students, the subject matter, and their own roles and responsibilities which are not always clearly articulated. These theories tend to be “eclectic aggregations of cause-effect propositions from many sources, rules of thumb, generalizations drawn from personal experience, beliefs, values, and prejudices… like all people faced with complex situations, teachers’ insights are subject to the full range of errors in human judgments” (Clark, 1988, p. 6).

Lortie (1975) described the process by which beginning teachers learn about teaching from years of being a student as an apprenticeship of observation, and claimed that teachers enter into the field with only partial knowledge of teaching. He went on to state, “what students learn about teaching, then, is intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical; it is based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles” (p. 62). Grossman (1990) also recognized the importance of experience gained within the classroom as an actual teacher, which cannot be replicated simply through observations. In this setting, teachers “acquire pedagogical content knowledge from actual classroom experience. Teaching experience provides the opportunity for prospective teachers to test the knowledge they have acquired from other sources in the crucible of the classroom” (Grossman, p. 15). And even as we recognize the importance of work done as a teacher, in a classroom, learning which influences multiple aspects of one’s life, including teaching, happens in a variety of ways. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) addressed the process of learning through socialization and claimed it “cannot be addressed adequately without linking the processes of teacher education to ongoing
patterns of schooling and to the social, economic, and political contexts within which both universities and schools exist” (p. 10).

With regard to knowledge, experience, and meaning, Britzman (1991) said that teacher “knowledge concerns all the ideas, discourses, and possibilities that enable one to reflect upon the meanings of experience. Yet in academic life, knowledge and experience are typically fragmented by tradition and design” (p. 35). This observation raises an important consideration about the ways that teachers adjust and cope with what they are asked, and sometimes told, to learn. Goldstein (2008) studied 4 kindergarten teachers, all of whom learned how to align what they already wanted to do with the standards they were required to teach. These teachers “actively interpreted the requirements of their state and school district through the lens of their professional beliefs, preferences, and strategic knowledge base and created classroom policy responsive to their particular professional contexts” (p. 448). Is it possible to completely separate personal and professional beliefs without making arbitrary distinctions? When a teacher circumvents state standards in order to teach whatever they believe is worth teaching, does this act speak to personal or professional learning?

The multitude of ways that teacher learning can be described, when taken as a collective and cumulative effort, hopefully strengthens our understandings of the ways teachers make decisions based on what they have learned and experienced throughout their lives and their professional training. Perhaps no one explanation can itself account for all that might affect any individual, yet every attempt to explain how teachers learn contributes a piece to the puzzle. According to Bell et al., “we do not have a unified conceptual framework in which to place teachers’ emerging understandings” (p. 123).
And here we begin to see a need to explain teacher learning in ways that go beyond explanations from within the field, and which look to generalized theories of adult learning that apply to a continuum of experience, including learning to teach.

**Adult Learning and Teaching**

If well stated, a theory concerning adult learning ought to be applicable to the lives of those learning to teach. In the same ways that the previous section sought to explain learning to teach, using terminology and ideas specific to the field, the current section seeks to explain learning across numerous contexts, with an emphasis on experiential learning. The rationale for this approach is that learning to teach is most accurately conceived as a complex activity, or a series of experiences, that an individual encounters as an integral part of life learning. Although teaching is a unique endeavor, in many ways almost any career path or learning experience is a unique endeavor, depending on what aspects one chooses to focus. At the very least, however, learning to teach does not happen in a vacuum, free from the usual ways in which an individual experiences learning in other contexts. Kolb (1984) stated that “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38).

Focusing on the sense of self, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggested “learning and a sense of identity are inseparable. They are aspects of the same phenomenon” (p. 115). Although more elaboration is needed, one point we might extract from these ideas is that learning can be viewed through the specific lens of becoming a teacher just as becoming a teacher can be viewed through the lens of learning through another series of experiences within one’s life. And just as our identities and ways of functioning in the world can be influenced by any number of events, perceptions, people, emotions, etc., which
themselves are interconnected and influenced by each other, perhaps so too can learning to teach become a part of this experiential matrix.

What follows is a series of ideas from multiple perspectives that share one common purpose. All attempt to describe the many ways in which knowledge and learning can be understood. Implicit in this collection is my assumption that learning to teach can also be accurately described in these ways.

During the years one spends as a student, a wide variety of teaching styles may be encountered. Presumably, we all experience teachers and classrooms which fall along a personal continuum of likes and dislikes. In what ways does this emotional connection affect what we learn from those classes? Dirkx (2001) found that when students in his teaching strategies course were asked to recall incidents of memorable classroom learning, they typically described experiences in which there was a “strong, positive, emotional, or affective dimension, such as a supportive climate, a caring teacher who listens to us as individuals, a teacher who respects us as persons, or a teacher who involves the whole person in the learning experience” (p. 67). From this the author concluded that “emotions are important in adult education because they can either impede or motivate learning” (p. 63). If we assume for the moment that these accounts of memorable learning are typical, then they may also tell us something about instances where learning does not occur. In other words, where there is a lack of classroom support, where teachers do not listen to their students, are disrespectful, and do not involve the whole person, students’ emotional responses to these scenarios may lead to undesirable consequences.
Students do not learn as easily in negative environments. In fact, they may learn to resent the teacher who they view as responsible for their emotional response, or following Lortie’s (1975) model of apprenticeship, they may learn how not to be an effective teacher. Surely there are numerous possibilities for what might follow under these conditions. However, it seems that “personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adult’s emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world” (Dirkx, p. 64). Furthermore, these experiences create an “accumulation of messages that empower and disempower learners and therefore it must be critiqued” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 57). Applying these ideas to teaching social studies, a beginning teacher who experienced instructors who dismissed opposing political views, for example, may learn to dislike social studies. Or, that same person may just dismiss the instructor’s approach and vow to teach social studies in an inclusive and supportive way. What is learned here or what counts as knowledge, either from “a critical or postmodern perspective . . . is socially constructed and situated within a particular context” (Kilgore, p. 54). Predicting how any one individual will respond is difficult, in part, because “knowledge is more thoroughly integrated in the process and politics of learning, rather than being a neutral reward at the end of the learning journey” (Kilgore, p. 60).

The acquisition and exposure to “experiences that provide learning are never just isolated events in time” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 162). Within teaching, connections are drawn among any number of recollections that can influence interpretations and responses to current and future events. Similarly, knowledge is “continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner” (Kolb, 1984,
When considering the experiences of student teachers as learners, we might look for examples in the ways that pedagogical choices are made and remade. We might look at the ways classroom management techniques are used and evolve. Or, in the case of teaching social studies, we might examine the influences on a teacher’s political or world views and the ways those ideas and experiences shape that person’s approach to explaining the relationship between public institutions and the governance of society.

Richardson (1996) identified three categories of “personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction, and experience with formal knowledge” (p. 105). Any combination may be involved with the decisions teachers make in all aspects of their work. Again, within the context of teaching social studies, we cannot assume that all educators develop the same, or even similar, views around concepts of liberty, justice, freedom, and democracy, or the role that human rights and having access to basic needs might play in determining the fairness of any particular societal arrangement.

Teacher educators who assume that students develop views around the purpose of social studies education similar to their own should consider that “learners, as peripheral participants, can develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93). In other words, what is intended to be taught may not coincide with what is chosen to be learned. To assist in this experience, Tisdell (1993) recommended an integration of “highly theoretical concepts . . . with a consideration of how they relate to the lives of real people, including the students in the class” (p. 102). From these perspectives, drawing on the lived experiences of students and others in the world whose lives might provide vicarious understandings seems to be a promising entry point into learning about teaching.
Experiential Learning

Jarvis, Holford, and Griffin (1998) defined experiential learning as “the process of creating and transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses. It is the process through which individuals become themselves” (p. 46). In a sense, this definition encompasses an extraordinarily wide range of factors, and yet this is precisely the intended purpose. The researchers wished to emphasize that all experiences hold the potential to influence our lives in many ways. Jarvis (2006) went on to say that “we do not learn directly from the world, or directly from what we are taught; we learn from our experience of the world and our experience of what we are taught” (p. 197). As a means of understanding teacher learning, this conception suggests that learning to be a teacher may occur in ways that are highly individualized and not typically associated with ordinary teacher preparation. By ordinary, I am referring to all teacher education programs, professional development opportunities, and actual classroom instruction. As mentioned earlier, the orientations that teachers have towards the nature of social studies may very well be shaped by factors never addressed in teacher education. Anything from a parent’s influential political leanings, one’s relative wealth, religious affiliation, or exposure to different cultures can all happen outside the formal teachings within colleges and universities, and can have an impact on an individual’s interpretations of history, economics, government, or any other discipline within social studies. The work of teacher education programs may focus on a wide range of important issues within teaching, but the way that a teacher explains and interprets the nature of society may result from a multitude of experiences, with their time spent in teacher education being just one. In other words, the individual life-world is not independent of a
wider society, and the influence of systems such as a capitalist market, for example, permeate the individual as they grow and develop in ways that can be unnoticed or taken for granted (Jarvis, 2006). Given the individualized nature of experience and its connection to learning, Jarvis asserted “we cannot have another person’s experiences. Experience is always subjective and, therefore, so must be our learning” (p.85). So while similarities exist regarding the ways individuals experience learning to teach, pre-service teachers taking the same courses within the same teacher education program still develop widely different understandings of what it means to be a teacher.

Building on the work of Kolb, Jarvis et al. (1998, p. 51) developed a typology of learning which included the following categories: (a) Non-learning (presumption, non-consideration, rejection); (b) Non-reflective learning (preconscious learning, skills learning, memorization); and (c) Reflective learning (contemplation, reflective skills learning, experimental learning). The first category, non-learning, is meant to acknowledge that people do not always learn from their experiences. Presumption refers to the way individuals deal with predictable, everyday life experiences. For example, an individual does not have to think about every utterance, gesture, or aspect of the social world at every minute of the day. Non-consideration occurs when someone simply does not think about an experience for whatever reason. They might be too busy or they may not understand an experience and do not attempt to spend time thinking about it.

Rejection refers to the tendency to dismiss potential learning opportunities. If, for instance, someone believes they will never understand how an automobile operates, they might not try to learn about basic mechanical functions even when presented with the opportunity. Rejection can happen in a variety of settings, and can refer to everything
from scientific disciplines to understanding people of different cultures to exploring differing political views.

Jarvis et al. (1998) described the second category, non-reflective learning, as that which is most often thought of as “learning proper” (p. 53). None of the types of learning in this category involve an individual’s reflection on the matter at hand, hence its name. Preconscious learning refers to instances where a person notices something about their environment but does not take the time to process what they have seen. When drivers pass a landmark or see something in their peripheral vision, they may not remember what was seen unless asked to recall it, but whatever “it” is can nonetheless be recalled. Skills learning occurs while performing a specific task, similar to what might be seen on an assembly line or simple tasks on a computer. Memorization is experienced most often in formal schooling, and for that reason is described as the most commonly known type of learning. Frequent examples include memorizing multiplication tables, state capitals, and definitions. Jarvis et al. claimed this form of learning represents a “process of social reproduction” (p. 54) when it leads to an unquestioning nature of societal structures.

Lastly, the category of reflective learning includes questioning, rethinking, and in some cases restructuring aspects of individuals’ lives and society as a whole. Contemplation necessitates that an individual thinks about experiences and draws a conclusion from that process, often in reasoned ways. For instance, a teacher may decide to alter subsequent lessons because she decides a change would increase students’ participation. Reflective skills learning is seen when someone reaches conceptual understandings about an event and can make immediate changes to achieve a desired result. Teachers exhibit this type of learning when making decisions in the middle of
class about what to do in response to unexpected situations. Reflection on the overall atmosphere of a classroom or the general strengths and weaknesses of one’s teaching also provides numerous opportunities for improvements in those areas (Schon, 1983). And finally, experimental learning occurs when an individual uses theoretical concepts in practical ways and develops new knowledge based on those experiences. For example, in education, this might happen when a principal uses an understanding of social justice to restructure the school day in ways that allow all students access to academic tutoring.

Jarvis (2006, p. 12) later criticized his own theory for a variety of reasons. He felt it did not capture the complexities of learning and did not recognize how a person can be changed incidentally through experience. It depicted individuals within the world rather than their relationship to it, which became a focus in his later work. Reason and emotion were not described relationally. Memory in relation to life histories was not reflected or fully understood. He also claimed that evaluation and planning should have been considered in the reflection process. Still, Jarvis’ work can be helpful towards understanding the range of experiences all individuals may have that do or do not lead to learning. He readily admitted, however, that while it is “possible to discuss almost all of the constituent elements in the learning process, we know insufficient about the influence of the individual variables to be able to have a theory that fully explains every aspect of the human process” (Jarvis, p. 194). Taking this into consideration, Jarvis (p. 134) attempted to offer a comprehensive definition of lifelong learning, conceived as:

The combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical, and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs, and senses) – experiences social situations, the
perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively, or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person’s biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.

When applied to student teachers’ experiences with social studies at the elementary level, Jarvis’ theory reveals learning possibilities which potentially shape personal orientations to students, decision making in the midst of lessons, classroom management styles, rationales around social studies content, and even comprehensive ideas about the role of individuals in society. While using experiential learning theory to understand student teachers’ choices may not be as common as using theories specifically focused on teaching practices, these ideas help illustrate the ever present reality that teachers are influenced by many competing factors. What is learned in one social studies methods course may significantly impact some student teachers, for example, but the demands and priorities of placement schools may trump those ideas for others. An in depth discussion of these possibilities will follow in the research findings. However, this analysis would be incomplete without also examining the perspectives from the teachers themselves, in their own words through the current literature.

Experiences of Student Teachers

Pre-training influences, the teacher education program, and the context in which student teaching takes place are three arenas in which experiential learning takes place. Tang (2004) claimed productive learning experiences occur when all of these interact and are framed in positive ways by the student teacher. Every student teacher experiences numerous learning opportunities, but the types of learning that actually occur as a result
of these opportunities can be just as numerous. Sometimes, however, observable patterns emerge. In a study of 1,016 classrooms, Goodlad (1990) found that student teachers viewed their field experiences and student teaching as the “most effective and useful components of their preparation programs” (p. 217). Nearly all of these same student teachers had “great difficulty recalling the substance of their foundations courses” (p. 215). When asked to rate the perceived contribution of each course to their future success as a teacher on a 7 point scale, the average means were 3.8 for social foundations courses, 4.9 for educational psychology, 5.2 for general methods courses, 5.7 for special methods courses, 6.0 for field experiences, and 6.7 for student teaching” (p. 247). From this study, Goodlad concluded that many teacher educators value the study of education, reflective practice, and relevant theories, whereas most student teachers judge the value of what they encounter on “grounds of perceived practicality” (p. 224). Worth considering is whether learning positively correlates with a prioritization of perceived importance, relative to any individual’s personal orientations. These orientations can certainly change over time. However, it seems at least plausible that every experience is filtered through this particular lens. That which is not thought to be important may not be learned or is intentionally not remembered beyond any immediate need (i.e. tests or other assessments).

In a study based on interviews with 25 social studies education students Ross (1986) found that “course work in teacher education was generally perceived as less useful than field experience components of the program” (p. 15). Ross’ findings support the notion that learning also occurs through socialization, and is a dialectical process between variables encountered in universities and schools, their own biographies, and the
individual interpretations of those experiences. In a survey of 300 teachers, Wilson and Demetriou (2007) distinguished between formal and informal learning encountered in most schools. Formal learning usually occurred during whole school meetings or in service days, whereas much more informal learning occurred via dialogue with colleagues, experienced teachers during initial teacher education, colleagues from other schools, and university professors.

When student teachers were asked to recall and describe their own learning experiences, Beaty, Dall’Alba, and Marton (1998) found 6 ways this process was conceived: (a) increasing one’s knowledge, or a collection of information; (b) memorizing and reproducing for the purpose of an assessment; (c) applying, or using what is learned; (d) understanding, where the learner has an active role in making meaning; (e) seeing something in a different way, usually about the world outside of the university setting; and (f) changing as a person, with regard to personal characteristics. From this work we can see that beginning teachers develop their own understandings of when learning occurs. Even a conception of what counts as learning is most likely based, in part, on what people experience as “learning” in contexts where predetermined outcomes serve as the accepted measure. Based on those experiences, teachers may come to accept these constructs or not, and perhaps we then see differences among teachers as to what assessments are best at determining what a student knows and can do. This process of learning and non-learning, of accepting certain ideas and rejecting others happens as a continual way of interacting with the world. With this complexity in mind, Bell, Horn, and Roxas (2007) claimed “it is clear that teacher learning in this domain is neither straightforward nor easy” (p. 131). And in some cases, pre-service teachers’
experiences lead to undesirable learning. Popular metaphors used to describe students such as “at risk learner” and “struggling reader” can actually hinder a beginning teacher’s ability to understand students (Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008). Parks (2008) recognized a “tight link between productive and unproductive learning” (p. 1214) when pre-service teachers talked with each other about their classroom experiences, and recommended further analysis of the undesired learning that can occur in these settings.

The social context in which student teachers learn to teach plays a vital role regarding which experiences are prioritized over others (Edwards & Protheroe, 2001). In an accountability driven system, the authors found that teachers were driven to “interpret teaching as efficient curriculum delivery” (p. 239). Since the majority of student teachers over the past 10 years have themselves experienced school systems which place test scores above all other outcomes, it stands to reason that when learning to teach, the “images and episodes of these places are filtered through the familiar images of their past” (Loughran, 2006, p. 114). For some, this may lead to an acceptance of the status quo or a rejection of that conception. Some student teachers may have learned not to question “the system,” and some may have learned that social progress requires one to challenge belief systems that do not coincide with their visions of good teaching. Either way, past experiences are evident within the process, or the experience, of learning to teach.

The influence of student teachers’ prior beliefs about teaching is widely recognized (Lasley, 1980; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). These beliefs can affect any aspect of teaching, both in positive and negative ways. Lasley reviewed belief statements generated in a yearlong study of first year teachers and noted 3 patterns,
namely that teaching is a rewarding and fulfilling career, teacher education courses do little to prepare teachers for the real classroom, and people who like children are effective teachers. How teacher educators deal with these conceptions further reinforces or challenges past experiences from which their students have learned. Pajares suggested that “educational beliefs of pre-service teachers play a pivotal role in their acquisition and interpretation of knowledge and subsequent teaching behavior and that unexplored entering beliefs may be responsible for the perpetuation of antiquated and ineffectual teaching practices” (p. 328). Ideas of what advice is useful or not constitute an immediate experience for beginning students and again indicate that all people, student teachers included, are constantly prioritizing their experiences based on perceptions of importance and usefulness. Unfortunately, the very preparation that teachers encounter in universities and colleges may lead to undesired results. Edwards and Protheroe (2001) found that university supervisors often inhibited learning by offering advice that did not allow student teachers to generate their own meanings. In contrast to the potential influence of supervision experiences, Nespor suggested that “prospective teachers’ perceptions of and orientations to the knowledge they are presented with may be shaped by belief systems beyond the immediate influence of teacher educators” (p. 326). He went on to say that questions about “how beliefs come into being, how they are supported or weakened, [and] how people are converted to them are not easily answered by experimental or correlational studies but they need to be addressed.” (p. 326). Given these challenges, a primary objective for this study was to understand and narrow down those factors and beliefs that most influenced student teachers’ choices, through classroom observations, multiple interviews, and self reports.
Chapter Summary

Learning to teach involves many variables, yet student teachers’ experiences with these variables may actually predict what they eventually prioritize in their own classroom instruction more than the variables themselves. Although individual differences exist, many student teachers report their field experiences and student teaching placements have the greatest effect on their views of social studies than any particular course taken in a teacher education program. Prior beliefs are thought to influence classroom instruction, but exactly how this occurs is not well understood. A reliance on self reporting may also affect studies conducted on this topic because participants may not be able to identify every factor that accounts for their choices. The social and political context which student teachers learn within accounts for important considerations as well, such as the past decade’s emphasis on testing and strict adherence to mandated curriculum standards. In order to best understand the phenomenon of teaching social studies in elementary schools, research also needs to include time spent observing classroom instruction and talking with student teachers about their decisions.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. This chapter details the methodology used to investigate the following research questions:

1. What is it like to teach social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher?

2. What, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies?

3. What do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools? and

4. How do elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they encounter around teaching social studies?

Contexts and Design of the Study

In order to understand the lived experiences of student teachers who are asked to interpret and teach social studies curricula, the methodology for this research will maintain a phenomenological orientation. Giorgi (1997) stated “the phenomenological approach is ‘discovery oriented’ and in order to discover meanings in the data, one needs an attitude open enough to let unexpected meanings emerge” (p. 247). Keeping with this perspective as the researcher, I always tried to keep an open mind to the experiences of
my participants, with an ongoing attempt to question my assumptions about what is and is not influencing the decisions they made around social studies instruction.

I chose a phenomenological methodology because it “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Certainly, phenomenological research cannot claim an all knowing perspective. Here, this orientation aimed to keep the possibility open that learning to teach is not a neatly packaged process, but similarities may still emerge which communicate fundamental aspects of the phenomenon. My intent in researching this phenomenon was to see all the ways that student teachers come to understand their roles and responsibilities as social studies instructors. These experiences, identities, and relationships are potentially affected by a wide variety of contextual factors, including but not limited to: school cultures, school demographics, relationships with cooperating/mentor teachers, formal teacher preparation, grade level placement, as well as the student teacher’s socio-economic background, religious identity, political affiliation, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. All of these factors are always, already present in the actions and experiences of everyone within the school. And all potentially comprise the same issues addressed within the field of social studies.

The term intentionality is used in phenomenological research to indicate an ever present connectedness that all human beings share with the world (van Manen, 2009). This concept is used as a lens to understand where meaning resides. Phenomenological meaning is found within the interactions and inseparable nature of people and all they encounter through their daily lives. However, an intentional relationship is not synonymous with purposefulness, where an individual is actively creating a desired
outcome. Purpose, in this sense, may only constitute one aspect of a relationship and is not a fundamental component of phenomenological research. With respect to student teachers, an intentional relationship exists with everything that constitutes their teaching of social studies, including curriculum standards, mentor teachers, the children they teach, and their teacher education programs. Ideas about these entities are constantly developing, changing, and being reassessed. The existence of intentionality, when conceived as a connectedness of the world and consciousness is not an add on which is occasionally present, rather “lived experiences themselves are as such intentional” (Heidegger, 1925/1992, p. 260). In other words, intentionality is a fundamental tenet of phenomenology which is always relational and evolving. The main objective of this research was to reveal the ways these relationships are experienced by student teachers.

Levinas (1983) stated that intentionality is “an intention of the soul, a spontaneity, a willing, and the sense bestowed itself, in some way, what is willed” (p. 530). An example from this study where Levinas’ conception of intentionality can be applied pertains to the interwoven relationship of student teachers and teaching state mandated curriculum in social studies. For this study, I was interested in those times when student teachers found themselves balancing, disregarding, or perhaps integrating their own beliefs into and with the content they were asked to teach. What was this process like for them and what did they learn from it? Surely most student teachers are capable of making good choices that lead to meaningful learning in their classrooms, despite being relatively new in the profession. How do they decide what to do? And the life experiences of all these individuals, before, during, and after their teacher preparation programs may have
as much to do with what happens in their classrooms as any education course or student teaching placement.

In what ways can intentionality be conceived to exist across many elementary teachers and the intersections of teaching social studies? McNamara (2005) described an “interdependence of subject and object and the idea that human consciousness is always consciousness of something and is therefore, essentially related to objects” (p.698). Student teachers, and teachers at every level, can be seen as entering into an intentional relationship with the curriculum, ideas, and children they teach. Multiple ways of understanding and describing these experiences may coexist, with no need to compete for one “correct” perception. Each should build on the various ways in which this phenomenon can be accurately understood.

I am drawn to the ideas of Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008) who said, “in reflective lifeworld research this activity is based on a profound understanding that meanings belong to the lifeworld and come to be in the relationship between the subject and phenomenon” (p.172). As much as possible, I wanted to take a fresh perspective into this research, and create a space where those nuanced meanings could be discovered. Heidegger (1925/1992) reminded those wishing to study phenomena in this way to “free ourselves from the prejudice that, because phenomenology calls upon us to apprehend the matters themselves, these matters must be apprehended all at once, without any preparation” (p. 258). I interpreted this orientation as one in which researchers must not assume so much about what is discovered that they begin to make unsubstantiated claims. Instead, they should rely on a thoughtful, pragmatic methodology that provides a reasonable framework for understanding that which is studied. A phenomenological
approach to studying student teachers’ experiences will not seek “to claim that all that exists can simply be reduced to appearings, nor to affirm an unknown and unknowable reality behind appearances. Both claims distort the essence of the phenomenological point of view” (Moran & Mooney, 2002, p.5). Instead, my goal was to present the phenomenon of teaching social studies in elementary schools in all its complexities and simplicities, as those meanings became apparent to me via the findings of this research.

**Philosophical Claim**

Phenomenology, as van Manen (1990) suggested, is both a “description of the lived through quality of lived experience, and on the other hand, description of the meaning of the expressions of lived experience” (p. 25). In order to describe and interpret the experiences of student teachers and the multiple meanings expressed therein, I tried to remain open to all possibilities. This does not mean that I somehow forgot everything I know, rather, as Gadamer (1960/1989) stated, “all that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text” (p. 316). Seeking to avoid an either/or dualism of description or interpretation, this study was an attempt to understand the multiple ways that student teachers interact with and make decisions about elementary social studies. And it may be that the lived experiences of others are never fully recognized, expressed, described, or comprehensively interpreted by a researcher. However, an explicit recognition of this difficulty should not replace an attempt to clearly articulate research findings; rather it serves as a reminder to constantly question and reconsider supposed meanings and expressions of lived experience. Going further, van Manen stated that phenomenology “does not simply yield alternative explanations or descriptions of educational phenomena. Rather, human science bids to recover reflectively the grounds
which, in a deep sense, provide for the possibility of our pedagogic concerns with children” (p. 173). One interpretation of this depiction of phenomenology is that only through a continued interrogation of our own assumptions and research methodology can we begin to understand the nature of what constitutes or makes possible the existence of pedagogical concerns. Then, perhaps, we can gain insight into an educational phenomenon of interest.

Within phenomenological research, the term “essence” is often used to describe a fundamental characteristic of some phenomenon or state of being. Dahlberg (2006) offered clarification when explaining her own interpretation “that essences are their phenomena; the phenomena are their essences. Phenomenology shows that everything is experienced as something, i.e. everything has its own style. An essence is, simply, a phenomenon’s style, its way of being” (p. 18). In the case of student teachers and the phenomenon of teaching elementary social studies, I contend that multiple essences are possible. To reduce this complex and multifaceted process to one essence is to overlook the possibility that the same phenomenon can be experienced in many different ways and from many different perspectives. Returning to Dahlberg’s idea, the experiences, meanings, and essences of teaching constitute, by themselves, the phenomenon to be explored.

Participant and Data Selection

Maxwell (2005) defined validity as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). Although disagreement exists around the “epistemological assumptions underlying the notion of validity” (Seidman, 2006, p. 23), specific methodological steps can and should be taken
to substantiate the claims that emerge from this research. For these reasons, I used the following means via participant and data selection to increase the relative strength of this study’s external validity, internal validity, and reliability.

*External Validity*

To understand the phenomenon of teaching social studies in elementary schools, participants were selected who were uniquely situated to provide information that best represented typical cases and could not be found via other individuals. I first provided a recruitment email (see Appendix A) to approximately 60 elementary education student teachers while speaking to them about this study at one of their class meetings. All of the student teachers were enrolled in the same university teacher education program. Based on my pre-screening interview (see Appendix B) I originally planned to use Maxwell’s (2005) sampling technique of purposeful selection to choose four participants. However, six participants volunteered and all were included in the study. With no defensible rationale for excluding any of the volunteers, any arbitrary choices to narrow them down could have resulted in valuable information being ignored. These six participants were placed in five elementary schools, which represented three county school districts. Each worked with a different mentor teacher, and the placements reflected four separate grade levels. These aspects of my participant selection were important as I attempted to understand multiple essences derived from different student teachers to reveal the distinctive ways they related to, interpreted, and taught elementary social studies. Through rich, in depth descriptions of my participants’ experiences and orientations, I also increased the likelihood of external validity (Maxwell, 2005).
Internal Validity

I interviewed each participant on four occasions and observed their classroom instruction on two occasions. Submersion or engagement in the research means “collecting data over a long enough period of time to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1995, p. 55). In order to understand the phenomenon of teaching social studies, it was important to interact with the participants on several occasions to provide a more comprehensive notion of their relationships to this phenomenon. I also took extensive notes during my observations which were reviewed afterward as a reminder of what I noticed about each participant’s instruction.

Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix C) and was interviewed the week before her student teaching experience and school semester officially began. These interviews were conducted outside of the school setting and allowed participants to describe what they hoped and anticipated would happen as they began student teaching. The first interview entailed similar, but slightly different questions (see Appendix D) than the ones used in each subsequent interview. Each classroom observation was immediately followed with a post observation, open ended interview (see Appendix F). The post observation interview allowed student teachers to talk about their impressions of the lesson and reflect more broadly on their experiences teaching. Although I used a list of potential interview questions, Dahlberg et al. (2008) stated that an “atmosphere of immediacy facilitates the decisions that must be made about the progress of the interview” (p.189). Therefore, I remained open to other questions that were relevant to our conversation in the moment. I anticipated these interviews lasting about an hour, although in keeping with an open ended and flexible approach, this was only an estimate.
I provided participants with full transcripts of each interview, and I asked for respondent validation to guard against mistakes, misinterpretations, and biases (Maxwell, 2005). Also known as member checks, this is a way of “taking data collected from study participants, and the tentative interpretations of these data, back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if the interpretations are plausible, if they ‘ring true’” (Merriam, 1995, p. 54). The last interview provided an opportunity for each participant to think back on the entirety of her student teaching experience and was conducted outside of the placement school setting.

**Reliability**

Prior to each observation, I asked the participants to write descriptive accounts of their instructional plans via a pre-observation form (see Appendix E). The purpose of this form was to gain a better understanding of the intentional relationships that student teachers develop in teaching social studies. By ‘intentional relationship,’” I am referring to the ways participants conceived social studies instruction, what they felt was important, how they used or did not use curriculum standards, and any other influences that affected this interactive space. After the third interview, participants were asked to respond in writing to questions from me about their ideas and experiences around teaching social studies. In an attempt to join aspects of this study with research already conducted on teaching social studies in elementary schools, the questions asked participants if their experiences were similar in nature to the findings of related studies already mentioned (see Appendix G). The use of observations, interviews, and written responses provided by participants constituted a form of triangulation which increased confidence that what was reported was indeed an accurate depiction of reality (Merriam, 1995). However, my
ability to accurately convey these research findings, I believe, was just as important as any other aspect of this study.

The remainder of this section is devoted to individual descriptions of the six participants and information regarding their student teaching placements. Table 1 presents an overview of demographic information, and includes assigned pseudonyms. The information was taken directly from the participants’ own descriptions of themselves. Each was asked where she had lived for the majority of her life, and all named locations within the state of Georgia. To maintain anonymity, but still provide some insight into these areas, the approximate population size of each location is used rather than the actual names of cities and towns (United States Census Bureau, 2000).

The six participants in this study were placed in four grade levels and five different schools, which represented three school districts within the state of Georgia. All were enrolled in the same university teacher education program and had taken many of the same courses as part of a cohort of approximately 60 student teachers. These participants represented everyone who volunteered for the study during this particular semester. A previous recruiting effort yielded only one volunteer. However, this individual was not included because the data collection was unable to commence until well after student teaching began. In general, the sample for this study was not particularly diverse in terms of age, gender, race/ethnic identity, or religious/spiritual identity. However, demographic differences did exist with regard to the size of the participants’ hometowns and their political identities, as well as the grade levels each was assigned to teach.
Katelyn

Katelyn was 22 years old at the time of our first interview, and identified as white/Caucasian, Christian and a Democrat. She was also the first in her family to attend a university. Katelyn’s placement was in a kindergarten class where she began observing two weeks prior to the beginning of her university schedule. Her prior experience was in 3rd grade. She felt her mentor teacher would support teaching social studies despite it not appearing on her daily schedule at all.

Katelyn did not remember much of her own experience with social studies at the elementary level but recalls talking about the American flag and what she called redundant facts. She enjoyed history in middle and high school and was inspired to enter teaching from one of her social studies instructors. Conversations around politics with her father served as an impetus to approach discussions with an open mind and instill that same approach with her students. Specifics about her university social studies course were difficult to recall, but Katelyn remembered an emphasis on integrating social studies into other subjects as much as possible. She described social studies at the elementary level as a means to lay the foundation of democracy, create functioning citizens who understand how laws are passed, and encourage students to be questioning, free thinkers.

Since social studies was not allotted any specific time in Katelyn’s daily schedule, she used a 15 minute period that was set aside as a class meeting time. She often focused on character education topics, as well as some content contained in the state curriculum standards for kindergarten. Katelyn expressed disappointment at the lack of time devoted to social studies and was particularly discouraged when she wanted to show a video
address to students from President Barack Obama and numerous parents wrote the school saying they would not allow their children to view his message.

_Evelyn_

Evelyn described herself as Christian and conservative, but with no affiliation to a political party. She was 23 years old and grew up in a mid-sized town. Although Evelyn requested a placement in the upper grades, she student taught in kindergarten. Having worked in an elementary Saturday school setting before, she felt comfortable with her ability to work with all ages. Evelyn’s mentor teacher was considered a “veteran” of the field, meaning she had been teaching for 26 years. A newly implemented change to the daily schedule was supposed to provide an hour every day for either science or social studies which Evelyn was excited to hear. However, her impression was that many teachers saw this change as an inconvenience because time was taken away from recess.

Evelyn said she basically hated social studies prior to her university methods course because she had only experienced it as the memorization of facts. She remembered a couple of positive teachers throughout grade school but for the most part, she did not connect the many disciplines of social studies and viewed it only as history. Her father studied geography in college which influenced her interest in that area. She hoped to set up a classroom with democratic practices, such as student serving particular roles, having choices, and learning about rules that are beneficial both for individuals and the greater good of everyone in her class. Evelyn attended a Montessori school as a child and was later enrolled in a public school. She hoped to bring a fluidity and connection with social studies to her students that she generally associated with her earlier schooling.
Although one hour was originally allotted for social studies and science, the actual instructional time varied significantly and averaged just 20 minutes for our two observations. Given these time constraints and other factors which will be discussed later, Evelyn was unable to establish some of her more important social studies instructional objectives. Coordinating topics and schedules with other classroom teachers in the same grade level also presented challenges because these meetings were often held with little preparation time before the social studies lessons were actually worked into the existing daily plan.

Table 1

*Participants’ Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Hometown Population</th>
<th>Political Identity</th>
<th>Religious/Spiritual Identity</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katelyn</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15,000-20,000</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7,500-10,000</td>
<td>conservative</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>100-500</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>70,000-80,000</td>
<td>moderate/liberal</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15,000-20,000</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60,000-70,000</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Karen

Karen identified as a Christian with no political affiliation and said her hometown was small and rural. She was 23 years old and said although her Christian faith influenced her desire to teach, it led other friends and acquaintances to support narrow minded views. Karen had a focused approach to her teaching and often reflected on her work in order to improve the learning experiences of her students. She requested to be with younger students and was pleased to find out her placement would be in a first grade classroom. Karen wanted to set a positive tone for her students early on and mentioned that she appreciated their innocence and goofiness, the latter trait being one she also associated with herself.

In her prior student placements, Karen noticed that social studies was often rotated every few weeks and she hoped her mentor teacher would not follow those same guidelines. She felt social studies should be tied into other subjects as much as possible and saw the subject’s potential dealing with issues in which students already have an interest, with an emphasis on social justice. Her experience with social studies was positive at the elementary level. Middle school memories focused more on learning about people and places, while high school is mainly remembered as a lot of lectures. Karen generally enjoyed school, even though she feels like some of her teachers were not very good. The strong emphasis on math and reading in her teacher preparation program, with just one course for social studies, seemed unbalanced and in need of a change. As a result, she did not feel as prepared with specific lesson plan ideas to teach social studies, nor did she remember many specifics from that one course.
Karen wanted to find out what her students already knew about the world around them and use that as a starting point for social studies topics. She anticipated challenges that would stem from having to teach to her grade level standards. In her opinion, social studies is a good avenue to instill a sense of importance with children, and to teach them about treating each other fairly and with respect.

Janice

Janice considered herself to be politically moderate/liberal and an apathetic Christian. She was 23 years old and identified as Caucasian. The area she described as her hometown has the largest population of all the participants in this study. Janice was placed in second grade and she actually taught approximately 40 social studies lessons, which was noticeably more than anyone else. She wanted to pick up this subject early on and planned to use her own resources because the mentor teacher informed her that social studies textbooks were not really used in her classroom.

Janice’s recollection of her own elementary social studies experience was mainly doing projects that had no real significance to her beyond earning a grade. What she saw in previous school placements did not seem to resonate with students either, so she was excited about the possibility of seeing social studies done well and in meaningful ways. Her preference was to focus on social justice issues, but she wanted to see what her mentor teacher’s approach would be before doing anything drastically different from what was expected. Janice said one of her university instructors was particularly influential; and, as a result, she wanted to use social studies as a means to get children thinking about social problems and examining their own position in the world. Although she felt her university methods course did as much as it could to prepare her for student
teaching, Janice also stated some aspects of teaching must be learned independently through one’s own teaching experience. She did not expect the state standards to hinder her decisions too much, and was thankful that she could still choose how to present the content that was supposed to be covered.

Laura

Laura was 21 years old and identified as a Caucasian female. She reported no political affiliation and grew up in mid-sized town. Her student teaching placement was in a fourth grade classroom, which made her 1 of 2 participants whose students were required to take a social studies assessment as part of their end of year Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). Laura’s previous experiences were with younger students and she requested fourth grade as a way to find out more about the upper elementary grades.

Laura anticipated that teaching social studies would not be a lot of fun, in part because it was not one her favorite subjects, and because she felt the upper grades would be more about note taking and lecturing in preparation for the CRCT. As a student, she did not feel social studies was relevant to her own life, so making these topics more applicable was a goal she hoped to achieve in student teaching. Laura was excited about working in her placement school because she viewed it as a place that welcomed student teachers and whose instructors were strongly dedicated to all students. She stated that social studies should help student become better citizens but admitted not remembering much from her university social studies course.

Similar to the other participant’s schedules, Laura rotated social studies with science. Approximately 40 minutes was dedicated to her lessons, and they were
scheduled first thing in the morning. She decided to experiment with allowing students to work with each other in groups for a project that was later presented to another class. Laura expressed hesitation in using this instructional method for fear her students might become uncontrollable, but she later realized the students responded very well to having choices and plans to continue using group based projects in her future classes.

Leslie

The last participant, Leslie, described herself as a 21 year old Caucasian female. She said her political views are moderate and like all of the other participants, she also identified as a Christian. Her placement was in a fourth grade classroom. Leslie mentioned that in her previous observations, if any other assignment needed more time, social studies was always the first subject to be discarded.

In elementary and middle school, Leslie stated her teachers tried to make social studies interesting, but by high school her instruction mostly consisted of reading textbook chapters and answering questions. Although she was still interested in the topics, assigning end of chapter questions as a primary teaching method was a practice she hoped to avoid as a teacher. Regarding the social studies methods course taken as part of her teacher preparation program, Leslie enjoyed hearing about others’ observations but could not recall specific details about the content that was covered. Growing up, she and her brother would watch the History Channel together. She did not claim to be politically opinionated. Leslie stated that she wants her students to be active citizens who possess a basic knowledge of history and who can find out more information about current events. She had both good and mediocre teachers and felt no one should have to settle for mediocrity in their instructors.
Social studies instruction in Leslie’s class seemed more structured and content driven, perhaps because it appears on the CRCT in fourth grade. Prior to the beginning of student teaching, she hoped her mentor teacher would be able to provide specific ideas on what and how to teach social studies, in part because she did not feel as prepared as she wanted to be. When asked, she also was unable to recall the content that was covered in her social studies methods class. Over the entire student teaching semester, Leslie personally taught or co-taught approximately 15 lessons.

Data Sources by Secondary Research Questions

My secondary research questions were as follows: (a) what, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies; (b) what do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools; (c) how do elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they encounter around teaching social studies? Although I suspected that information related to each of these questions would be discovered throughout the research process, some data sources and contexts were more likely to address certain aspects of the student teachers’ intentional relationships with social studies instruction than others, depending on the context. The interviews were well suited to ask student teachers about their life experiences (formal teacher preparation, life events that have shaped their world views, other experiences with children of this age, etc.) as well as choices each participant made in the actual observed lessons. In the next chapter, quotes from these interviews are provided to illustrate major themes and meanings of the study, and constitute almost the entirety of those sections. The classroom observations and pre-observation forms also provided insight into the knowledge, understandings, and
concepts that each student teacher felt were important. These data sources appear solely in the observed lessons section of my findings. In addition, written follow up questions brought me closer to understanding what my participants saw as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools as well as what they recommended regarding the preparation of teachers. This information was incorporated as a supplement to the interviews, and in many ways simply verified information gained from the four rounds of interviews. There is no limit to the ways content within social studies can be taught and classroom activities can be arranged to promote a student teacher’s vision of what this discipline should accomplish. A careful analysis of all these factors yielded important findings about what this experience is like and how schools and teacher education programs can maximize the potential of their teachers’ training.

Whole-Part-Whole Analysis

In an attempt to thoroughly process my data, I transcribed all 24 interviews rather than outsourcing that particular task. This work required me to carefully listen to every single word that my participants said. However, it was simply one stage in the overall data analysis. In most cases I was able to transcribe each text before conducting subsequent interviews. This step allowed me to further process what was discussed with each student teacher before deciding what to ask and talk about in our next interview. Spacing four interviews throughout the semester also helped in forming a longitudinal view of their entire teaching progression. Living almost five hours away from the participants’ placement sites meant spending a considerable amount of time over the course of one semester driving to and from the interviews. Doing so provided an excellent, albeit unplanned, opportunity for me to reflect on these interactions.
Vagle (2010) recommended data analysis “within and across each data source” (p.6) as well as multiple readings of each data source. He suggested an initial reading where the researcher becomes attuned to the data in its entirety, without taking notes. I used this analysis method to get acquainted with the data in a general sense and to write short summaries of the first three interviews before my final meeting with each participant. In the fourth interview, I reminded participants what was discussed in our previous meetings to see if they wanted to change, confirm, or add any new information. After completing an initial reading all of the interviews, I moved to a line by line reading, making notes and marking excerpts of text which seemed to reveal particularly important themes. I used a second line by line reading to identify tentative meanings that revealed variations across the phenomenon of teaching social studies in elementary schools. Again, using Vagle’s guidelines, I moved these ‘chunks’ of text which seemed especially revealing for each participant into one new document, in order to complete a third line by line reading of each participants’ individual texts. This new document was organized by the themes I found in previous readings and represented about one eighth of all the interview data, which totaled 480 pages.

Reading, thinking about, and rereading the data resembled a “dwelling with the phenomenon, which allows it to slowly show itself in a new way” (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 177). Multiple readings for each data source were intended to create numerous opportunities for me to delve deeply into my participants’ experiences, with each reading building on the ones before. The final reading was performed across the participants’ data, and here my goal was to select quotes that embodied the essences of each student teacher’s experiences. My intent was both to describe what the student teachers indicated
as influencing their instructional choices and orientations to social studies, and to reveal any congruence or contradictions I interpreted using the participants’ own words coupled with my observations.

Vagle (2010) also recommended using a bridling journal to explicate one’s thoughts and assumptions about the data at this stage. This not only served as a means to question my own ideas, but the act of transforming thoughts into written text served as a useful catalyst for further descriptions and examinations. These bridling entries formed the foundation of my conclusions and discussion in the final chapter. Examples are provided that illustrate the connections between my thoughts on the phenomenon of teaching elementary level social studies and actual experiences shared by participants.

In short, the whole-part-whole analysis can be understood as reading all of a participant’s text for each data source, conducting pragmatic re-reads of the same text, compiling excerpts across participants’ data which stand out as critical elements of their experiences, then selecting quotes from the newly created compilation across all participants to be included in the research findings.

Limitations of the Study

While steps were taken throughout this research to minimize its limitations, specifics in the design of any study can and should be addressed to better understand all findings as well as improve the analytical value of future studies. That said, the potential limitations listed below do not guarantee that significantly different results would be discovered by changing any of these variables. They are simply meant to frame the context of this particular research in a transparent and honest manner. And with any study, the abilities, perceptions, and potential biases of the researcher(s) can and often do
influence numerous aspects of understanding a given phenomenon. These personal limitations will be discussed in the following section.

The six participants selected for this study represented approximately 10 percent of all student teachers at the elementary level for one semester, within one teacher education program at one university. A similarly sized group completes student teaching every semester. Since the participants were enrolled in the same teacher education program, they took many of the same courses together. With regard to the one social studies methods course each was required to take, four student teachers had the same instructor, and a different instructor taught the other two participants. This arrangement meant these student teachers were exposed to similar ideas, course materials, teaching philosophies, and learning experiences in their respective classes. If each had a different social studies instructor, it is possible the group would have entered into student teaching with more varied ideas about the purpose of social studies and their responsibilities in those roles. Again, this is only a potential limitation. As discussed earlier, students enrolled in the same course with the same instructor often have very different experiences. They may agree with their instructor’s approach and try to replicate it, or they may find themselves in disagreement and striving to accomplish other objectives.

The participants’ teaching placements represented four different grade levels, five elementary schools, and three county school districts. Although this arrangement was beneficial in many regards, it is also true these schools all operate within the same state school system and are mandated to follow the same social studies curriculum standards. This factor will be discussed at length in the findings as it significantly influenced the experiences of all six student teachers.
Another potential limitation stemmed from demographic similarities among the participants. Each student teacher self-identified as white or Caucasian, female, 21-23 years old, Christian, and having lived the majority of their lives in regions geographically near those where they completed student teaching. A group with more diversity in these areas may experience student teaching and teaching social studies in ways that are influenced by or attributed to those characteristics. Although some similarities regarding political affiliations existed, these characteristics were not as common within the group.

Lastly, the participants’ willingness, ability, and opportunities to deeply reflect on their experiences and decisions impacted the extent to which this phenomenon could be understood. Although each student teacher seemed to genuinely examine her teaching experience and the influences on her decisions, confounding factors may have existed which were not recognized at the time our interviews were conducted. The immediacy of answering questions following a classroom observation is also beneficial and potentially limiting. Reflection on one’s experiences often provides greater insight when more time is available to process those thoughts. Allowing participants to read and comment on this study in its final stages would have further ensured that what was written accurately portrayed the essences, or the totality of their experiences.

Researcher Biases and Bridling Entries

Before collecting any data for this study, I began the process of bridling my ideas and assumptions about what it means to teach social studies in elementary schools. Vagle (2010) wrote that “bridling is a reflexive project where the researcher constantly (and I mean constantly) interrogates her or his pre-understandings and developing understandings of the phenomenon” (p. 5). As such, I continued bridling my assumptions
throughout the data collection period after completing the interviews and observations for each participant. To the extent that my writings illuminated important struggles, preconceived ideas, or understandings that directly influence my research, it was critical that I honestly brought them to the forefront. Vagle further stated the “art of crafting a bridled text then is to question one’s understandings, the traditions one is operating within, and the history one is launching from-- while carefully examining the participants’ experiences” (p. 5). This aspect of my research was a recognition that I came into the process with many assumptions and ideas that influenced the ways I viewed the phenomenon in question. Since I could not rid myself of those subjectivities, I continually reflected upon their impact before, during, and after my data collection, analysis, and writing. Often this meant rereading journal entries to remember various issues and concerns that crossed my thoughts. This process often led to internal conversations or thinking through ideas in ways that clarified participants’ experiences. For example, before collecting any data, I wondered what influenced student teachers’ decisions about social studies instruction. After the first two rounds of interviews, I began to realize how little control participants felt they possessed over their own choices, regardless of any other ideas they had for meaningful social studies lessons. Using a bridling journal required writing, reading, and thinking about my reactions to their experiences. This reflection assisted both in organizing my thoughts and revisiting possible explanations for the wealth of information I accumulated during the data collection process.

The following bridling entries are listed in chronological order and represent my thoughts, apprehensions, and assumptions about student teachers’ experiences of teaching
elementary level social studies. These passages were all written prior to any data collection. Examples from my bridling journal are also included in the final chapter that represent a continuation of these ideas after the participant interviews were completed.

1- I’ve known a few elementary school teachers and given my recent interest in their experience, I have on occasion asked them to describe what guides their decision making. Somewhat surprisingly, the first response I received was that it was very simple; the teacher said she just used the Georgia Performance Standards and didn’t put much more thought into it. Apparently the content contained in those standards was all that was used, whenever there was time to use it. I’ve also found that many elementary teachers spend a lot more time on reading and math exercises rather than social studies. I wonder how many teachers now feel that social studies is something ‘extra’…a subject on the periphery of what they ought to be teaching.

2- I am intrigued by the notion of discovering the intentionality that exists among teachers and the discipline of social studies. What purpose do teachers see? What other factors influence this interaction? How much do other life experiences (beyond teacher preparation) influence and determine this experience? This phenomenon of teaching social studies, of making decisions about what and how to teach, is something that is played out tens of thousands of times every day and yet the essence of the experience is something that eludes my understanding right now. Perhaps that’s all the more reason to study it. In order for me to take a perspective into this research that attempts to be as unbiased as possible, I cannot
rely on preconceptions of how taking one course in social studies does or does not affect beginning teachers.

3- It seems that the individual, regardless of outside forces, is always perceiving, thinking, reacting, doing. It also seems to me, and I don’t know if this is correct, that other entities like curriculum and policy makers hold as much influence in this world as anyone. People working at departments of education often decide the content that is supposed to be taught at every level of K-12 and with almost every subject. Granted, the student teacher might see this as a relief that they don’t have to figure out what to teach. They are, in theory, still choosing what methods to use, etc. However, when a high stakes test is the end game, and everyone from students to teachers is evaluated by how well students perform on these tests, then we have an external motivator (the test) which may begin to shape students’ experiences in ways that are much more influential than the teacher education program which keeps saying not to think that way.

4- Does an essence exist to this experience that is shared by most student teachers? Could we get at that essence by interviewing them? In the end, would we end up with as many different essences as we have student teachers or would all of their experiences combine to form one more accurate ‘essence’ which accounts for multiple possibilities? How can there be an essence if individual experiences and perceptions can take vastly different forms? What exactly is the phenomenon here…curriculum decisions, methods, teaching under state mandates? Can all of these be properly grouped into one phenomenon? Right now I don’t know.
5- My assumptions are that many people share complaints about standardized tests and the impact they have on what and how teachers present material in all subjects. Given the pressure to meet prescribed benchmarks, I can understand why an emphasis would be placed on the subjects that are tested. Do teachers even feel like they have agency to question and counter these mandates? When studying elementary level teachers, how much would my own desire to ‘change the system’ interfere with my ability to understand and describe the experiences and intentionality of those participating in my research?

For example, I hold strong commitments to treating every identity one might carry with a sort of egalitarian respect and appreciation. In other words, regardless of religious affiliation, nationality, wealth, family background, race, gender, etc. teachers should treat students equitably and with an appreciation for the value of diverse individuals. If I see a teacher who does not approach teaching with a similar outlook, I find it difficult to not let those ideas come to the forefront. Could this ever be bridled in the same way that something less pervasive in my orientation towards teaching might be?

6- When choosing a particular methodology for one’s research, to what extent do those choices reflect substantive differences among the ways we come to understand that which is studied? It is customary for doctoral students doing qualitative research to choose from a set of possibilities, including phenomenology, narrative analysis, case study, self study, discourse analysis, ethnography and others but how much similarity exists within these actual approaches and the results that are discovered? As I first began learning about
these possibilities, they were presented in ways that emphasized the differences. As I’ve read studies that claimed to use each, I’ve found just as much variability which I attribute to the authors’ perspectives and writing styles as I do the chosen methodology.

7- Since I’m interested in the experiences of student teachers, I want to take a moment and reflect on the experiences I had as a student teacher in order to better understand my own assumptions about what happens when one is becoming a teacher, learning to teach, or living as a student teacher. This process, as I remember it, seemed like a continual interaction between me and something ‘out there’ that was called teaching. I didn’t always know what to do or how to do it, but I found myself making decisions prior to, during, and after (which was prior to the next day) about what I wanted to do, what my cooperating teacher expected, what my field instructor expected, and of course what the mandated state curriculum designers expected. All the while I was generally sleep deprived from trying to create lessons and learn material that I hadn’t seen since I was in high school. And although I generally enjoyed my work as a teacher, it was an incredibly demanding experience for me. So when I think about the experiences of student teachers, I often assume that they are experiencing something similar to me. This belief is reinforced every time I hear someone share a similar recollection. The intentionality of my experience exists between my own consciousness and that with which I interacted. It may or may not be similar to others in a more general sense, however, at least anecdotally; it seems to resonate
with many who have gone through student teaching. However I should be careful about letting this overly influence my description and interpretation of others.  
8- I want to use this space to reconsider my ideas around what social studies might accomplish compared with what I believe to be the relationship that many beginning teachers might have with the field. I can’t recall anything related to social studies as a student at the elementary level other than answering questions at the end of a chapter. For the most part, this continued into high school where although I remember taking courses called American Government, US History, and World History, the actual content or anything we did eludes me. I can only remember that my world history teacher lectured every week on Mon, Tues, and Wed, then we had a test on Thursday and a video on Friday. This pattern was repeated every week for a year. Granted, I don’t remember much about any other course I took either. Both in anecdotal ways and via studies I’ve read, it seems that many people rank social studies as one of their least favorite subjects. Admittedly, I think many people who go on to become elementary school teachers probably have similar opinions. And if this is the case, it seems that social studies could easily become a peripheral subject when taught by people who don’t see it as interesting or valuable. Certainly there are exceptions, and maybe my prediction is completely off, but I can’t help but think that teachers’ prior experiences in their own classes (as students) shape their orientations towards teaching within the same discipline.  
All of these bridling entries were attempts at revealing my own assumptions about the experiences of student teachers and teaching social studies in elementary schools, yet this
process is always incomplete. As a matter of thoroughly and accurately understanding any phenomenon, Husserl (1936/1970) believed this might happen “only when one finally and quite seriously inquires into that which is taken for granted, which is presupposed by all thinking, all activity of life with all its ends and accomplishments” (p. 157). In other words, I could not escape my own biases but I constantly remained open to questioning the ways they influenced all aspects of my research.

Restatement of the Multiple and Varied Contexts

Emarking upon this research meant remembering the context in and through which the phenomenon I wished to study resided. Student teachers were placed with different mentor teachers, in different schools and school districts. They taught students in four different grade levels. The amount of instructional time allotted for social studies varied substantially. And each student teacher brought her various beliefs, backgrounds, challenges and talents to this endeavor. These differences affected the experiences of my participants as well as the ways I described and interpreted the research findings. In short, the diversity in these areas was an asset to the study and greatly improved my understanding of student teachers tasked with teaching elementary level social studies. In order for a phenomenological study to achieve its objectives, however, research findings must be thoroughly, accurately, and clearly presented. The next chapter utilizes the participants’ own words as much as possible within a framework that is meant to portray their experiences in exactly this way.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. There were four research questions guiding this study:

1. What is it like to teach social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher?
2. What, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies?
3. What do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools? and
4. How do elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they encounter around teaching social studies?

The study entailed interviewing six participants on four separate occasions, for a total of 24 interviews. The interviews were conducted during the fall of 2010 over a span of approximately 12 weeks. Each lasted an average of 45-55 minutes. I transcribed all of the interviews, which in retrospect was a beneficial first reading of these texts. Each participant received copies of their texts as they were completed and was given the opportunity to change or clarify any of their responses. The first interview was scheduled before participants were required by their university teacher education program to begin
student teaching. Some participants decided to visit their placement school beforehand because the schools’ academic calendar almost always began before that of the university. However, no participant had begun teaching at that point and generally just met their mentor teacher and students. Scheduling two classroom observations for the student teachers was somewhat challenging, given their relative lack of social studies instructional opportunities. The last interview was conducted at the end of each participant’s student teaching experience. The spacing of these observations and meetings reflected an attempt to see and appreciate the entire process each student teacher went through, from anticipating what the upcoming semester would be like to reflecting on their multitude of experiences at the end.

This chapter begins with brief summaries of the 12 classroom observations. The remainder explores themes and meanings that participants described through their own interactions with the many elements of student teaching. My analysis revealed multiple meanings or essences of teaching social studies at the elementary level. A phenomenological description and interpretation of these meanings is meant to both clarify and question the most fundamental aspects of what occurred with each participant during this research. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Observed Lessons

Each of the observed lessons will be described briefly in this section. Table 2 provides contextual factors such as classroom sizes, social studies instructional schedules, and lesson topics. Information and quotes included in these descriptions were drawn solely from two data sources, the pre-observation form that participants completed prior to each visit (see Appendix E) and my written classroom observation notes.
Katelyn’s kindergarten class was comprised of approximately 21 children for our two observations. Although tables and chairs were available for the students, both lessons were taught with everyone sitting on a carpet, facing the student teacher. Only 15 minutes were allotted for any social studies to be taught, a factor that severely limited the types of activities that might be possible and the depth to which any topic could be covered.

Katelyn described her first lesson this way:

For this particular lesson, we will have talked about friendship for three days. We will be making a Friendship Salad. Each ingredient is also an ingredient to being a good friend. However, when adding a bad banana, no would want that in their food, just like no one wants a bad friend.

When asked why this topic is important, Katelyn said “students need to understand how to function in society later in life, and part of that is knowing how to be a good friend.”

Here, the students mainly participated by listening and occasionally giving examples of how friends might help each other. This particular lesson was not associated with any Georgia Performance Standards for kindergarten social studies and instead was considered character education.

The second lesson lasted 12 minutes and consisted of students identifying objects on a smartboard that are either currently used or were used many years ago. This topic is included in the Georgia Performance Standards. Katelyn wanted “students to understand that as time progresses so do material objects in the world. We use words such a long ago and now to help describe the change over time.” A few of the examples (ex: cell phone, outdoor clothes line) unintentionally brought up socioeconomic issues and cultural
differences. For example, the clothes line was intended to be an item from “long ago,” but one student said their family still dried clothes that way. Katelyn responded that her own grandmother currently uses a clothes line but later said in our interview that she did not expect the student’s comment and might not use some of those items in future lessons. A fair amount of this lesson was spent on behavioral reminders (i.e. pay attention, stop talking, sit still). When asked how much of her day involved positive reinforcement and correcting behaviors, Katelyn laughed and estimated it to be about 85 percent.

_Evelyn_

The second kindergarten class was taught by Evelyn and had approximately 18 students. Although social studies and science were originally supposed to receive an hour in the daily schedule, Evelyn realized this was not happening and had to fit in her lessons whenever she and her mentor teacher found the time. Our first observation was scheduled during the morning meeting and the topic was American symbols. Evelyn described her feelings about the lesson this way:

Sadly, the instructional process will involve me presenting a Powerpoint on the Bald Eagle….The way I am approaching this lesson is to appease my mentor teacher and satisfy the collaborative planning needs of our team. If this were my class and lesson to teach, I would attempt to devote more time than 10 minutes on these national symbols. I think I would integrate this standard into language arts and writing. Honestly, I don’t see very much importance in knowing the national bird.
Finding time to schedule social studies and science was a persistent challenge for this Evelyn. Collaborative meetings with other kindergarten teachers were often held only a week before the planned lessons which did not allow her to think about or prepare any instructional materials more than a few days in advance.

The second observation was an attempt to combine social studies and science topics into one lesson, and this time was scheduled later in the morning. Although more time was allotted, a previous lesson ran late so this was again cut down to about 20 minutes of actual instruction. A cartoon about the moon was shown to students and Evelyn noted its purpose in her pre-observation form as follows:

Students should be able to discuss what comes before and after in relation to the sun, ideally using these vocabulary terms. It is vital for students to know these time terms in order to comprehend how history has taken place in the past and is being made in the present. Additionally these terms are essential for understanding our calendar and daily time conversations.

A class discussion was supposed to be held afterward by the student teacher; however, she was distracted by one or more students needing attention outside the classroom, and the mentor teacher briefly reviewed the cartoon instead.

Karen

The first grade classroom in this study was taught by Karen. On average, there were about 15 students present for each observation. A handful of students missed her social studies instruction every afternoon because they were taken out of the classroom for help in other subjects. Karen said these students only received about 30 minutes of social studies instruction per week. Generally, her lessons lasted about 35 minutes.
The first lesson I observed with Karen focused on maps and compass directions. She indicated that her students would be “learning what a compass rose is, what the four directions are, and learning about our city.” She described the purpose of this lesson as follows:

This is important because it is a basic map skill used in life outside of school.

Learning about their town is a great way for young students to begin to develop
spatial awareness….We did not get to do a social studies lesson on Monday, and are already behind. Karen collected materials about the city in which her students reside as a supplement to the lesson. She expressed a belief that students would be more interested in learning about their own community and consequently, the map skills she hoped they would learn might develop faster.

The second lesson began with students quietly reading to themselves about landforms. Karen gathered everyone together for a whole group discussion afterward. She then asked students to write a song about any landform they liked and felt this was important because “it helps them understand the physical characteristics of different parts of our planet.” Thinking ahead about the lesson, Karen stated:

I anticipate that the students will have a difficult time sitting still and listening for long periods of time, and that I need to remember that and not get caught up with “what needs to get done”. I anticipate that some of the students will have a lot of background knowledge about these landforms, and that some will have little knowledge.

The students seemed to enjoy the freedom of choosing which landform to read about as well as writing a song with their friends. The positive mood of this class was severely dampened, however, when the mentor teacher returned to class and chastised the students for talking too much.
\textit{Janice}

Janice taught a second grade classroom with about 20 students. She canceled the first observation, saying just that it had been a bad day, but rescheduled for the following week. She described the original lesson this way:

Today, we’ll be working to construct a map of the area around the school. First, we’ll make a list of things that might be important to place on our map. We used this ‘less intense’ unit first for two main reasons: to help the kids get used to social studies in general (At my school, social studies isn’t taught as an isolated subject until 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade.); and also to get them comfortable with switching classrooms.

The two observed lessons were almost identical, but were taught to different classes. This practice of switching classes with a teacher across the hall was used by Janice’s mentor teacher as a means of rotating science and social studies. Janice described the purposes for her lessons this way:

We will be finishing a government booklet that briefly summarizes the scope, location, buildings, and leaders of each sector of government. Then, we will be brainstorming for our own laws as a basis to write our letters. I’m passionate about my students becoming active and aware citizens. Because of this, I’m not sure I’ll be satisfied with a cursory letter to the government leader of choice; it might be hard to get some of my kids to dig deeper, as they’ve only been writing self-directed personal things since I took over.
Laura

Two participants were placed in fourth grade classrooms. Laura’s class included approximately 25 children and both of her lessons were scheduled for 45 minutes. One aspect about the first observation that stood out was how structured each portion of the lesson seemed to be. Laura used a combination of methods, including whole group content review, smartboard illustrations, answering questions from a textbook, and soliciting student thoughts about a variety of topics. This was the beginning of a 3 week unit entitled “The First Americans.” Laura described her approach this way:

This is going to involve a study of 6 specific tribes, where they settled, and how they used their environment to obtain food, clothing, and shelter. Each fourth grade class is going to be responsible for researching two of the six tribes and then reporting on them to the other two classes.

It became apparent through our interviews that Laura saw the value in reflecting on her teaching and making improvements wherever she could, especially when she saw student enjoying learning. Social studies appears on the CRCT for third, fourth, and fifth graders and this is also a factor that influenced her decisions. These issues are apparent in her thoughts from the pre-observation form:

Something I’ve been working on is improving student’s engagement in lessons and varying from a very traditional, teacher-centered lesson, but this has also been a challenge. Some of this difficulty is coming up with the ideas that aren’t just following the book, and one large difficulty is the time constraints and pressure to prepare for the test. My lack of a love for social studies seems to make teaching
this more difficult, but I also am trying to overcome that and make it really fun and enjoyable for my students.

The second observation lasted the duration of its allotted time, but the entire period was dedicated to students working on their project for this same unit. Laura mostly kept student on task and helped groups as they asked for assistance. It seemed the students were taking their assignments seriously while also enjoying the process of working with their friends. This unit was directly tied to the state standards. Laura reiterated that she was “trying to improve [her] social studies teaching” and had enjoyed the way students became engaged with the various research activities of their own choosing.

Leslie

The last participant, Leslie, was also placed in a fourth grade classroom. Once again, she was mainly responsible for a three week unit. Leslie’s instruction centered on European explorers and the respective state standards for her grade level. Generally, 40 minutes were devoted to her lessons, although she also spent extra during some afternoons for students to explore these topics further. The first observation was fairly teacher centered, but Leslie made a habit of interjecting questions for individual students to answer as she presented the material. Her depiction of the lesson and its purpose was explained as:

I plan on reading an excerpt from a book about Balboa, then showing a PowerPoint summarizing important details. These are important because if my students have learned this information, they are meeting the Georgia Performance
Standards. They are learning about six different explorers and have to know many things about each. I’m worried they’ll have a hard time remembering it all.

Unfortunately, the second social studies lesson was canceled because Leslie’s mentor teacher decided that same day to use that time in order to prepare for an upcoming test in a different subject. We were unable to reschedule the observation. However, Leslie had already completed her pre-observation form. Her intent was for students to “read the material from their packets about colonization and use the foldable organizers they’ve made already during the unit” in order to create a Venn diagram. She wanted them to “see that even though the three regions seemed really different, they had a lot of the same underlying ideas, like that they were all looking for a better life.”

Overview of Themes and Meanings

Much of the purpose from conducting phenomenological interviews rests in allowing participants to reveal their experiences in an open and thorough manner. While it may be necessary to have a general idea of the questions one might ask, it was equally important in this study to simply begin by asking student teachers what their experiences were like. This created a space for participants to say whatever was on their minds at the time while providing avenues to explore throughout our conversations. For example, if a participant began by telling me they were struggling to form a positive relationship with their mentor teacher, I would ask them to talk more about what that was like. If they told me that time constraints were hindering their instructional objectives, I would ask them to tell me more about that experience.

After multiple readings of the interview transcripts, seven themes revealed the essences of student teachers’ experiences teaching elementary level social studies. Within
each theme, meanings emerged which differentiated participants’ experiences in important ways while forming noticeable similarities across these relationships. Table 3 summarizes this information.

Table 3

*Themes and Meanings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations and purpose in social studies</td>
<td>Content, General purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal experiences and influences</td>
<td>Family members and friends, Social studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>instructors and courses, Classroom experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adherence to state standards</td>
<td>No separate meanings</td>
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<td>Scheduling and time constraints</td>
<td>Lack of scheduled time, Balancing time with other subjects,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Control of scheduling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships with mentor and grade teachers</td>
<td>Interpersonal cohesiveness, Instructional</td>
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<td>decisions and control, Collaborative experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving social studies education</td>
<td>Scheduled time, Policies and standards, Teacher education</td>
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<td>programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reactions to the end of student teaching</td>
<td>Relief, Missing students, Disheartened anticipation</td>
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</tbody>
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Quotes and explanations included in the following sections came almost entirely from the four rounds of interviews. Responses to three written questions (see Appendix G) supplemented the data regarding coursework and training, suggestions for teacher education, and purpose in social studies.
Expectations and Purpose in Social Studies

Given that the student teachers in this study encountered relatively little preparation in social studies instruction when compared to math, reading, and writing, it was important to ascertain what they expected to occur in their classrooms as well as what they hoped would happen whenever they did teach a social studies lesson. More so here than with any other theme, it seemed the student teachers described meanings across multiple conceptions of how teaching social studies should affect children’s lives. In order to provide a general sense of where their thoughts were focused, these excerpts are divided into ideas around content and the general purpose of social studies.

Content

Katelyn was at first “really confused about social studies in kindergarten” and did not know what to expect beyond learning the Pledge of Allegiance. When she found out how little it would be taught, she expressed disappointment but reconciled the situation by saying “in kindergarten they’re learning the rules, they’re learning…democracy, how rules are, you have to follow the rules. So it’s not social studies but it is social studies.”

When asked about the importance of knowing historical facts, Katelyn responded:

I feel like you can be a functioning citizen without knowing much about history, as long as you know the basics. Dates, they don’t mean anything in reality. As long as you understand how laws are passed, I feel like that is important.

Similarly, Evelyn described the kindergarten curriculum as focused on “community helpers, establishing rules, and the understanding of democratic ideas, like treating your neighbor nicely.” She wanted content to address what it means to be a good person:
I feel like there’s a lot of information that’s not necessarily state mandated and that kind of stuff, about being a moral character. You study a lot of people in history who were good characters and so it opens up a lot of communication about, what is a good person what types of things do good people do? So establishing a moral code that is acceptable in society that’s going to allow them to function better.

Karen expressed a desire to use topics and questions that her students were already interested in pursuing. She felt the standards for first grade did not fully address or predict what might be exciting to her class. Regarding those interests, she said:

Some of them may not even be in the standards but there are questions that kids are going to have naturally that maybe are not answered…why are people different, why do people fight, you know, all these big questions. And even like how was the world created? And I think a lot of times, teachers choose to not let it in the classroom. It seems like you just hear a lot of U.S. history, Georgia history.

Karen carefully considered the kinds of activities and materials she used with students and provided a thoughtful critique of what was actually useful. She explained that it was not important, for example, to ask students to “do a crossword puzzle on landforms” whereas looking at books and pictures was valuable. Janice saw a lot of art projects used in the class but preferred to explore topics she considered more meaningful in her second grade classroom, saying “I want to do a little more in depth things with them. I love crafts but I don’t know that it really teaches what you need to learn necessarily. It might become an art project and not a lesson.” Her mentor teacher did not use the state
sponsored textbooks which meant she essentially had to provide most of the materials used for social studies.

Laura was not sure what to expect initially, but she knew she would have a textbook and a CRCT social studies prep book. When thinking about her past experiences in elementary schools she recalled that the upper grades were not as fun because it was “more note taking and lecturing” in order to prepare students for tests, as well as middle and high school. In her view, understanding U.S. history was important because “the United States has gone through so much change and is going through so much change in government and…I would like my students to really know what’s going on.” The influence of testing could be seen as well in that she want them “to know whatever is required of them…and whatever they need to be successful in the next grade.” One opportunity for social studies exists every morning, in every grade, when students are asked to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Laura indicated she was unhappy with her students who chose not to stand, saying if there were religious reasons not to, then that was okay. However, just “being a 10 year old and…not wanting to stand up and be respectful” was not acceptable. She used this situation as a brief lesson:

Why we stand up and say the pledge of allegiance and…why we show respect for our country. And that it symbolizes our country and is a thank you to those who serve our country.

Laura also wanted to include a lesson about heroes, something that is explicitly mentioned in the Georgia Performance Standards as early as kindergarten. For fourth grade, she explained what would be covered:
I’m going to go into a little mini unit just when we have time…and have them talk about how heroes are all kinds of different people. And I guess that kind of gets into the social aspect of we can be heroes by being a good citizen and by doing our part, donating at a can food drive, that kind of thing. So I really like to get into those social issues and it’s something I see that they need. It kind of helps them almost have a purpose.

Although Leslie did not have the opportunity to cover current events, she mentioned thinking they were important to bring into the classroom, perhaps with newspapers and current magazines. She felt it was “really important to be aware of what’s going on in the world around you and what’s already gone on in the world around you, even when you’re young.”

**General Purpose**

More often than not, the participants provided a specific sense of purpose within social studies that paralleled ideas taught in their teacher education program. However, these ideas were not often detailed, in terms of how actual lessons might illuminate each individual’s sense or purpose, nor did the student teachers feel they were given a realistic opportunity to teach in ways that revealed the potential they thought social studies possessed in elementary education

Janice wanted her social studies instruction to focus on “social justice” but was hesitant to incorporate her ideas without knowing how they would be received, saying, “I don’t want to throw that on her and plan things that aren’t…supported, because I don’t think that is something you should go halfway with.” She described one of her biggest concerns as:
Trying to give my kids different perspectives…I don’t know if that’s because I’m like a pretty moderate, slightly liberal person. I like to know what other people think and why they believe that. And I think I want to get my kids curious about that too. Why do people think differently than I do?

She went on to say that children should be “active in their own community” and one of her most important goals was to “build socially aware children.” Janice said this was possible without having to memorize dates and names, rather it was better to understand the general “flow of history to kind of help kids understand why we are where we are today.”

Laura admitted that social studies would be a struggle for her because as a student in grade school, it never seemed relevant to her own life. She worked diligently to overcome that, though, and explained the purpose of social studies as “making it more applicable” and less disconnected from current events. Her hope in approaching the subject this way was creating “good citizens who are aware and want to have a part in something even like voting.” Laura also mentioned that history was important to “make sure certain things…don’t repeat themselves” and to understand “America being such a leader…and the great things about that.”

In the other fourth grade class, Leslie described herself as “not politically opinionated” but explained the purpose of social studies, in part, was to help students form their “own political opinions.” She added, “I think part of being an active citizen is not being ignorant about history or current events. To me preparing children to be knowledgeable citizens is an important part of why we teach social studies.”
In both kindergarten classes, Katelyn and Evelyn talked about being a good person, and showing how these traits create communities and even governments. Evelyn explained:

I want to establish, like maybe a classroom government and a very loose version of a government with roles for each citizen and try and implement that, not only in like this social studies block, but throughout the day. So everybody would have a job, and there would be some sort of pay system.

She also felt establishing “the idea of a community would be really good at that young age because it’s only going to help teachers later on” in addition to the students. This approach was also intended to develop ideas about democracy “where students know the benefit of the whole class is far more important than the individual.” Katelyn described her purpose this way:

I think talking about being a citizen, what does it mean to be a good citizen in the world. You know you don’t want to go out and hurt or harm somebody, that’s not being a good citizen. So when we’re in our classroom, we’re not going to go out and hit somebody.

She also added that “history will repeat itself if we don’t learn it” and that “social studies is an opportunity for people to learn how things work, to learn why we do what we do in society.” Katelyn said that despite these goals, the number of standards that had to be covered in writing in reading prevented her from having time to really achieve what she hoped in social studies.

Lastly, Karen viewed social studies “as a lot of different things, including human relationships, citizenship, and social action,” categories that coincided with Goodlad and
Adler’s (1985) study of elementary school teacher’s perspectives. For her, social studies was broadly conceived, but should always build on what students wanted to learn:

I think it answers a lot of big questions for kids or should answer a lot of big questions. And just understanding why things work the way they do, why people act the way they do, why things are set up the way they are. Just different things like that. Like why the kids have to go to school, why is it important.

Karen anticipated difficulty in attaining her objectives, though, because the standards did not address these big questions. She added:

I think a lot of times because teachers do just stick with the standards it’s going to be hard because I would rather respond to what kids know and want to know about than what the standards say. A lot of times they’re just not interested in the things that are in the standards so that will be really hard to make that…a lot more interesting but it’s hard….it’s just not designed in a way that I can do what I’d like to do.

In short, each of the student teachers possessed ideas about the purpose of social studies that reached beyond what was felt the standards could cover. However, it was not clear how those ideas might be fully realized given the perception that state standards had to be prioritized over their own preferences.

*Personal Experiences and Influences*

In an attempt to understand all that might influence the participant’s orientations towards social studies, and how their perspectives in turn affected instructional decisions in the classroom, each of the student teachers were asked at various times what they felt impacted their choices. In the first interview, before the semester of teaching
commenced, answers to this inquiry spanned a wide range of possibilities. However, it was difficult to ascertain the degree to which any of the people and experiences mentioned might predict future pedagogical choices. One assumption at the beginning of this study was that multiple influences might be at work since the participants were only required to take one social studies methods course as part of their formal training. And while one course can certainly be transformative, the broad range of topics within social studies seems to parallel ideas and events that many people encounter in their every day lives, regardless of any coursework they may have completed. Politics, religion, economics, human rights, geography, and many other disciplines are always, already present and happening all around us. Therefore, it seemed pertinent to ask how these experiences might affect the participants’ instructional decisions. They identified potential influences as family members and friends, their own social studies instructors and courses, and classroom experience in various capacities. This last category of meaning included learning opportunities within the teacher education program which affected later decisions. With just one exception, the participants did not identify their political or religious views as determinants of what they chose to do with their classes. And even then, Karen said her Christian beliefs impacted her desire to help others through teaching, but she did not try to teach about or impose religious values. However, the single greatest influence which guided every student teacher’s classroom decisions was an adherence to the Georgia Performance Standards. This deference to the standards was overwhelmingly prevalent and, according to the participants, seemed to trump every other possible influence. This factor will be discussed at length as a separate theme.
An acknowledgement that family members and friends helped shaped participants’ views about the world, and consequently some of the topics that might be taught as social studies, was mostly mentioned only in the first round of interviews. Karen recalled her parents’ influence while growing up in a small town and said she saw both positive and negative effects of strong religious views:

I’ve just seen a lot of things in religion that I like and don’t like at the same time. And most of that has made me be the person that I am for many different reasons. A big part of that is me wanting children to be able to think for themselves and form their own thoughts. And that’s why I like the idea of presenting things to children so that affects that a lot. If I was not raised by the parents that I was, I might be prone to just believe things that I hear.

She described some of the pressures to conform in her hometown further:

You are shunned if you believe anything other than what they believe. Like generations of people doing the exact same thing as their parents. Then there’s the people who were just very loving, and respect people and value everyone. And that is not dependent on things like religion.

Karen’s grandfather, whom she called Papa, was involved in politics as well. She said though it was “small town politics, even that gave me insight into the way things work.”

Janice also had a family member, her father, who was involved in politics. She described his influence on her views of government:
One of my greatest influences was my father, who has worked in city government my entire life. Listening to him talk about local politics and decision making, I got a sense of government as a living organism that regular people impact daily.

Evelyn’s father majored in geography and said she developed a passion for that subject and enjoyed looking at maps. She hoped to use Google maps as a resource in her classroom and thought it would be “really fun to teach.”

Katelyn remembered conversations with her parents about their Polish heritage and felt it influenced her enjoyment of history. Unfortunately she was unable to teach anything about family histories in her kindergarten class. Leslie, whose brother attended the same university as a history major, stated he encouraged her to watch the History Channel and added:

I always used to really love that. Like at first I thought it was boring. But as I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to appreciate the fact that as you learn things, you don’t always learn [them] at school or in any of the classes you’ve taken.

Social studies instructors and courses

Much of what constituted social studies instruction, both as a field of study and actual teaching strategies, formed as the result of the participants’ own experiences as students. In general, participants could not recall much from their elementary experiences and usually remembered high school social studies as a lot of lecturing. Similarly, most had difficulty recalling the specific content and teaching methods covered in their one university social studies course, but often had positive recollections of their university instructor. Each could usually remember one K-12 teacher who stood out as someone that
made social studies interesting. Unfortunately, those instructors seemed to be the exception rather than the norm.

Memorizing content, such as American symbols, people, and events was a common occurrence for most of the student teachers. Katelyn said, “I honestly don’t remember that much social studies in elementary school. I remember going over the flag, and going over the constitution, just those redundant kind of facts.” However, she described her social studies methods course was a positive experience:

[The professor] just really opened the door for me when it came to social studies. We all walked in like, what was the point of this class. And I was one of them too. I was sitting there going, I don’t understand, you write definitions all day long, it will be fine. But she really opened the door. And for her, it was just really differentiation and integration and just bringing everything together to teach. I feel much more prepared than I did a year ago after taking that….I would seriously have gone in teaching these kids the presidents, forward from George Washington on. They’re not ready for that, you know.

Evelyn said she “hated social studies” until taking her social studies methods class because she “completely linked it to memorizing boring history facts.” She later recalled one teacher in sixth grade whose approach she enjoyed:

I remember I had a professor who was awesome and brought history to life. I absolutely loved going to his class and it was challenging and it was great. I probably learned more history in that one class than I did the rest of my education.

The qualities that stood out to her the most about these instructors was their “passion and enthusiasm” for social studies. Evelyn stated their “story telling abilities made it really
engaging.” As much as positive teachers had an influence, those who were not good instructors also stood out. She explained her experience this way:

   In high school, I went into history and I had a terrible economics teacher who just loved to hate me. Economics and geography were taught by the same teacher. The principles of economics I remember and I really enjoy, but I had a really negative taste due to the teacher. And so I was probably biased and would have said I hated economics prior to college.

Evelyn also attended a Montessori school before entering the public school system and wanted to bring some of that philosophy, which she described as “fluid and integrated learning” into her own classroom.

   When Karen considered her teacher preparation, she saw the value in all of her coursework, but found her student teaching experience to be the most influential component. Identifying student teaching as the one university requirement which most guided classroom decisions was common for the participants. Karen described her thoughts:

   I learned a good deal from my student teaching, as compared to my courses in the teacher preparation program. I think that without those courses however, I would have had a much more difficult time student teaching, and would not have learned as much. Some of my courses have really helped my in practical ways, while I do not even remember things about other courses. The courses that really helped me were mainly special methods courses. Classes in which we were asked to create lesson plans on our own and then explain them.
However, Karen felt the proportion of social studies and science preparation to math and reading was unbalanced. She stated:

We had one social studies course, which is kind of crazy, one social studies and one science, and a load of math and reading and literature. Which that’s important but I feel unprepared in both science and social studies right now. For social studies, it’s like, here are some cool ideas, you know, just get a few. I mean there is only so much you can do in a semester as opposed to when we had so many math classes and reading classes.

Regarding her time spent as a student in grade school, she thought social studies was probably enjoyable at the elementary level, but not as much in middle and high school because it “was mainly just lecture.” Her recollection was as follows:

Well, I guess it was kind of one extreme or the other. I had some teachers who weren’t really very competent. They’d just get us to read a chapter and answer questions at the end of it, take a test, that was basically it.

Janice stated that while she “appreciated a number of my [university] courses, the information gained from them didn’t mean much outside the framework of an actual classroom.” However, she did appreciate the orientation towards social studies of her university instructors:

What I’ve taken from both of them is helping kids learn how to be critical about their position in the world and other people and being able to compare them and talk about them freely without judgment. And hopefully encourage kids to change things that they think are wrong or at least, I want my kids to be aware.
One of Janice’s observed lessons was inspired by a university professor. She had students think of laws that would be important and then write letters to the appropriate legislators. The idea for this was described as follows:

I remembered when I was in class, [the professor] shared how her child was really upset about having to take the CRCT and wrote a letter to [the governor] and that kind of got me thinking about that.

Thinking back to her own social studies classes at the elementary level, Laura felt those instructional methods influenced her to not replicate what she saw because “it wasn’t very memorable,” and she wanted more for her students. She also drew comparisons between the emphasis on testing then and what she saw during student teaching, saying:

When I came through school, it was so different. I mean sure we took tests, I can remember ITBS, but I was never stressed out about it. And I was never exhausted by tests. To where these kids, they hate your weekly tests because they have so many tests they have to take. Here, they have a benchmark test they have to take, like once a quarter. They have these performance assessments from the district every so often. We have to take a pre test before each unit, and a post test. And it’s just like, I would get sick of it too. And I’m sick of giving them so I know they’re sick of taking them.

When asked about the impact of her university methods course, Laura had trouble recalling specifics:

Like I remember the course, I remember being in there. But I don’t remember what we talked about so much. And it’s like I’m thinking what did we do in that
course, what do I want to do, what did I learn from that, how do I use something.

And I don’t even remember what I learned.

Leslie had a similar response regarding her university preparation, but added that
reflecting on her experience was something that she later saw as a benefit:

When asked to recall specific things from my courses or the program overall, it’s
been difficult. I gained so much from student teaching, since teaching is a
profession I feel like you learn a lot more from doing rather than hearing about it.
Something notable, however, is that I think I drew on my previous courses more
than I actually realized. For instance, I found myself subconsciously asking
questions that were reflective.

She also remembered taking basic skills assessments but said there wasn’t as much
pressure because “it didn’t determine whether you passed or failed. It was always just to
see how you’re doing.”

Classroom Experience

Prior to student teaching, some of the participants cited their observations in
previous semesters as important to their current understandings of how social studies
should be taught. While immersed in the classroom during this study, the participants
also built upon what they learned in an effort to improve their work as the semester
progressed.

Leslie’s impression of how social studies was taught was that it varied
considerably from grade to grade, and certainly between schools. This came as the result
of observations in previous semesters. She recalled:
I was in a third grade classroom two semesters ago and they alternated social studies and science every six weeks I think. During the six weeks that it was supposed to be social studies, they did it pretty much every day, but if there was something they felt was more important that they needed to finish, they just kind of scrapped that for the day. And I was in a kindergarten class this past spring, and there was never really a social studies time of day.

She also noticed in her own classroom that students responded very well to working on creative assignments, saying “they were begging me to work on their projects,” something she instituted to supplement the regular social studies instruction. Laura also noticed how well her students responded to her group research project instead of taking notes from a lecture or simply answering textbook questions. She said it was “definitely something I’m starting to do more of because I see it helps them so much.” Karen realized how much her students enjoyed social studies, which motivated her to find extra resources for them. She enjoyed “planning and thinking about it” and realized that social studies was one “of their favorite subjects when it’s done well.” Consequently it became one of her “favorite subjects to teach.”

**Adherence to State Standards**

The single most influential factor in determining curriculum choices and classroom activities, according to the six participants in this study, was the prevailing notion that teachers must always adhere to the Georgia Performance Standards. Failure to do so was viewed as problematic, and some participants reported they might even lose their jobs if the standards were not followed when they became full time teachers. This one concern dominated virtually every instructional decision and every assessment.
Throughout the four rounds of interviews, the idea that student teachers had no choice but to follow the standards was mentioned many times. The participants’ accounts begin here with both fourth grade teachers, who frequently felt pressure to only teach content contained in the standards in order to prepare students for the CRCT in social studies. Unlike the other themes, this section focuses solely on one intentional relationship that existed between the participants and the social studies content, manifested as state mandated curriculum standards.

Laura very succinctly described a feeling shared by many participants when she noted that “everything revolves around the test now.” The pressure to cover standards tied to these tests is ever present. As a student teacher, impressions about one’s responsibilities are quickly learned. Laura went on to say, “I think that’s something all teachers struggle with… we want to do so much but you have to teach the standards. You have to pass the test. You have to get it all done within this time frame.” Rather than focusing on topics within social studies that she determined students enjoyed or showed more interest in learning, she stated “I’m just kind of following the curriculum map that I was given. So for the first three weeks, we do focus on that one standard.” Determined to use methods that were more engaging than just lectures and book work, Laura collaborated with another class. She asked students to research the material in groups, then present the content through mediums of their own choosing. Regarding her ability to include anything beyond the content of the state standards, she said:

The standards kind of help you… because they kind of tell you what they think is important but there’s so much other stuff too that maybe I want to tie in this, but
I’ve got to make sure I get the standards because that’s what they’re going to be tested on.

When asked whether the standards helped students in their roles as citizens concerned with the public good, Laura said those inclinations result “much more from other things than the standards.” This notion was also prevalent among the other student teachers. Many felt they were teaching their students how to be good people, but this was primarily happening through informal interactions. The standards were generally seen as a plethora of names, events, and places that had to be memorized to pass a test over that same content. In other words, learning the content within the standards was generally regarded as valuable in so far as it increased the chances of doing well on standardized tests, rather than for its inherent worth, a sort of cyclical reasoning that was reported by the participants on numerous occasions. Laura said teachers “complain about them all the time, but I don’t know what I would do to make them better.”

Leslie, the other fourth grade teacher, described the influence of state standards the following way:

My experience working in the schools has shown me that the Georgia Performance Standards are the Bible we are told to follow. There is just so much material to get through that it seems like many teachers and student teachers alike are scraping by to just cover the bare minimum.

At the same time, however, the standards provided a framework for what content should be covered that was sometimes helpful to student teachers. To this end, Leslie explained how they helped her:
It’s kind of a relief to be like here’s exactly what they need to know and here’s what’s meeting the standard and what is not. But we have run into conflicts of what we think is meeting the standards, like the fourth grade teachers versus what the county has said.

During the first observation for Leslie’s class, I noticed a sign posted on the outside of their classroom door entitled “social contract.” This seemed like a resource that might be used to teach democratic or egalitarian values. However, when asked about its use, Leslie responded, “That’s never been talked about. I’ve never heard her teach it….She’s never said anything about it to the students or to me.” Towards the end of her student teaching experience, Leslie formed the following opinion regarding tests and standards:

I think that standardized testing is a necessary evil. I think that it’s important to be able to see how everyone is stacking up but just seeing kids taking the CRCT, they’re so stressed out, pale and sad. It just seems like so much pressure is placed on those tests. And [the mentor teacher] says you need to know this because it’s going to be on the CRCT. And it just feels like something that is looming.

In kindergarten through second grade, the Georgia Performance Standards are expected to be covered. However, social studies is not tested on the CRCT in these grades. Janice, who taught second grade, looked for ways to teach beyond the standards. She described their function as a “bare bones foundation” that should not determine every lesson for every day. However, she too had a curriculum map provided by the school district that was supposed to be followed by all teachers and admitted that she had to abide by those “to a certain extent.” Towards the beginning of student teaching, Janice felt “it would be silly, and rather difficult, to completely ignore the perspective of 20 plus
people in an effort to address only the state standards as they are strictly interpreted.” She wanted to infuse issues around social justice into her classroom. When asked towards the end of her semester about the extent to which this was achieved, she replied, “I wanted the kids to make what we were learning about a part of their lives. Social justice did not happen, I will be completely honest. That was a little disappointing.”

One of the challenges Karen encountered in first grade was the expectation to teach lessons which she saw as unimportant or irrelevant to the students. As a rule, she was “not crazy about the social studies standards” and wished they were more “developmentally appropriate” but did her best to teach them anyway. An example of what seemed like an unneeded standard focused on Johnny Appleseed, which is included in the Georgia Performance Standards. In one of our interviews, she critiqued what was supposed to happen the next day for her entire grade level:

Tomorrow in the lesson plan for first grade, they are scheduled for the entire social studies period to do a lesson on Johnny Appleseed because his birthday is coming up. But that is like a really small part of the standard, and to me not as important because it’s just one person out of a group of people and those other people don’t get that much focus. It’s just like oh it’s his birthday so let’s do a whole big thing about it. So to me that’s not as important because the students aren’t going to mention it, and they would rather do more of what we’ve been doing.

Regarding the inherent value of this content, Karen said, “I don’t think in my life I have ever needed to know anything about Johnny Appleseed, you know. I don’t know where that’s ever been important.” When asked what input she had regarding the adherence to
state standards, she began by saying, “Well for one thing I don’t get to decide at all the standards that should be taught.” However, the essential questions that were expected to be posted every day were items over which she did feel some control. When asked further about the use of essential questions and their potential benefit, Karen explained:

I think it depends on what the district requires of you, I think maybe a week and a half ago they did walk throughs. They wanted to make sure the teacher had the standard posted, was telling the students the standard, had the essential question posted, and was reading the essential question to the students. That was, what I gather, their objective for coming in and doing that. If the teachers did not do well on that, you know that’s bad news for them. So I just think that’s what’s important to people who may or may not be able to fire you.

In other words, a significant amount of pressure existed to always teach the standards and post essential questions, even if it was only to appease school or district administrators.

Although in kindergarten, where there was often little to no time for any social studies instruction, both student teachers were still acutely aware of the importance placed on all teachers to justify their lessons through standards. Regarding the lack of actual social studies based instruction in her classroom, Katelyn stated, “I hate to say it, but I do feel like they push it to the side and get to it when they can get to it, or teach whatever is on the CRCT.” When her mentor teacher found out she was participating in this study, the response was, “Well, here are the standards, and I normally teach it during class meeting.” Their class meeting was always 15 minutes long, at best. When Katelyn wanted to teach a lesson on why students say the Pledge of Allegiance, she could not get approval to do so. She explained:
The lesson I would like to do but I can’t get approval to do, where I plan it and it’s something they don’t normally do, they don’t feel comfortable with me doing it. So no, I haven’t been able to do those things that I would like to do.

Similarly, Katelyn wanted to teach her children to recognize the President of the United States by viewing an address Barack Obama recorded to inspire students. The response she received led to a decision not to show this video:

I got note after note after note from parents saying my student is not supposed to watch it. I don’t want them to watch it. And I’m sitting there going ugh, okay…well there goes wanting to talk about who the President of the United Stated is right now.

Posting essential questions that were aligned with the state standards was also expected in both kindergarten classes. Katelyn viewed their use like this:

Every lesson before and after, [the students] have to be able to tell me the essential question because the county can walk in at any time. And our students have to be able to say, our EQ is this in kindergarten, which is a little ridiculous….To expect a kindergartner to be able to repeat an essential question is ridiculous. Like I have to bribe them with candy. At the end of my lesson, I have to stop in the middle of my closing and say, so what was our essential question for the day. Even though I probably said my essential question an hour ago. Like this is ridiculous that the county has to come in, look at my essential question, make sure it’s on the board, make sure it’s starred with the standard next to it, and then make sure the kids can say it. It aggravates me to no end. So when did it all become about that?
When asked what other teachers thought about posting essential questions as a means to reinforce every state standard, Katelyn said, “We all laugh about it. You know we think it’s kind of silly.” Then she added, “Technically they are for the kids, but it’s really for the adults.”

Lastly, Evelyn did not feel as prepared to teach social studies at the beginning of her semester. Her comments were:

That’s sad when I don’t have that education and I’m supposed to be teaching it. I think I’m capable, but I don’t think I’m absolutely 100 percent prepared. Like I think I could pull it off, but it probably wouldn’t be the best. It just puts…the responsibility on me to look at the standards ahead of time, and I can re-teach myself.

Here, the standards were again placed at the forefront of what should and needed to be taught. However, when Evelyn experienced what teaching some of the kindergarten standards was like, she had this to say:

So for me to stand there and say the bald eagle is America’s symbol, well if they can regurgitate that, that means they’ve met the standard, but does that mean it has any meaning or is helping them at all? Like it doesn’t make any sense.

Evelyn later reiterated Laura’s first comment that “everything is based off standardized testing” and when asked what she was learning about teaching social studies and its place in the school, her response was “how unvalued it is.” She went on to say that social studies always “gets pushed to the side” and that “standardizing tests makes the focus” whatever content appears in the standards and on the tests themselves. The pressure Evelyn felt and saw all around her was best described here:
Every teacher you talk to tells you about these people who were fired because they didn’t follow the standards, they didn’t follow the class schedule. Every school I’ve been at says if we get observed, we better be doing what’s in our lesson plan. Otherwise we’re going to get chewed out.

**Scheduling and Time Constraints**

One of the more prominent challenges that participants encountered was an overall lack of time devoted to social studies in both their daily and semester schedules. In virtually every interview, each of the student teachers mentioned how they wished more time was available for them to teach in ways that were preferable to their current arrangements. The ramifications of having so little time were far reaching and will be discussed in detail. Within this broad theme of scheduling and time constraints, the participants’ experiences generally resonated through a lack of scheduled time, balancing time with other subjects, and feeling very little control over scheduling.

**Lack of Scheduled Time**

One of the most fundamental hindrances to teaching social studies in elementary schools is the amount of time allocated for it. As seen in Table 2, when social studies was included in the daily schedule, the length of lessons ranged from 15 to 40 minutes. Other variables such as settling students before the lessons, handling unexpected problems, getting materials ready, or lining up for the next activity reduced the actual amount of instructional time in most cases by another five to ten minutes. The phrase “scheduled time” is used to note that it is always possible to schedule equal amounts of time for all subject areas, or otherwise adjust daily schedules or curriculum maps so the allocation of lesson time is configured in more equitable ways. The same amount of time always exists
during the school day. However, people make decisions to organize that time in ways that suit theirs and other’s preferences. Regardless of the time that participants utilized for social studies, they each wished for more.

Prior to my first observation with Katelyn, she said, “I’ll forewarn you that the social studies you do come in and see probably won’t last very long, I mean it will probably be 10 or 15 minutes.” When she first asked her mentor teacher about teaching, she reported that the teacher laughed and said, “I don’t even have it on my schedule.” Katelyn later wished she “had at least 20-25 minutes.” When asked if she had been able to implement the kinds of lessons she wanted to teach, Katelyn responded:

Honestly I haven’t. I hate it, but I talk about it with my friends over and over. You learn great things to do in class but when it boils down to real life situations, you hate it, but you can’t do it. And you want to do it…but 15 minutes is not reasonable, it’s not acceptable. I don’t have the time, and it’s awful, and I absolutely hate that.

Similarly in Evelyn’s kindergarten class, she often had just 15 minutes to insert a social studies lesson, despite assurances from her principal earlier in the semester that science or social studies would receive an hour of instructional time every day. She and her mentor teacher had to find places in the day to fit in whatever they could. Evelyn explained the situation this way:

In the curriculum guide from the county, it says we should be teaching both at the same time, although in our schedule for the day we only have an allotted time for one or the other. And so right now we’re cramming social studies into morning meeting so we cover science during our social studies/science block. So where
we’d normally have 50 minutes for social studies or science, we now have 10 or 15 minutes in the morning for social studies.

For most of the semester, there was “no predictable plan” for scheduling social studies, an aspect of her experience that Evelyn said “drove [her] crazy.” As a result, she felt that she could not “plan really exciting and engaging lessons and accomplish that in 15 minutes.” Social studies as whole then, felt “limiting and really hard to teach.”

In Karen’s first grade class, social studies accounted for roughly one tenth of the total instructional time. She stated this might be the case because “first graders aren’t tested for the CRCT” in social studies. Ironically, Karen described social studies and science as “the fun things that do not get as much time” and noted that the daily schedule was almost always adjusted in ways that took time away from social studies. During the time that social studies was scheduled, about five students were taken from her class each day to receive further instruction in math and reading. According to Karen, these children were probably exposed to just 30 minutes of social studies per week, if that. Janice described her block of social studies instruction as “very isolated” even though she felt it was “one of the most relevant subjects” to her students’ lives.

The fourth grade classrooms had the most time scheduled for social studies, yet Laura felt it was still not enough, especially when compared to the amount allotted for other subjects. She sought teaching methods that would make social studies more interesting for her students but said:

We might be able to do one of those things but you can’t go as in depth and you can’t get all the fun stuff in there cause you’ve only got 45 minutes in the
morning. Mornings are crazy anyway; and if behavior gets a little awry, then you
don’t even get to half the stuff you wanted to.

Even though Laura did not consider herself to be a “social studies person,” she still
desired more time because she saw how much her students enjoyed the topics they
covered and the opportunity to work on a research project where they chose how their
information would be presented to another class.

While Leslie said she was “okay” with the 40 minutes or so she had for social
studies lessons, she admitted it was limiting and stated:

With social studies, they just get told the information, then sometimes there’s a
worksheet or something for them to fill in that she does. But there’s just not much
time to critically think about what’s going on. We have a lot of discussions.
They’re usually pretty brief though. In an ideal world, they’d get a chance to
maybe write about what they’re learning and have that really help them think
about what they did.

Balancing Time with other Subjects

In addition to a lack of scheduled lesson time, social studies was often shifted
around or disregarded entirely to make room for other subjects. Even in the best case
scenarios where time was actually allotted, social studies was almost always rotated with
science, usually every two to three weeks. Since the student teachers did not plan or
instruct every subject throughout the semester and instead picked up one or two areas at a
time, the total number of lessons taught or co-taught by each participant was usually just
10-15. The two exceptions were Laura and Janice, who taught 30-40 lessons over the
course of three months. Every participant felt social studies was not valued as much as the other subject areas. Evelyn recounted her observations this way:

Every single classroom I’ve ever been in, it’s the first thing that gets left out. If anything, when we’re running behind, it’s like we’ll pick up the math or reading... I’ve never been in a class where they said oh we’re running behind, but we have to stop because we really want to do this social studies. Never have I seen that which is just sad, but actions speak louder than words.

So not only was this true in Evelyn’s student teaching classroom, it was the case in every class she observed throughout her teacher education program. Due to its low priority and ever present time constraints, social studies became one of her “least favorite subjects.”

This recognition of social studies’ low importance was recognized in every grade level. Karen mentioned there was never “enough time in the day to do everything that people want to do” and that balancing the daily schedule never worked out unless she was the only person in the room and could do everything exactly as she wanted. She explained the situation this way:

A lot of time because things don’t get as much time as they’re supposed to, and I’ve never seen a day work out the way it is scheduled to work out, I wanted to do that. And it’s not that it’s about time or scheduling, if something is going the way it should be, it’s silly to freak out about a schedule, but I wanted to get things in the allotted time just to see how it turned out. And so that’s what I did and everything was just fine.

Unless Karen made a determined effort to see what it was like to actually follow the intended schedule, she might never have experienced what that was like. She determined
that math, reading, and writing were continually prioritized over social studies because they were viewed as “necessary” and social studies was not.

The rotation of science with social studies is commonplace, yet it left some student teachers unsatisfied. Janice described her feelings like this:

I don’t like splitting up social studies with science. It’s kind of hard to see past that. Cause during those two weeks they do science, it’s not like social studies pauses. It’s still going on. I think there’s also periods during the day that are really wasted.

Janice possessed a strong desire to make social studies meaningful to her students, but she felt its potential was significantly limited by splitting her instructional time between it and science, and because the overall amount of time was so much less comparatively.

Katelyn basically chose to teach social studies under the guise of character education. She said, “It’s going to be one of those things where I’m not going to call it social studies, but I’m going to try and integrate it in there.” When viewed as character education, there were many opportunities for Katelyn to talk with her student about what it means to be a good person, but not necessarily as part of planned lessons. She went on to say:

It’s not every week and I wish it could be every week but realistically there’s just not enough time during the day to do it every week. So like now that I’m trying to take over, for me and my mentor teacher, social studies is taught along with science during classroom meeting which is that 15 minutes….In the big scope of things, it is one twentieth of my whole day and I hate that, but it’s just how it is.
Although social studies appears on the fourth grade CRCT, Laura mentioned that being a student teacher, “you definitely get the feeling that it’s not as important.” As was often the case, she found herself teaching math and reading for two hour blocks almost every day, whereas social studies and science seemed to be enjoyed more by her students and received much less attention. Laura thought every subject deserved equal time as shown when she stated, “I don’t see why it’s not like 25 percent, like you have reading and language pretty much grouped together, and you have math, then science and social studies. So why would it not be more evenly distributed?”

Leslie saw the potential of using social studies to teach and discuss current events, but was left with the concession that “it seems completely impossible.” The limited time she had compared to other subjects and responsibilities was expressed as:

I don’t know, the time constraint puts pressure on you and I’m just like, okay what do I really need to do. So it was like trying to get those things done that I really needed to do. So I wasn’t thinking what if I could do this, just because there was a million things going on while I was teaching social studies. I wasn’t just teaching social studies.

*Control of Scheduling*

Perhaps the most discouraging conclusion the participants came to at some point during their semester of student teaching was that they had virtually no control over the allotments of time, and the prioritization of other subjects over social studies. The feeling that at any moment, someone from their schools or districts could walk in and see what they were doing served as a strong influence on their lesson management. Each participant developed the sense that they were quite capable of teaching the students what
they needed most, if only they possessed the agency and trust to do so. Laura summarized this notion as follows:

I think it would be a great idea to give teachers that freedom because supposedly, we are the ones who know what these students need. And we are in charge of that classroom and you’re supposed to be catering to each student, so maybe we don’t need a two hour reading block and a math block. My students need to read. They got the math so why are sitting here working on that for so long?

She went on to say, “if somebody from the district comes by and that schedule says you’re on math, you’re supposed to be doing math. So you kind of got to stick with that.”

Karen echoed the idea that she could not control how much time was spent on each subject and went further to say, “We can’t change the schedule of the day or the standards that have to be covered, or even so much the lesson plans that the teachers already have.” In other words, having little control over what is taught and how much time there is to teach it became an accepted part of social studies instruction.

In the two kindergarten classes, others in the school or district office were credited when asked who was in control of their schedules. Evelyn’s principal made the social studies and science schedule, and in doing so, created a situation where neither area received as much instruction as needed, forcing teachers “to be creative combining standards and integrating them” so they could all be covered. Interestingly, Katelyn framed her decision to abide by a schedule that had zero time scheduled for social studies as an effort to do what was necessary for her students. She reconciled her decision by saying “I still love social studies and it’s frustrating to not be able to go off and teach
other things. But you’ve got to do which you have to do. Cause you have to have the kids’ interest at heart.”

*Relationships with Mentor and Grade Level Teachers*

A foremost concern for each of the participants was the relationship they developed with their mentor teacher. These interactions had far reaching implications, mostly around issues of interpersonal cohesiveness, instructional decisions and control, as well as collaborative experiences with other teachers in their respective grade levels. Overall, the participants did not view their mentor teachers as significantly influential in positive ways concerning social studies instruction. Most experienced a sort of balancing act between what they wanted to do and what their mentor teachers usually did or wanted to do with the students. While not all of these ideas and instructional approaches were at odds with each other, there were very few instances where the participants reported learning a great deal about meaningful and engaging classroom teaching. However, all of the student teachers attempted to maintain a positive working relationship with their mentors, despite potential disagreements.

*Interpersonal Cohesiveness*

One of the first areas where participants’ thoughts resided was whether their personality would be a good match with that of their mentor teacher. This aspect of student teaching received a substantial amount of attention among the student teachers themselves. Karen mentioned that she previously did not have good experiences with mentor teachers and was “nervous” about establishing positive communication. She described her university field instructor’s notion that pleasing the mentor teacher should be a top priority:
My goal, according to my supervisor, our goal as student teachers should be to do what our mentor teacher would want. And that’s what makes it hard because sometimes I don’t think it’s what’s best for the students. So what really matters more?

In this case, a tension between always doing what the mentor teacher wanted and doing what the participant felt was best for students was actually created by her supervisor and was something that became a challenge as the semester progressed. One example where this was visible came from the treatment of students. Karen explained:

I learned a lot about classroom management, what not to do…. a lot of times at the beginning, she would just embarrass the students as a tactic for managing the classroom. And I never want to use that kind of thing….I was really frustrated after seeing the way she treated the kids. About halfway through I was really having issues just being around that all the time and hoping that it didn’t affect the way I teach, or pick up some of her habits.

Janice also came into student teaching curious about how her approach would meld with the mentor teacher. Her thoughts included the school as well:

I’m probably gonna watch and see what she does, what kind of activities she values. I think it’s also important to figure out, how your lessons would fit in with the school itself. Some schools are a lot more willing to branch out and some aren’t.

Later in the semester, Janice felt discouraged about the kinds of interactions she was having with her mentor teacher, and said, “I think it’s difficult in any situation where you feel like your gifts are very undervalued and your weaknesses are very magnified.”
Laura was the only participant whose mentor teacher was male. She anticipated this being a potential issue and stated, “I’m very different I would say from my mentor teacher. Obviously he’s a male so that in and of itself is going to be different from how a male runs a classroom and a female runs a classroom.” These perceived gender differences were not identified as problems in our subsequent interviews.

Towards the end of her semester, Leslie grew bored with her lack of responsibilities and the menial tasks her mentor teacher began assigning. She described the situation like this:

Sometimes I feel like a glorified mom that’s coming to help out or something. Especially now that I’m done with teaching, I sort of just do the things that she doesn’t want to do. Like I take forms up to the office or I pass out homework, or I write things on the board for her.

This aspect of their relationship spoke to a lack of agreement on what Leslie was supposed to accomplish and learn.

Katelyn reported that she liked her mentor teacher despite not agreeing with everything she did in the classroom. However, with virtually no social studies instruction scheduled, very little could be accomplished towards learning how to teach the subject in meaningful ways. In the other kindergarten classroom, Evelyn considered her mentor teacher to be a “veteran” since she had been in the profession for 26 years. Regarding numerous aspects of student teaching, and returning to the idea that student teachers should try and please their mentors, she said this about her experience:

Through student teaching it’s like you’re forced to conform to what your teacher expects, and her needs, and it’s her classroom. So it’s a balancing act of what I
would like to do versus what she would like to do. There’s only so much I can push without being disrespectful.

*Instructional Decisions and Control*

The negotiation of instructional decisions and responsibilities created many opportunities for student teachers to compare ideas with their mentors. Participants provided numerous examples of when they wanted to teach in ways that were not viewed as congruent with what their mentor teachers wanted. A prevalent expression was the deference to doing whatever mentor teachers preferred since the classrooms were seen as theirs, and not the student teachers’. This seemed to significantly limit the amount and types of authentic instructional opportunities participants were afforded.

Even though Evelyn described her mentor teacher as supportive, she felt pressure to always err on the side of what her teacher would like, as opposed to having the freedom to do whatever she thought would be valuable for students. Evelyn explained “there was always that fear in the back of my head like it was her classroom. And I don’t want to offend her or she’d say well we just can’t do that.” An example was Evelyn’s desire to teach her kindergarten class about making good choices. Her mentor teacher’s response was, “they’re five, they don’t really understand the principle of choice making and we just have to tell them.”

Karen reiterated the looming feeling of being in someone else’s classroom and not feeling as if she could teach how she wanted:

I think that depends totally on the mentor teacher because like no matter what I want and I want to try, it’s her classroom. She makes the final decision on everything, which she should, because…she’s responsible for the learning that
goes on there. So even if I have these great ideas that I want to do, if she doesn’t want me to, then she has the power to say no.

This not only presented challenges for Karen in determining the content of her social studies lessons, sometimes she wasn’t able to teach them at all because the mentor teacher prioritized another subject. Karen said, “Usually it’s because the teacher wants to do something that was scheduled for another time in the day that for whatever reason she feels is more important.” The frequency of not staying on the planned schedule and not getting to teach what she wanted led Karen to think about having her own classroom and the lack of opportunities to teach what she learned in her university course. She came to this conclusion:

There’s no way I could do things the way I wanted to in my student teaching classroom. So there are definitely things I want to do when I have my own classroom. I guess what I’m trying to say is throughout this experience, I haven’t seen what we learned in that methods class.

Karen described the experience of student teaching as feeling “on her own.” The only exception was one teacher, in a different grade, who offered her support and instructional advice.

Comparatively, Leslie did not express numerous problems with her mentor teacher, but even she emphasized, “I’m still in her classroom, and I still need to follow the procedures that have been set forth even if I don’t necessarily love them.” More than anything, Leslie did not care for the repetitiveness of mundane work. She became inspired to use time in the afternoon to try a project where students could choose an explorer to research. The positive response from her students led Leslie to conclude:
If I had my own classroom I would love to do more things like that. Especially because the kids, they do practice on the worksheets, and I don’t think that’s bad per se. The worksheet has its place, but every day it just seems like ugh. They’re just kind of doing it to get it done.

Laura’s mentor teacher told her that “social studies was not his area” which she said was something she could “relate to” because it was never something she “particularly loved or was good at.” She only taught a three week unit but was able to include limited group work instead of the lecturing and note taking preferred by her mentor. This freedom was appreciated but again, Laura did not observe social studies taught well, and instead felt it was a “trial and error” method that she had to create on her own.

Lastly, Janice was disappointed with the lack of control she felt over her lessons. She began the semester by saying she wanted to get used to what her mentor teacher liked because she was “a guest in her classroom” and had to “respect that.” She quickly realized her mentor’s affinity for art based projects, which was not something she planned on doing. Janice described her situation this way:

Technically I have been teaching social studies but I have to, there are things that she wants me to get done in each unit, or products that she wants to come out. Like for display or grading, so I have to keep that in mind when I’m planning.

Regarding her mentor teacher’s expectations, Janice felt her “hands were tied” and that lessons involving meaningful learning were not part of the social studies instruction she was asked to teach. She went on to explain:

I understand that she thinks it is harder for them to come up with their own opinions. But I don’t think it’s because they don’t have them. I think they haven’t
been encouraged to share them before or encouraged to think about it. A lot of the activities that I’ve seen them do are very surface level. They don’t require a lot of critical thinking.

Like most of the participants, Janice ultimately did what her mentor teacher expected with only a few exceptions where she felt able to teach in ways that were closer to the purpose she saw for social studies. This experience led her to conclude about her mentor that “a lot of time it seemed she really didn’t want me there.”

**Collaborative Experiences**

Grade level collaboration and lesson planning were commonplace for the participants to some degree. For some, this was a weekly occurrence that involved numerous teachers. For others, it was an occasional meeting with just one other teacher. Regardless of the arrangement, the experience of collaborating for student teachers often meant being asked to teach lessons or administer tests that someone else planned. The move to standardize teaching across classrooms created ever more pressure to conform with teaching practices that were rarely viewed as truly innovative or beneficial.

Katelyn, like many participants, received mixed messages from other teachers about social studies instruction and its priority compared to other subjects. As a beginning teacher, the ideas expressed by teachers in the school sometimes made a significant impression. Her initial encounters were explained this way:

> We talk about it during our collaborative planning. A lot of teachers just brush over it like yeah you know, I don’t even really include it on my schedule. And that’s what I hear the most. I don’t even put it on my schedule. I don’t have time for it. When I teach it, I teach it.
Another collaborative meeting provided the following insight into her school’s culture:

I was at a meeting one day and there were a lot of fourth and fifth grade teachers in there. And a lot of them are sitting there going well in kindergarten they can do this and this. But in fifth grade…they have to learn to be quiet, they have to learn to suck it up. I’m sitting there going that’s what’s wrong with education. Like, suck it up and do it? That’s not working. The high school drop out rate has gone up drastically. It’s not working so something has got to change.

Evelyn’s collaborative planning experiences often reinforced the perception that she had little control as a student teacher. She recalled how that feeling evolved:

I guess I’ve learned a lot about collaborative planning and the restrictions that you can’t always teach what you want, which is frustrating. And being a student teacher I don’t have the weight and the pull that I would like to have if it were my own classroom.

Evelyn said she sometimes changed her lesson when she didn’t like what the group had planned, but also said there was “not a whole lot of difference in the classrooms.”

Apparently this was explained as a necessity in case a child was moved from one classroom to another. For the most part though, social studies was not discussed, an aspect of collaborative planning that further cemented the idea that other subjects were more important and required much more attention.

Karen recalled her mentor teacher and others saying “time and time again, whether they’re planning together or talking about things that reading and math should be the priority in first grade.” Since her time to teach social studies was in the afternoon and coincided with students being taken out of class for extra help in reading and writing,
some of Karen’s students never experienced social studies with her, and often were only
exposed to 30 minutes of social studies instruction per week. She went on to describe
what was expected of student teachers in general at her school:

   As a student teacher, we’re asked…just to get their lesson plans when they’re
   finished with them…if I’m allowed to change them, which is just getting approval
   from my mentor teacher, then I do that. Otherwise I just use the standards and
   what they have for their lesson plans.

   In contrast, Laura had a very positive impression of the teachers at her school.
   However, she was not involved in collaborative planning to the degree that others seemed
to be. She stated her school community was “great” and “they really care about these kids
and what they’re doing.” Laura added that the faculty “cared about each other” and were
very welcoming to her.

   Leslie explained that “a lot of the teachers in fourth grade have student teachers so
they have to decide what we’re doing.” This practice took the responsibility to plan
original lessons away from student teachers and instead reinforced the idea that what
needed to be done should be decided by looking at what teachers had already taught.
Leslie decided it was best just to go along with what other teachers decided she and her
cohort of student teachers should be doing. Her rationale was as follows:

   With social studies, I felt like there’s kind of a predetermined way they’re doing
things…so I just kind of went along with that. And that’s not bad or good. I just
decided to stay with the status quo mostly for the sake of trying to maintain some
sanity.
Janice found herself in a scenario where her mentor teacher would switch classes with a teacher across the hall so that one taught social studies to each group, while the other taught science. This experience impacted Janice’s views this way:

I know before this semester I didn’t really have strong feelings about group planning, and switching classes kind of across the grade. And now I really feel like I would like to keep my kids with me the whole day.

Her reasoning was that she did not enjoy planning with others, nor giving up control over the kind of instruction her students received. Unfortunately, the combination of collaborative planning along with being matched with a mentor teacher who seemed unsupportive created an unpleasant atmosphere. Janice concluded one of our interviews by saying:

This week I have become very aware of how not my classroom it is….But again, I don’t feel like it’s okay to bring up things like that. I’m working in a structure that’s not anything like what I hope my class will look like.

*Improving Social Studies Education*

An important, and perhaps necessary, objective throughout this research was listening intently to what student teachers had to say, and how they learned from their experiences. Through our many interactions, and as their time spent teaching social studies evolved, suggestions for improving the field of social studies education became a focal point of meaning. In many ways, advocacy is at the core of all of these suggestions. If social studies education can be conceived as an entity influenced by policy makers, educators, and academics, then many people and their respective institutions can potentially improve how the field operates. The participants emphasized scheduling more
time for social studies, changing current curriculum policies and standards, and
rethinking certain aspects of their teacher education program.

Scheduled Time

Given that a recurrent challenge for all the participants was a lack of time, it may
be expected that having more time would be one of the first improvements mentioned.
This simple and straightforward idea would create a much more meaningful experience
for everyone involved, according to these student teachers. Leslie wondered if she had
enough teaching experience to put forth a suggestion of what social studies would look
like in an ideal situation, but having more time only seemed fair since every other subject
received at least an hour in her classroom. When I inquired as to who might be in a
position to accomplish this, she replied, “I’m not really sure who designs the schedule,
definitely some kind of administrator, like our two principals.” The notion that someone
other than teachers would have to make these scheduling changes was prevalent.
However, some of the participants included ways for beginning educators to deal with the
issue. Katelyn put it this way:

While I totally agree that social studies is important in education, the fact remains,
until the county and the state see it that way, then this will never be a possibility.
There are not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything the county wants,
let alone work on the very few social studies requirements. For student teachers
coming in, the best advice I can give is to not get frustrated by the lack of social
studies, or time to teach it, but rather use your methods to integrate day in and day
out. It is really the only exposure some students get to social studies.
Janice was more determined about taking control over what she did and did not like, and hoped other teachers would do the same. She explained her position that outside forces should not be allowed to dominate what happened in her classroom:

There is a very big disconnect between teachers and administrators, and policy makers and local school systems. And that’s something I have continued to see. As much as outside forces or to some extent administrators determine what goes on in your classroom, at the end of the day, it’s your responsibility. And I think sometimes teachers forget that. Because you are a professional and you did go to school for this. And you have control. It’s not like you’re a pawn of the state.

Laura also felt the way her daily schedule was set up actually made learning more difficult for students. She wanted to “get away from this idea that you have to teach social studies now, reading from 11:00 to 12:00, then science from 1:00 to 2:00” and “get more to the idea of it all being interrelated, like working off of themes.” Looking back on her student teaching, Evelyn concluded that “social studies is the most neglected subject but has the potential to make the most difference in character education.”

Determining the rationale behind elevating other subjects over social studies (and science) was a mysterious process. Karen provided her thoughts on how each has its place in the development of her students’ skills and abilities:

Social studies and science are ways that we view the world and math and reading are tools that we use in the world, and so I feel like they’re more like skills whereas social studies is more like knowledge…. I mean it’s understanding too but…you can’t just know how to do social studies.
In other words, Karen felt that what passed for social studies was often just the memorization of content, despite its potential as a way to interpret to the world. As such, very little time was spent “doing” social studies where students had to use that knowledge to think about and deliberate on issues; they simply had to know a few people, places, and events. She went on to say the daily schedule should be managed better:

Have a schedule that cuts out things that are unnecessary but teachers just want to do sometimes. For instance we had morning work in our classroom which was pretty much just busy work for the kids. And that’s valuable time that was wasted.

**Policies and Standards**

Following school, district, and state policies as well as adhering to mandated curriculum standards has become a fundamental focus of public schools. This orientation to the field is particularly striking for beginning teachers. It is also true that the participants in this study still formed their own ideas of how to address this issue in ways that pushed back at being told what to do and how to do it at all times. Katelyn made her point by saying:

It has to start with the teacher. They need to say, “This isn’t working, we need to change it.” I mean easily we could change those EQs for kindergarten. Easily by saying I know you may have made up this EQ but it’s not working. I’m changing mine. But they’re so scared to go outside and say I don’t like that. I’m not doing it because I don’t want to offend you, I’m so sorry. No it’s not working for my kids, I’m gonna change it. I’m gonna make it work. You know what I mean?

Sometimes you have to make the movement happen.
She added that essential questions (EQs) did not work in kindergarten, nor did they constitute learning, primarily because the students “could not figure out the questions.” They were “too hard” and written in a way that was “not [the students’] own language. Her adamant stance was not limited to what teachers can or should do in their own classroom. She also advocated taking these issues to school administrators as those individuals who create district and state policies. Katelyn proposed the following:

I mean you can talk til you’re blue in the face to your administration, to your fellow colleagues. It’s not going to get you anywhere. You have to have, and I mean I’m still naive and young, you have the data, the proof that this is not working. And you have to go as high as you can go with it. You have to go to the state, the county, or whoever it is and never give up on it.

Whereas Katelyn felt teachers should advocate sweeping changes in the standards, Evelyn felt the best way to improve social studies was to work from with the current structure of standards and testing. She said adding social studies to the CRCT in the early grades would “put a lot of pressure on administration to value it.” She also addressed the ever present assessment measures stemming from No Child Left Behind:

The politics of No Child Left Behind [are] so reading and math focused, and I realize that’s a government enforced thing but it trickles down. Math and reading you have to pass…in order to meet AYP which is where all your funding is coming from for schools. Which is causing principals to say ok, math and reading let’s get after it. So in order for that to change, there’s going to have to be some incentive for focusing on social studies. So if AYP started including it…I feel like
principals would start valuing social studies just as much and it would become more equitable.

In her fourth grade classroom, Laura felt pressure to stick with the standards because her students were tested in social studies at the end of the year. And yet, these same guidelines she was supposed to follow created her biggest challenge. She described her dilemma as follows:

The standards would probably be the largest issue technically. But I think it’s important for us to remember, but it’s also hard to remember because there’s so much with the standards. But those are just the minimum. They’re not meant to be restrictive but since those are the things they’re going to be tested on in the end. Everybody puts so much weight on them, and at the same time they’re saying those are a minimum. It’s like well that’s what they’ve really got to know so I want to make sure they know all that before I really move on to something else.

In Laura’s view, the content of the standards wasn’t necessarily the problem, more so the sheer volume of standards she was expected to cover never seemed to leave room for her students to explore other topics. Leslie wished she had more resources to draw from in order to address the standards. Her grade level did not have enough textbooks for all the students so textbooks were rarely used. Although limited use of textbooks might be seen as a positive situation, Leslie felt she had very little information to help her teach the information and was totally reliant on whatever she could quickly find online.

Lastly, Janice again stressed resilience as a means to counter undesirable circumstances. She predicted her future in teaching would look like this:
I mean there are going to be some outside factors that I just have to work with or work around, which I tend to do. But I think part of being a teacher is standing up for your kids and letting people know this is what they need. And asking people to hold on a second and not freak out until they see the results. Which I know will be hard as a first year teacher but hopefully over time it won’t be that difficult.

*Teacher Education Programs*

The six student teachers in this study were all nearing the successful completion of their teacher education program. They had taken numerous education courses, interacted with many different instructors, fulfilled various observation and teaching requirements, and talked with their peers about their shared experiences. This journey was a collection of requirements, responsibilities, and possibilities for transformative learning. When coupled with the participants’ reflections around their own preparation, a set of ideas surfaced as particularly meaningful which were intended to improve teacher education. These ideas focused on courses taken, instructional methods, and general advice for future student teachers.

Leslie provided suggestions that she hoped could be shared through instructors preparing future groups of student teachers:

I would explain the difficulties they are going to face when trying to teach social studies. I especially felt like the time set aside for social studies was minimal, and it was difficult to teach a really good lesson in the small amount of time I was given. I was usually in a rush to just cover the material. Other advice I would offer to student teachers is to consider ways to integrate social studies into other subjects. I know in fourth grade, where the subjects are divided into set blocks of
time, it can be difficult, but there are always ways to get around the small time set aside for social studies. All the subjects are so easily interrelated that you can integrate social studies into math, reading, and writing with no problem. I would especially recommend trying to use literature as a tool for teaching social studies. Children seem to get much more interested [in literature].

Similarly, Laura’s advice applied to student teachers while also speaking to the structure of teacher education programs. Her comments were:

I would recommend just getting as much experience and seeing as much actual good lesson implementation as possible. For now, standards and high stakes testing are just a given, but teachers should focus more on good lessons, where students learn, more than standards and tests.

Karen also felt that teacher education programs should essentially forewarn their students on what to expect:

Since there are things in place in schools that are not ideal, and that teachers can often not control, it would be beneficial for teacher education programs to inform future teachers about how social studies is often done, and how they can work with what they cannot control in order to make their situations as ideal as possible.

Evelyn wanted to see an explicit effort from her instructors to motivate student teachers when she lamented, “If college professors are passionate about social studies and can provide authentic reasons for why it should be squeezed in, regardless of the difficulties, then future teachers will share in their enthusiasm.” She also felt her teacher education program should be clear with mentor teachers about the amount of time student teachers
should have to be in full control of their classes. Although some guidelines existed, Evelyn did not see those as adequate in preventing scenarios where student teachers had relatively little time actually “in charge” of a class.

In this particular teacher education program, students typically took 4 or 5 courses in math and reading, but only one methods course in social studies and science. The type and number of courses taken to prepare student teachers was tangentially mentioned by a few participants but Janice summarized these feelings in a concise way that also reflected the comments of her peers when she said:

Allocate more class time to these two neglected fields. The course progression as it stands seems to reflect testing authorities’ relative neglect of science and social studies; perhaps a grassroots shift in perspective is required from teachers and teacher educators to change this pervasive and unfortunate opinion. While I appreciated a number of my courses, the information gained from them didn’t mean much outside the framework of an actual classroom.

Lastly, some participants emphasized the importance of reflection and sharing ideas with other student teachers. While university supervisors would meet with a small group of their own student teachers a few times throughout the semester, there was no program requirement or scheduled opportunities for more frequent meetings where individuals from different schools could discuss ideas and offer support to each other. Evelyn recalled talking with her peers about classroom observations from a previous semester’s course and explained the benefits this way:

Oh my gosh it’s valuable. It’s necessary. Just because, sitting in a group we’d go around and someone would talk about something, what they found as a struggle in
their classroom, and the rest of us would be like oh yeah, we’re experiencing that too. And just knowing there are those problems, and we may not have a solution but at least we all know we’re kind of in the same boat with this behavior issue, or this teaching method. We all have the same understanding and that empathy is just encouraging.

Janice also wished she had more opportunities to interact with her peers, especially those placed at other schools, and described student teaching as “an isolating experience, especially for a college student who is used to seeing people on campus.” And Karen described reflection on one’s practice as one of the greatest benefits:

A lot of times teachers just do things just because that’s the way it’s always been done, even if it’s not a standard and it’s not important for students to know. And they’ll do those things over and over again every day, so I think it’s important to be extremely reflective on yourself and ask why you’re doing things. Even if the whole school does it that way and your teachers ever since you were little did it that way, it may not be the best thing.

Reactions to the End of Student Teaching

The last interview with each participant was conducted at the completion of their student teaching placement. As was often the case, I began our conversation by asking what this experience was like. Their responses revealed meaning as expressed by relief, missing their students, and feeling disheartened in anticipation of finding suitable teaching positions.
A common response was the expression of relief at successfully completing the semester of teaching. Evelyn said “I’m glad to be done. I’m ready to be a regular teacher now.” This feeling was echoed by Karen who explained that “it feels good to know I’m finished with my requirements for student teaching and college.” Laura expressed her relief by saying she was “glad that my part of the schooling will be done.” Janice stated she was “really happy” but “really tired” and that she was “ready for this situation to be in the past.” Other factors led to this feeling as well. This became apparent when Leslie noted that her role and responsibilities diminished considerably. She said “I’m kind of looking forward to it being over because at this point, I’m kind of bored a lot during the day. I’m just kind of observing…but I’m here all day every day without doing anything much of value.”

Along with feelings of relief, another reaction to the end of student teaching was expressed as sadness. The participants felt strong connections to their students and as a result, missed being around them on a daily basis. Katelyn said “I mean I’m sad. I don’t want to leave them, they’re my babies. You know what I mean you get so attached to them so easily.” Evelyn enjoyed her experience but also mentioned that she was “sad that it’s over.” As soon as the semester ended, Karen made plans to return to her classroom and visit the students, saying she “missed the kids a lot.” Janice, who seemed eager for the semester to end, also anticipated missing her students. Laura reflected on her time with the students more deeply and recalled how her relationship evolved over the course of a few months. She stated she would “definitely” miss them and was “sad because right
now is when I feel I’m just starting to break through to them, like they’ve really started accepting me as the teacher and they come to me for everything.” Leslie talked about her students’ reactions as well by saying:

I’ll miss my kids, and they’ve been making me cards. They’re actually working on a secret project for me; they don’t think I know about. Which is kind of funny because I see them. Which is really sweet. So I’ll miss them but I’m really bored. I won’t miss sitting there all day.

*Disheartened Anticipation*

Accompanying the emotions already described was a somewhat disheartened sense of anticipation about what the future would hold, namely with regard to finding a teaching position. Most of the participants felt their prospects of finding a suitable job were slim, yet they also found themselves wanting to apply for anything that seemed like a reasonable fit for their interests. Karen summarized her situation when she stated, “there’s not gonna be a whole lot of teaching jobs, but if I can get on the sub list around where I live, then I’ll probably end up working as much as I would full time teaching.” Evelyn described her thoughts about finding a job that did not include the difficulties she had encountered this way:

I used to be so optimistic. I realize the realities will probably still be the same.

Like a lot of the negotiation of me being a new teacher and my role in the school within the administration’s expectations and my coworkers, that kind of thing, will be something I have to face.

Similarly, Janice developed the sense that her style of teaching would not work in every school. Regarding her prospects she stated:
I know I’m going to have to work hard to find a school where teachers are treated like professionals who have some discretion over what goes on in their classroom. I’m also very much an ask forgiveness, not permission kind of person. So I realize that I’m not going to fit in with every kind of school but that’s okay with me.

For Katelyn, the process of job searching was “nerve racking” and made her last week of student teaching “horrible” because it was such a prevalent issue. Leslie also found herself “worn out” at the end and was “not as optimistic about things” as she once was.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study used a phenomenological methodology and included six participants who volunteered out of a group of approximately 60 student teachers, all from the same university teacher education program. These six participants were placed in five elementary schools, which represented three county school districts. Each worked with a different mentor teacher, and the placements reflected four separate grade levels. Interviews were conducted in four rounds, spanning the duration of their student teaching placements, along with two observations per classroom. The student teachers completed a pre-observation form ahead of these meetings that briefly described the content, activities, and purpose around their social studies instruction. Participants were asked their opinions about previous research findings as well as suggestions to improve the overall quality of social studies education via written follow up questions after successfully completing their teaching requirements.

These interactions led to seven themes becoming apparent, through which more detailed meanings emerged. Although differences certainly existed, the themes were repeated over and over by the participants when asked what their experiences were like.
Shared meanings can be seen as forming the essences of social studies teaching at the elementary level, as experienced by student teachers. The seven themes were as follows: (a) expectations and purpose in social studies; (b) personal experiences and influences; (c) adherence to state standards; (d) scheduling and time constraints; (e) relationships with mentor and grade level teachers; (f) improving social studies education; and (g) reactions to the end of student teaching.

Before the participants embarked on their semester of student teaching, different expectations surrounding the content and purpose of social studies were discussed. Although uncertainty was prevalent regarding the actual topics they would be teaching, the student teachers held specific, though not always detailed, ideas about what they hoped to accomplish. One of the greatest concerns was that mandated curriculum standards would actually pose an obstacle to accomplishing what the participants wanted to do.

Many of the personal experiences and influences described in the first round of interviews related to family members who were involved with the disciplines of social studies in some capacity, time spent in grade school social studies courses, and teachers or college professors whose approaches stood out to the participants, both for positive and negative reasons. As time passed during the semester of student teaching, however, these people and experiences grew less and less influential when compared to the state standards participants felt they had to follow.

Adherence to the Georgia Performance Standards was the predominant influence on nearly every instructional decision made by each participant, at all grade levels and in every school. This significantly limited the types of lessons student teachers would have
preferred to teach. While having the standards was sometimes viewed as beneficial for student teachers in need of direction with social studies content, pressure to continually reinforce the standards through testing and essential questions led to frustration, stress, and disappointment.

A prominent challenge of teaching social studies in elementary schools was negotiating scheduling and time constraints. All of the participants recounted the burden of not having enough time to teach what they wanted, devoting disproportionate amounts of their day to other subjects, and perhaps most troubling, feeling they had little to no control over the situation. As a result, the pattern of social studies seeming disconnected and even irrelevant to students’ lives was perpetuated further. In some cases, the participants themselves enjoyed teaching social studies less and less due to these burdens.

The relationships that formed between participants and their respective mentor teachers and their colleagues were a central aspect of the entire student teaching experience. The implications of these relationships affected a potentially wide range of daily interactions, including interpersonal cohesiveness, instruction decisions and control, and ideas around teaching and learning taken from collaborative meetings with other teachers in the same grade level. Among the findings was an acknowledgment that none of the student teachers reported any significant instances of learning about meaningful or transformative social studies instruction from their mentor teachers.

Suggestions for improving social studies education were generally brought up by the student teachers in the last round of interviews. Upon reflection, many felt the most obvious improvement was scheduling more time during the day for social studies. This was true for all but one participant, regardless of how much time they were used to.
Rethinking state standards was mentioned, but alternative curriculum ideas were not easy to formulate. Essential questions were generally viewed as unhelpful for students, and were used only because school administrators required them to be. And finally, the participants thought teacher education programs should realistically address current challenges with social studies instruction and provide more opportunities for student teachers in different schools to get together and discuss their experiences.

The participants’ reactions to the end of student teaching were grounded in relief that their hard work had been successfully completed, a sense of missing students who they taught and mentored for over three months, and the disheartened anticipation of not easily finding teaching positions in the near future. When asked what adjectives came to mind that might describe the totality of student teaching, descriptors such as chaotic, stressful, fun, and isolating were mentioned. A couple of participants mentioned substitute teaching as part of their immediate plans in an effort to earn money while familiarizing themselves with various schools and applying for full time positions. One knew that she would be enrolling in graduate school and therefore was not as worried about the current lack of teaching openings. All of the student teachers developed positive relationships with the majority of their students, a result that provided considerable motivation to continue teaching as a career, despite the many challenges.

These findings illustrate the shared ways that student teachers interact with and negotiate the multiple experiences of teaching social studies in elementary schools. A phenomenological approach helps frame these experiences as fundamental processes that are shared, in some form, by most individuals living within and through this scenario.
The next chapter returns to the original research questions and looks at how each can be understood in light of the themes and meanings previously discussed.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. Research questions for the study included the following: (a) what is it like to teach social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher? (b) what, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies? (c) what do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools? and (d) how do elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they encounter around teaching social studies?

This study included six participants who volunteered from a group of approximately 60 student teachers, all from the same university teacher education program. These six participants were placed in five elementary schools, which represented three county school districts. Each worked with a different mentor teacher, and the placements reflected four separate grade levels. The participants were interviewed on four separate occasions, for a total of 24 interviews conducted over a span of approximately 12 weeks. I transcribed every interview. The following sections will summarize findings from the study, address the original research questions through my conclusions and discussion, consider implications for practice, and make recommendations for future research.
Summary of the Findings

After multiple readings of the interview transcripts, seven themes revealed the essences of student teachers’ experiences teaching elementary level social studies. Within each theme, meanings emerged which differentiated the participants’ experiences in important ways, while forming noticeable similarities around these relationships. Table 3 identifies the themes and their respective meanings.

Table 3

*Themes and Meanings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations and purpose in social studies</td>
<td>Content, General purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experiences and influences</td>
<td>Family members and friends, Social studies instructors and courses, Classroom experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adherence to state standards</td>
<td>No separate meanings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheduling and time constraints</td>
<td>Lack of scheduled time, Balancing time with other subjects, Control of scheduling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships with mentor and grade level teachers</td>
<td>Interpersonal cohesiveness, Instructional decisions and control, Collaborative experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving social studies education</td>
<td>Scheduled time, Policies and standards, Teacher education programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions to the end of student teaching</td>
<td>Relief, Missing students, Disheartened anticipation</td>
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Conclusions and Discussion

The research questions for this study formed the framework of the following conclusions and discussion. As previously mentioned, writing through or bridling one’s ideas and questions can serve as a valuable tool for data analysis and understanding the impact of one’s own intentional relationship with a phenomenon. The following sections began as bridling journal entries after I transcribed all of the participant interviews. This exercise brought forth my ideas and assumptions around the original research questions, and explicated a reflective thought process intended to more accurately interpret and describe the research findings. By expressing and questioning my ideas in writing, I was better positioned to manipulate and revise these thoughts until deeper conclusions emerged. The resulting texts evolved over multiple writing sessions. Portions of each bridling entry are provided to illustrate this relationship.

The following sections will discuss four conclusions based on the findings of this study: (a) student teachers experience a continual process of prioritization and negotiation around elementary level social studies instruction; (b) the dominant influence on student teachers’ orientations towards elementary level social studies is their experience of the requirements and structure of student teaching; (c) purpose in social studies is generally conceived by student teachers as broad citizenship objectives but actual content coverage is tied to mandated curriculum standards; and (d) student teachers process their experiences of teaching social studies mostly through a reluctant acceptance of dominant narratives.
What is it like to teach social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher?

Student teachers experience a continual process of prioritization and negotiation around elementary level social studies instruction. From the beginning, they come into schools and face expectations already in place concerning their performance. Mentor teachers’ requirements can range from personal preferences to guidelines and policies from their school administrators. School and district administrators are often carrying out the expectations of policy makers at the state level. A culture of adherence to prescribed curriculum standards affects virtually all instructional decisions in every grade. Rather than experiencing freedom as professional educators to tailor what is taught and learned to the interests and needs of students, beginning teachers often feel quite limited in developing their own ideas, lessons, and courses.

Excerpt from Bridling Entry 1

What has this experience really been like for the student teachers? They often seem unsatisfied with what they generally accomplish. Is this primarily a matter of control, and if so, what are the chances this will change in the near future? Is this what teaching social studies looks like for everyone in elementary schools? Social studies is a low priority and when it is taught, sometimes it seems like anything passes as long as it loosely relates back to the standards. The form of education that social studies takes lends itself mostly to memorizing content. Memorized content is then used mostly to pass tests. And test taking as a life skill is virtually useless outside the walls of a classroom.

Figure 1. Excerpt from Bridling Entry 1

Participants described this experience as frustrating but found themselves eventually accepting these circumstances with only occasional and minor modifications. That social studies is often skipped or only taught for small amounts of time likely limits the dissatisfaction felt by some student teachers simply because there are so few opportunities for actual instruction. It does seem, as Tanner (2008) argued, that
elementary level social studies is no longer considered to be a core subject in the same manner as math, reading, and writing. Segall (2003) suggested that standardized testing determines what is taught or not taught, and this too seemed to be the case at virtually every grade level. Student teachers who are placed in grades 3, 4, and 5 are much more likely to have time scheduled into their days for social studies instruction. Even then, the allocation was always rotated with science and comprises less time overall during the school day than other subjects. This arrangement replicates the findings of Leming, Ellington, and Schug (2006) who found that 70% of second and fifth grade teachers spent less than 4 hours per week on social studies.

Student teachers are told by their mentors and school administrators to prioritize other subjects over social studies, and when social studies is taught, they must negotiate the subject using topics and ideas that are intentionally aligned with the content of state standards. More often than not, these standards and a lack of scheduled time leave very little room to cover any other material. Edwards and Protheroe (2001) noted the significant effect this socialization process has on student teachers and the extent to which they also become desensitized to prevailing narratives concerning which subjects are most important. In this way, what should be an opportunity to explore all that social studies might offer devolves into what Dewey (1938) called a miseducative experience that limits further growth and understandings.

Currently, teachers at all elementary grade levels have limited control over the content they cover and are pressured to prepare students for tests above all other objectives. This way of being and teaching is quickly learned by student teachers who are eager to succeed at their placement sites and want to be seen as cooperative colleagues.
The demand to conform to these expectations is pervasive. Although student teachers often have creative and meaningful ideas around social studies instruction, this potential is only minimally realized in most school settings. As a result, the cycle of not teaching social studies at a level on par with other subjects is replicated over and over. All who are involved in education policy, curriculum, and assessment decisions must recognize these lost opportunities if they are ever expected to improve. Student teachers may not feel much agency, but change is still possible through collective action.

*What, if any, life experiences do student teachers feel shape their orientations towards teaching social studies?*

The dominant influence on student teachers’ orientations towards elementary level social studies is their experience of the requirements and structure of student teaching. This conclusion parallels similar studies (Goodlad, 1990; Grossman 1990; Ross, 1986) which found that student teachers viewed their field experiences to be the most influential aspect of their teacher preparation programs. A related finding is that student teachers in this study generally had difficulty recalling specific instructional methods and social studies content covered in their university coursework. However, some participants were still appreciative of the general ideas they took from those courses, and felt they had at least been exposed to a conception of social studies that represented thoughtful and careful consideration of its potential in schools.

Goodman and Adler (1985) suggested more research was needed on all that shapes student teachers’ orientations towards social studies. There may be many possibilities, but teachers who work in schools, judged primarily through mandated curriculum standards and tests, develop a pattern of continually responding to these
limiting demands. As Hass and Laughlin (2001) found, the broader and more flexible social studies themes developed by organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) are virtually ignored or unknown by student and mentor teachers alike. In most cases, it seems the experience of student teaching has an overall effect of negating almost any competing orientation around the purpose of elementary level social studies.

**Excerpt from Bridling Entry 2**

The student teachers usually remember one relative or teacher who really enjoyed social studies or influenced their ideas in some form. How much this translated into their lessons is unclear though. Could it be these people influenced the participants’ ideas about subjects or bodies of knowledge generally associated with social studies, but teaching social studies is almost unrelated to these basic interests and orientations? It seems like the most dominant life experience that shaped their orientations was student teaching itself, and the adherence to state curriculum standards with very little time and resources.

*Figure 2. Excerpt from Bridling Entry 2*

Each of the participants in this study named one or two individuals, usually a family member or past instructor, who exuded a passion for one or more areas of social studies. While these individuals stood out to the participants in positive ways, it is worth noting that each student teacher would have experienced many other social studies instructors throughout their schooling careers, and most were neither favorably nor remembered at all. Rather than leaving those courses with a strong interest and appreciation for current events, history, geography, politics, human rights, etc., many participants reported that social studies was mostly lecture based and required rote memorization throughout middle and high school. To some degree, it seemed that participants’ orientations towards social studies were, in fact, influenced by other
individuals and courses taken as students. However, their orientations were only minimally influential on most social studies instructional decisions while in the classroom. This lack of academic freedom and general neglect of social studies in schools have been greatly impacted by current requirements and interpretations of No Child Left Behind (Chapin, 2006).

In all of the previous examples, multiple opportunities exist for learning through life experiences. Jarvis (2006) theorized that we learn from our experience of the world more so than what is directly taught. In a related sense, Lortie (1975) labeled the time beginning teachers spend as students as an apprenticeship of observation. To the extent these depictions are accurate, the participants of this study were likely exposed to a lot of poor social studies instruction which provided few examples of transformative and worthwhile teaching. In essence, their experiences were often interpreted as how not to teach social studies. Unfortunately, the participants did not report learning about or observing quality social studies instruction from their mentor teachers either.

What do student teachers see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools?

Purpose in social studies is generally conceived by student teachers as broad citizenship objectives but actual content coverage is tied to mandated curriculum standards. Participants in this study expressed purpose in terms of wanting their students to function as democratic citizens, understand choices and their consequences, care about other people, and learn U.S. history along with American values. What was taught during the observed lessons for this study most closely resembled the citizenship transmission model (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977) of social studies. In response to the categories Goodman and Adler (1985) set forth, social studies as human relations, citizenship, and
social action were chosen by participants as potential purposes. In every classroom, however, these six student teachers felt they were unable to attain their instructional objectives to the degree they would have preferred. Often, their ideas of purpose were not realized at all. And to this end, Goodman and Adler may have correctly observed that conceptions of social studies from official organizations and academic writers rarely form the basis for what teachers do in their classrooms. Much of this predicament may relate to the limited time social studies receives in elementary schools as well as the limited social studies preparation most elementary educators receive in teacher preparation programs.

Excerpt from Bridling Entry 3

The most common expression I’ve heard is a desire for students to be good citizens who have a basic understanding of society. These ideas seem both simple and profound to me. However, the participants have not provided details about what this means or how to use social studies for this purpose given the instructional realities they face every day. Maybe if they felt the freedom to imagine and implement their own lesson topics, more time would be devoted to purpose.

Figure 3. Excerpt from Bridling Entry 3

Although making informed decisions for the public good is often cited as a primary purpose of teaching social studies (NCSS, 1994), only one observed lesson came close to this objective. In this example, students were asked to think of new or existing laws they felt were important and write their government representative(s) regarding that legislation. Aside from this one instance, none of the observed lessons included making decisions about important social issues. A great opportunity for this type of instruction exists daily with various events covered in the news. Some news outlets even create stories that are specifically meant for young children. However, this was simply not a part of the curriculum. Another prominent way of framing elementary level social studies in
current literature is through the expanding communities model, which is often attributed to Hanna (1966). While participants sometimes taught their students about community helpers and landforms of different sizes, the purpose behind this model that Hanna described was virtually unseen, especially in relation to current distributions of basic needs throughout the world.

Despite what seemed to be a genuine desire to attain meaningful objectives through social studies (i.e. citizenship education, critical inquiry), student teachers in this study ultimately made curricular decisions that upheld an adherence to state standards. By doing this, they were usually unable to create lessons that came closer to meeting their stated visions of what social studies ought to achieve. Without an opportunity to observe instruction that was completely free of outside requirements or hindrances, it is difficult to know what social studies would look like in these same classrooms if student teachers truly had the freedom to teach anything they wanted. While it may be easy for teachers to say what would occur if only the standards and other obstacles did not get in the way, actually creating a classroom where students internalize democratic principles of fairness, equality of opportunity, civic participation, etc. is substantially difficult. Within their efforts however, the student teachers achieved a purpose unrelated to social studies per se, which was doing whatever was needed to meet curriculum benchmarks, and helping students pass their tests to move on to the next grade. This concern for the students’ well being ultimately shaped the participants’ purpose in ways that were not linked to social studies as a source of inquiry about the world. Rather, the participants were more concerned with their students passing high stakes tests and meeting other curriculum expectations which ultimately determined their success in the current school system. In
the end, student teachers wanted their students to be successful in school as a means to
create other opportunities in their lives, even if the path to that success meant abandoning
what they felt meaningful social studies instruction could achieve.

*How do elementary student teachers process the concerns, ideas, and experiences they
encounter around teaching social studies?*

Student teachers process their experiences of teaching social studies mostly
through a reluctant acceptance of dominant narratives. By this, I mean certain ideas about
social studies tend to be regularly repeated among teachers, and that repetition creates a
sense of inevitability that is often adopted by those who are new to the field. Examples of
these narratives include: (a) social studies is not as important for students to learn as other
subjects; (b) teachers who go beyond the allotted time for social studies are not following
the rules; (c) teachers who do not cover the required state standards may lose their jobs;
and (d) instruction that does not prepare students to pass mandated tests is not useful.
These statements were characterized by participants in this study as fairly common and
largely unquestioned within their school’s culture. In order to be perceived as cooperative
and responsible, student teachers regularly felt they had to adopt these same stances on
social studies, even if they disagreed with the premises all together.

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**Excerpt from Bridling Entry 4**

Most of the student teachers seem to be accepting things as they are with only minor
modifications to their overall lessons and time spent teaching social studies. When an opportunity
was found or created for topics of more interest, student teachers and their students enjoyed it.
Why is this potential and creative desire not valued any more than what I’m seeing? How could
so many people in education know this isn’t working and yet the cycle just perpetuates itself?

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*Figure 4. Excerpt from Bridling Entry 4*
Various strategies and perspectives were developed by the student teachers to handle these challenges, all of which eventually included some form of acceptance. Evelyn said the way to deal with these prevailing ideas is just to “pick your battles.” She remembered not wanting to teach her students that Christopher Columbus discovered America, but at her mentor teacher’s urging, she reluctantly chose to say he was “one of the first people to discover it.” Janice worried that her desire to emphasize social justice would seem intimidating, or her mentor teacher “would not trust her” to venture outside the standards with topics of this nature. She decided that she would have to “ask for forgiveness [and] not permission” in order to try out the lessons she wanted to teach. In the end, Janice felt unsuccessful in meeting her goals for social studies, but reassured herself by saying she was “not dependent on the opinions that are formed” by her mentor teacher. However, having to face these obstacles became an accepted part of teaching at her school. Leslie mentioned that in talking with her peers, they had all “agreed that it seems like social studies is kind of on the back burner.” When asked if there had been any times when it was difficult to decide what to teach, Katelyn responded, “No, cause I have those standards.” Although she wanted to expand her lessons, in one example to include information about the September 11th attacks, she decided it would be best to “stick with the standards” and not risk repercussions from parents or teachers.

Another frequent challenge for the participants was a lack of social studies resources. Some classrooms had no textbooks, or not enough for every child to get their own copy. And while this was accepted as part of student teaching, all of the participants found ways to work around that limitation, either by bringing in materials from their local libraries or just searching for information online and using that in place of textbooks.
Overall, the student teachers were creative and did their best with what they had.

However, it was common for them to feel they had no real power over their situations. As Katelyn noted, “I’m just starting to teach. So I feel like nobody [will] listen to me.”

And finally, participants quickly learned that frequent testing would be a requirement for them and their students. To accept this while trying to encourage and comfort children who were emotionally drained was difficult. Laura explained how she related to her students’ feelings:

I see how much they hate it….I have kids who know it, I know they know it.

But…they’re just sick of tests. So they don’t care if they answer the questions because they just don’t care. They don’t want to take the tests any more.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this research point to a significant and unfulfilled need in elementary schools and society. People of all ages make ethical choices through their individual actions and support of various public issues on a regular, if not daily, basis. As young learners and developing citizens, social studies students deserve instructional opportunities that encourage reflection on their moral and social positioning. These individual orientations are necessary in fostering a public commitment to justice and should begin at the earliest levels of education. Beginning teachers need the resources and freedom to create social studies lessons where decisions about fairness and equality can occupy a prominent focus in their instruction. Curriculum choices must include a concern for social problems and their impacts on individuals as well as society. A system of instruction which teaches deliberation within social studies education stands the greatest chance of producing citizens who possess a sense of belonging, find meaning in
their social contributions, and display the willingness to support a social structure which protects basic human rights. Rather than viewing social studies education as a passive acceptance and memorization of unchanging causal relationships and events, students involved in a deliberation of democratic concepts and meanings are better equipped to evaluate these systemic relationships and determine for themselves how ideas around the nature of society evolve, change, and constitute various forms of thinking. When elementary school students are thoughtfully exposed to the reasons why all people deserve to be treated fairly and with respect, they begin to experience the most valuable understandings social studies has to offer.

The participants in this study felt their students were capable of handling more advanced content that what was generally included in the state standards. As students mature, they can grapple with more and more complex ideas. For example, rather than accepting the dichotomous construct of liberal and conservative allegiances, students might begin to question how this way of describing political values ever came into existence. Young students can be taught to focus on fairness, a concept that most become interested in at a very early age, and learn about its application in a multitude of individual and collective ways. An orientation towards understanding the development of ideas then leads to reformulations of knowledge and in this example, might lead a social studies student to ask why political conversations are not normally framed in terms of fairness rather than categories that possess no inherent moral value.

Effectively applying deliberative skills to social dilemmas in order to form principles of justice is a fundamental guideline for upholding democratic political systems. However, simply advocating an undefined and inconsistent version of
democracy can lead to very different interpretations and results. Even worse, teaching children to be blindly obedient, rather than enabling them to think about universal virtues that transcend political affiliations, is a form of harmful indoctrination. Teaching students to care about social dilemmas presents unique challenges that traditional, teacher-centered instruction cannot fully address. Current curriculum standards tied to high stakes testing only exacerbate the problem.

Although some of these challenges may seem widely recognized to those administrators and teachers who are experiencing the day-to-day pressures of schools, only recently have politicians and those involved with educational policy begun to understand how significant and damaging this educational doctrine has become. Hopefully this situation is changing. In a town hall meeting, President Barack Obama (2011) had this to say about the current state of education:

We have piled a lot of standardized tests on our kids. Now, there’s nothing wrong with a standardized test being given occasionally just to give a baseline of where kids are at….Too often what we've been doing is using these tests to punish students or to, in some cases, punish schools….One thing I never want to see happen is schools that are just teaching to the test. Because then you're not learning about the world….All you're learning about is how to fill out a little bubble on an exam and the little tricks that you need to do in order to take a test. And that's not going to make education interesting to you.

Standardized tests covering basic reading, writing, and math skills potentially provide valuable information that ideally helps schools’ efforts to teach all children. However, high stakes tests that often require the memorization of random social studies content and
are tied to student and teacher promotion or worse, school funding, have an entirely different effect on schools. Instead of perpetuating this cycle, educators and policy creators at all levels should change the way social studies is conceived, taught, and assessed. At the classroom level, teachers who understand their practice as a moral activity should integrate content with value dilemmas that are relevant to students' lives.

In fact, a critical need in every subject under the umbrella of social studies is the ability to prioritize competing claims of justice. Multiple opportunities exist every day for students to grapple with real issues that affect them and their communities, but most content standards do not address these problems. Rather, the model of social studies most often followed in public elementary schools is one where content is usually learned to pass a test and is forgotten soon afterward.

Teacher education programs should emphasize the connections among social studies, human rights, and universal justice when training prospective teachers. The research findings here suggest that a significant need exists for student teachers to be equipped with adequate resources and practiced at developing lesson plans that match their visions of social studies prior to beginning the student teaching experience. For example, when teaching geography, we might focus, as Hanna (1966) did, on the lack of access that people in the world have to natural resources based arbitrarily on where they are born. When teaching history of any kind, prospective teachers might be encouraged to focus on the decisions made by political leaders and their constituents by examining the extent to which those decisions created and sustained a just society. When teaching about institutional governance, we might evaluate which political systems uphold the most extensive scheme of basic liberties and human rights imaginable (Rawls, 1971). In
addition, those in teacher education should recognize the powerful influence of mandated curriculum standards and their corresponding tests. The most advanced ideas of what social studies might accomplish can be easily discarded by teachers when a completely different vision of the field is enforced at every grade level. In order for social studies education to realize its full potential, significant changes in curriculum, testing, and daily school schedules need to occur.

The ability to achieve an egalitarian society relies heavily on the collaboration of citizens with diverse political and moral conceptions. Deficiencies in this regard may not stem as much from a lack of opportunity to provide students with this experience as much as competing interests that largely prevent these goals. Rather than social studies serving as a medium for memorizing historical narratives and basic facts which are easily found and do not require memorization, a focus on conceptual understandings and social issues can provide young learners with a sense of justice, and the willingness to engage in meaningful discussions around democratic action. Unless students are provided with opportunities to understand and discuss problems in their communities and the world, they will only be able to offer limited help imagining solutions. When a curriculum that focuses on principles of fairness and justice is integrated into all aspects of elementary social studies, students will begin to understand how their own rights are inextricably bound to the human rights of all people.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to understand student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. A phenomenological approach necessitated an open and questioning perspective as a means for me to understand and articulate the
participants’ experiences. This type of research is well suited for studying many aspects of education, and was utilized here to illustrate an unfortunate and systemic phenomenon. In an effort to allow the findings of this study to resonate clearly with anyone interested in the potential of elementary level social studies, I chose phenomenology both for its theoretical and methodological implications. By that, I mean phenomenology seeks to reveal fundamental essences of what experiences are like and what it means to live through those same experiences. This simply stated objective is philosophically complex, yet it provided a practical framework that was well suited for exploring this phenomenon. Different research methodologies or theoretical perspectives might yield equally engaging results. Based on those possibilities, I have six recommendations for future studies to investigate variations of this important topic.

Since this study looked at student teachers’ experiences in elementary schools, one alternative would be looking into social studies instruction at the middle and high school levels. The expectation of adhering to state standards may be quite similar, as well as other themes such as forming relationships with mentor and grade level teachers. However, one significant difference may be the amount of scheduled time social studies receives, especially at the high school level. In most cases, high school social studies courses are taught every day. It remains to be seen whether more time would translate into teachers feeling less hindered by mandated content standards and standardized tests.

A second variation on this research would be an investigation of student teachers’ experiences around other subject areas at the elementary level. All of the participants in this study noted that math, reading, and writing received significantly more time than social studies and science, both in their teacher preparation programs as well as the
schools where they were placed. One might begin by asking what these experiences are like, and then consider the extent to which student teachers see the need for this emphasis in their daily schedules. The degree to which student teachers feel they can teach meaningful lessons using their own ideas in math, reading, and writing would be another avenue to explore. Lastly, it would be interesting to know if beginning teachers feel time lost in these areas is more, less, or equally important as that in science and social studies.

Just as understanding student teachers’ experiences is important, another alternative would be studying first year teachers’ experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. Perhaps the unique situation of being a student teacher fundamentally changes the essences of social studies instruction in ways that are minimally seen afterward. The participants of this study looked forward to having their own classrooms, in part so they would have more control over instructional decisions. However it may be the case that most teachers, regardless of their years of experience, are under similar pressures to teach within certain frameworks that greatly determine the overall experience of teaching elementary level social studies.

Current teachers, who have been in education prior to mandated testing and standards, possess a unique perspective on the evolution of curriculum reform and school cultures. This group potentially understands the ways teaching has changed, for better or worse, in ways that few do. One of the differences between most current student teachers in public schools and individuals in this category is that current student teachers have likely never experienced teaching or learning in a school atmosphere significantly different from what they currently see. By this, I simply mean that high stakes testing and the strong emphasis on strictly adhering to mandated curriculum standards has only
gained prominence in the last 10 to 15 years. Additionally, teachers with more experience may have developed coping skills that allow them to negotiate recent reforms in ways that preserve their autonomy. If so, these adaptations could be shared with beginning teachers to avoid some of the problems seen by participants in this study.

A fifth variation related to this study would be researching the lived experiences of elementary level students who are learning about social studies. On more than one occasion, participants in this study noted how much their students seemed to enjoy social studies and science during those times where teachers or students could choose topics of their own interest. However, when social studies instruction consisted mainly of lectures and bookwork aligned with state standards, neither teachers nor students seemed to enjoy their experiences. If social studies is at all supposed to create active citizens who understand social systems and seek to improve them when necessary, then regardless of the content needed to guide students in this direction, an interesting question would be whether young adults feel prepared to do just this upon leaving school or graduating.

Lastly, any number of theoretical perspectives or variations in methodology could alter the focus and means through which we understand student teachers’ experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. To some extent similarities exist across all forms of qualitative research, and as stated before, a phenomenological approach is not intended to compete with other ways of knowing and researching topics of interest. We could utilize critical, feminist, postmodern, or many other lenses to understand and talk about a phenomenon. We could survey hundreds of student teachers, conduct a narrative analysis, use grounded theory, or create some other combination of methodologies that seems best
suited to answer our questions. All of these attempts to describe and interpret the worlds around us potentially add substance and meaning to our understandings.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand student teachers’ lived experiences of teaching elementary level social studies. I completed four in depth interviews and two classroom observations with each of the six participants. Through a phenomenological analysis of 24 transcripts, and responses to two pre-observation forms as well as one set of follow up questions, I identified seven main themes of this experience. These themes provided four conclusions: (a) student teachers experience a continual process of prioritization and negotiation around elementary level social studies instruction; (b) the dominant influence on student teachers’ orientations towards elementary level social studies is their experience of the requirements and structure of student teaching; (c) purpose in social studies is generally conceived by student teachers as broad citizenship objectives but actual content coverage is tied to mandated curriculum standards; and (d) student teachers process their experiences of teaching social studies mostly through a reluctant acceptance of dominant narratives. In addition, theoretical and practical implications of this study were discussed. Theoretically, this research illuminated the experience of learning to teach elementary level social studies within the current educational focus on mandated standards and testing. Practically, it provided meaningful suggestions on ways to improve social studies education. Lastly, I discussed six variations on this study to consider for future research.

In short, the role of social studies education at any level cannot, nor should it, be limited to the pedagogy of classroom teaching alone. If an argument can be made that all
people deserve basic human rights, then the movement towards this realization can begin with classroom instruction, but it must also include a commitment to changing the way in which students and teachers are allowed to operate within the domain of public education. The student teachers in this study clearly demonstrated when an imbalance of control over curriculum standards rests in the hands of people whose decisions do not reflect an explicit concern for teaching about justice, the very nature of what social studies should be is never fully realized. This lack of attention towards understanding basic human rights necessitates action beyond the walls of a classroom. Solutions might include political activism in the form of organized efforts towards curriculum and policy changes, running for state and local school boards, or deciding to work within instead of on the periphery of a state department of education. Perhaps then, social studies education as an avenue to understand the world and change it when needed will find its place within a society concerned for the public good.
References


Dear UGA Student,

My name is Daniel Byrd and I am a doctoral student in the department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at UGA. You received this handout because you will complete your student teaching during this fall semester and may be eligible to participate in my dissertation research. I am interested in speaking with student teachers about their experiences teaching social studies. In particular, I am interested in all that influences your orientation to the subject(s), your decisions about what to teach, and what you see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools.

For your participation, you would receive the following benefits:

- **Research participation experience which can be included in your resume and mentioned to future employers**
- **The opportunity to improve your classroom instruction through participation in the study**
- Participation in the study would entail agreeing to an initial interview, two observations, and a final interview over the course of your student teaching semester. Prior to each observation, you would be asked to fill out a brief (5 questions) form about your intended social studies lesson. After each observation, you would participate in an interview with me to discuss various aspects regarding your experiences teaching. Following each post-observation interview, you would be asked to answer a few questions via email about these same issues.

**A $50 gift card which can be used in any store, restaurant, etc. (example: VISA, AMEX card) upon the conclusion of the final interview**

Interviews will be totally private and confidential. They have to be tape-recorded for transcription, but the tape will be destroyed after the research is complete. Naturally, names and any other identifying information will be removed from the transcripts, and pseudonyms will be used in my report.

The study is entitled “Teaching Social Studies in Elementary Schools: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Student Teachers.” If you are interested in this study, please call me (Daniel Byrd) at 678-378-2296 or email me at dbyrd@uga.edu. Please provide your contact information when you call or email. Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you!
Appendix B
Pre-Screening Interview

Thank you for contacting me about my study, “Teaching Social Studies in Elementary Schools: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Student Teachers.” Before I begin the screening, I would like to tell you a little about my research. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of student teachers in elementary schools who are teaching social studies. I am interested in what influences your instructional decisions, what you feel is important to teach, and what you see as the purpose of social studies in elementary schools. In a moment I will explain further what is required of participants in this study.

Would you like to continue with the screening? The screening will take about 10 minutes. I will ask you about your student teaching placement and your teacher preparation. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or are uncomfortable answering, and you may stop at any time. Your participation is voluntary.

Your answers will be confidential. No one will know your answers except for the research team. If you do not participate in the study, your pre-screening information will be destroyed. If you do qualify for the research, decide to participate, and sign the research informed consent form, your screening answers will be kept in a locked cabinet located in a locked office.

Would you like to continue with the screening? (If no, thank the individual and hang up) (If yes, continue with the screening)

- What is your full name?
- What school have you been placed in for student teaching?
- Who was the instructor for your elementary social studies course at UGA?
- Are you willing to participate in an initial interview prior to any school observations?
- Are you willing to participate in 2 observations during your student teaching?
- Are you willing to fill out a 5 question form about your lesson prior to each observation?
- Are you willing to participate in a 1 hour interview after each observation?
- Are you willing to answer a few questions via email after each interview?
- Are you willing to participate in a final interview after your teaching concludes?
- How can I contact you in the future for further participation?

Thank you for answering the screening questions. (Indicate whether the person is eligible, requires additional screening, or is not eligible and explain why.) Do you have any questions about the screening or the research? I am going to give you a couple of telephone numbers to call if you have any questions later. Do you have a pen? If you have questions about the research screening, you may call me, Daniel Byrd at 678.378.2296 and I will answer your questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, please call the UGA Human Subjects at 706.542.3199 Thank you again for your willingness to answer my questions.
Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

I, _________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled "TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT TEACHERS" conducted by Daniel Byrd from the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia (542-4244) under the direction of Dr. Todd Dinkelman, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia (542-4244). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to better understand the phenomenon of teaching social studies in elementary schools as a student teacher. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) Participate in an initial tape recorded interview prior to any classroom observations.
2) Allow the researcher to observe my classroom instruction on two (2) occasions during my student teaching semester.
3) Fill out a five (5) question pre-observation form prior to each observation.
4) Participate in a post-observation tape recorded interview for about an hour after each observation.
5) Answer a few follow up questions via email after each interview.
6) Participate in a final tape recorded interview after student teaching concludes.

The benefits for me are this provides an opportunity to reflect on my own work in education and the potential impact my social studies instruction has on elementary school students. The researcher also hopes to learn more about what influences the decisions student teachers make around social studies instruction in public elementary schools, in order to design teacher preparation courses which address those factors and use them to better prepare future teachers for the diverse students they will teach.

No foreseeable risks are expected for this research participation.

I will receive a $50 gift card upon completion of the final interview.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. I will be assigned a pseudonym (fake name) on the interview transcripts and in the final research findings.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

__________________________________________  ____________________________  ________
Name of Researcher  Signature  Date

Telephone: _______________  Email: _______________________________________

__________________________________________  ____________________________  ________
Name of Participant  Signature  Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
Appendix D
Initial Interview Protocol

Questions about what it is like to teach social studies in elementary schools:

1. What do you anticipate it will be like to teach social studies?
   a. Have you received any instructions or directives on how/what to teach?
   b. Are there any specific curricular materials you plan to use?

Questions about life experiences influencing orientations towards teaching social studies:

1. Are there any challenges you anticipate that are specific to teaching social studies?
   a. How will you decide what to do?
2. What has your own experience as a student been with social studies (likes/dislikes)?
3. To what extent do you feel prepared to teach social studies?
   a. To what extent do you feel any classes you have taken prepared you?
   b. Are there any people, events, or other experiences that you feel will affect your instruction and decisions about what and how to teach social studies?

Questions about the broader purpose of teaching social studies:

1. What do you see as the purpose of teaching social studies in elementary schools?
   a. To what extent do you think your decisions will be guided by this sense of purpose?
2. What knowledge, understandings, and concepts do you feel are important to teach?
3. Do you want your instruction to affect student’s lives? If so, in what ways?
Appendix E
Pre-Observation Form

1) Please describe the current unit of study (if applicable) and how today’s lesson fits within that unit.

2) Briefly describe the instructional methods and activities you have planned.

3) Briefly describe what you hope students will learn from this lesson and what you hope to accomplish with them. Why is this important?

4) What assumptions do you have about teaching this lesson to these students? What, if any, challenges do you anticipate?

5) What, if any, personal opinions, beliefs, or life experiences affect the way you will approach teaching this lesson?
Appendix F
Post-Observation/Final Interview Protocol

Questions about what it is like to teach social studies in elementary schools:
1. What is it like to teach elementary social studies?
   a. How much time do you teach it each week?
   b. What curricular materials are usually used?
   c. What aspects do you enjoy?
   d. What aspects do you not enjoy?

Questions about orientations towards teaching social studies:
2. Can you talk about times where you made decisions about teaching social studies?
   a. How do you decide what to do?
   b. Were there ever any difficult social studies curricular decisions?
   c. What do you feel influenced those decisions?
   d. Can you provide some examples?

Questions about the broader purpose of teaching social studies:
1. What do you see as the purpose of teaching social studies in elementary schools?
   a. To what extent are your decisions guided by this sense of purpose?
   b. To what extent are you able to accomplish this purpose in your instruction?
2. What knowledge, understandings, and concepts do you feel are important to teach?
3. Do you want your instruction to affect student’s lives? If so, in what ways?

Questions about processing concerns, ideas, and experiences around teaching social studies:
1. Can you tell me how you go about making instructional decisions?
   a. Have you experienced any concerns or tensions when making these decisions?
   b. How do you handle or resolve problems regarding what and how social studies should be taught?
2. Can you give me some examples where your views about teaching social studies were different from what or how you were supposed to teach?
Appendix G
Additional Research Questions

Please read each passage and respond based on your own experiences. Thank you!

1- In a study of 1,016 classrooms, Goodlad (1990) found that student teachers viewed their field experiences and student teaching as the “most effective and useful components of their preparation programs” (p. 217). Nearly all of these same student teachers had “great difficulty recalling the substance of their foundations courses” (p. 215). When asked to rate the perceived contribution of each course to their future success as a teacher on a 7 point scale, the average means were 3.8 for social foundations courses, 4.9 for educational psychology, 5.2 for general methods courses, 5.7 for special methods courses, 6.0 for field experiences, and 6.7 for student teaching” (p. 247). From this study, Goodlad concluded that many teacher educators value the study of education, reflective practice, and relevant theories, whereas most student teachers judge the value of what they encounter on “grounds of perceived practicality” (p. 224). To what extent has your experience been similar to the participants in Goodlad’s study?

2- Teacher educators face a considerable challenge when structuring what is often just one course that is supposed to convey the most important aspects of teaching social studies at the elementary level. To complicate matters further, most of the teacher educator books and articles dealing with this issue seem to be at odds with those who author the state standards which most teachers are expected to follow. However, the influence of standards and high stakes testing often shifts the balance of power towards those who make educational policy and away from university teacher education programs and the body of literature this community produces. Teacher education programs must actively address these problems if their intent is to counter current challenges and contradictions between competing visions of social studies. What advice would you give to a teacher education program to better prepare student teachers for teaching social studies in elementary schools?

3- Goodman and Adler (1985) studied 16 elementary preservice teachers and formulated the following categories representing the ways in which these teachers viewed social studies: (a) as a non-subject; (b) as human relations; (c) as citizenship; (d) as school knowledge; (e) as the great connection; and (f) as social action. The authors suggested that more research is needed which investigates how these perspectives develop, possibly from conceptions of social studies stemming from childhood experiences, significant individuals such as family members, cooperating teachers, university instructors, and social forces or demands outside the classroom. Do any of these categories reflect your own perspective? What, if any, factors have significantly influenced the development of your views? To what degree do state standards supersede all other potential influences?
Kindergarten

SYMBOLS OF AMERICA
In kindergarten, the students begin to understand the foundations of the social studies strands: history, geography, government, and economics. Students begin their introduction to United States history through the study of important American holidays and symbols. Basic concepts of cultural and physical geography are presented. Civics provides students with an introduction to rules and character traits of good citizens. Basic economic concepts are also introduced.

Historical Understandings
SSKH1 The student will identify the purpose of national holidays and describe the people or events celebrated.
   a. Labor Day
   b. Columbus Day (Christopher Columbus)
   c. Veterans Day
   d. Thanksgiving Day
   e. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
   f. Presidents Day (George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and the current President)
   g. Memorial Day
   h. Flag Day
   i. Independence Day

SSKH2 The student will identify important American symbols and explain their meaning.
   a. The national and state flags (United States and Georgia flags)
   b. The bald eagle
   c. The Statue of Liberty
   d. Lincoln Memorial
   e. Washington Monument
   f. White House
   g. Pledge of Allegiance
   h. Star Spangled Banner
SSKH3 The student will correctly use words and phrases related to chronology and time to explain how things change.

a. Now, long ago
b. Before, after
c. Morning, afternoon, night
d. Today, tomorrow, yesterday
e. First, last, next
f. Day, week, month, year
g. Past, present, future

Geographic Understandings

SSKG1 The student will describe American culture by explaining diverse community and family celebrations and customs.

SSKG2 The student will explain that a map is a drawing of a place and a globe is a model of the Earth.

a. Differentiate land and water features on simple maps and globes.
b. Explain that maps and globes show a view from above.
c. Explain that maps and globes show features in a smaller size.

SSKG3 The student will state the street address, city, county, state, nation, and continent in which he or she lives.

Government/Civic Understandings

SSKCG1 The student will demonstrate an understanding of good citizenship.

a. Explain how rules are made and why.
b. Explain why rules should be followed.

SSKCG2 The student will retell stories that illustrate positive character traits and will explain how the people in the stories show the qualities of honesty, patriotism, loyalty, courtesy, respect, truth, pride, self-control, moderation, and accomplishment.

Economic Understandings

SSKE1 The student will describe the work that people do (police officer, fire fighter, soldier, mail carrier, baker, farmer, doctor, and teacher).

SSKE2 The student will explain that people earn income by exchanging their human resources (physical or mental work) for wages or salaries.

SSKE3 The student will explain how money is used to purchase goods and services.

a. Distinguish goods from services.
b. Identify various forms of U.S. money (coins, currency).

SSKE4 The student will explain that people must make choices because they cannot have everything they want.
Grade One

AMERICAN HEROES
In the first grade, students continue their introduction to United States history through the study of selected historical figures. In the history strand, students study the important contributions each historical person made. In the geography strand, students learn about where these historical people lived and explore important basic geographic concepts. The civics strand provides a study of the positive character traits exhibited by these important historical figures. The economics strand continues the introduction of basic economic concepts.

Historical Understandings

SS1H1 The student will read about and describe the life of historical figures in American history.

a. Identify the contributions made by these figures: Benjamin Franklin (inventor/author/statesman), Thomas Jefferson (Declaration of Independence), Meriwether Lewis and William Clark with Sacagawea (exploration), Harriet Tubman (Underground Railroad), Theodore Roosevelt (National Parks and the environment), George Washington Carver (science).

b. Describe how everyday life of these historical figures is similar to and different from everyday life in the present (food, clothing, homes, transportation, communication, recreation).

SS1H2 The student will read or listen to American folktales and explain how they characterize our national heritage. The study will include John Henry, Johnny Appleseed, Davy Crockett, Paul Bunyan, and Annie Oakley.

Geographic Understandings

SS1G1 The student will describe the cultural and geographic systems associated with the historical figures in SS1H1a.

SS1G2 The student will identify and locate his/her city, county, state, nation, and continent on a simple map or a globe.

SS1G3 The student will locate major topographical features of the earth’s surface.

a. Locate all of the continents: North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Antarctica, and Australia.

b. Locate the major oceans: Arctic, Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian.

c. Identify and describe landforms (mountains, deserts, valleys, plains, plateaus, and coasts).
Government/Civic Understandings
SS1CG1 The student will describe how the historical figures in SS1H1a display positive character traits of fairness, respect for others, respect for the environment, conservation, courage, equality, tolerance, perseverance, and commitment.

SS1CG2 The student will explain the meaning of the patriotic words to America (My Country ‘Tis of Thee) and America the Beautiful. Economic Understandings

SS1E1 The student will identify goods that people make and services that people provide for each other.

SS1E2 The student will explain that people have to make choices about goods and services because of scarcity.

SS1E3 The student will describe how people are both producers and consumers.

SS1E4 The student will describe the costs and benefits of personal spending and saving choices.
Grade Two

GEORGIA, MY STATE
In second grade, the various social studies strands become more woven around the historical strand. The history strand focuses on important historical figures in Georgia and the Creek and Cherokee cultures in Georgia. The geography strand emphasizes the geography of Georgia and relates that to the historical study. In addition to the positive character traits of the individuals and groups in the historical strand, the basic concept of government is also introduced. Basic economics concepts continue to be introduced and are related to the historical strand.

Historical Understandings
SS2H1 The student will read about and describe the lives of historical figures in Georgia history.
a. Identify the contributions made by these historic figures: James Oglethorpe, Tomochichi, and Mary Musgrove (founding of Georgia); Sequoyah (development of a Cherokee alphabet); Jackie Robinson (sports); Martin Luther King, Jr. (civil rights); Jimmy Carter (leadership and human rights).
b. Describe how everyday life of these historical figures is similar to and different from everyday life in the present (food, clothing, homes, transportation, communication, recreation, rights, and freedoms).

SS2H2 The student will describe the Georgia Creek and Cherokee cultures of the past in terms of tools, clothing, homes, ways of making a living, and accomplishments.
a. Describe the regions in Georgia where the Creeks and Cherokees lived and how the people used their local resources.
b. Compare and contrast the Georgia Creek and Cherokee cultures of the past to Georgians today.

Geographic Understandings
SS2G1 The student will locate major topographical features of Georgia and will describe how these features define Georgia’s surface.
a. Locate all the geographic regions of Georgia: Blue Ridge Mountains, Piedmont, Coastal Plain, Valley and Ridge, and Appalachian Plateau.
b. Locate the major rivers: Ocmulgee, Oconee, Altamaha, Savannah, St. Mary’s, Chattahoochee, and Flint.
SS2G2 The student will describe the cultural and geographic systems associated with the historical figures in SS2H1 and Georgia’s Creeks and Cherokees.
a. Identify specific locations significant to the life and times of each historic figure on a political map.
b. Describe how place (physical and human characteristics) had an impact on the lives of each historic figure.
c. Describe how each historic figure adapted to and was influenced by his/her environment.
d. Trace examples of travel and movement of these historic figures and their ideas across time.
e. Describe how the region in which these historic figures lived affected their lives and compare these regions to the region in which the students live.

Government/Civic Understandings
SS2CG1 The student will define the concept of government and the need for rules and laws.

SS2CG2 The student will identify the roles of the following elected officials:
a. President (leader of our nation)
b. Governor (leader of our state)
c. Mayor (leader of a city)

SS2CG3 The student will give examples of how the historical figures under study demonstrate the positive citizenship traits of honesty, dependability, liberty, trustworthiness, honor, civility, good sportsmanship, patience, and compassion.

SS2CG4 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the state and national capitol buildings by identifying them from pictures and capitals of the United States of America (Washington, D.C.) and the state of Georgia (Atlanta) by locating them on appropriate maps.

Economic Understandings
SS2E1 The student will explain that because of scarcity, people must make choices and incur opportunity costs.

SS2E2 The student will identify ways in which goods and services are allocated (by price; majority rule; contests; force; sharing; lottery; command; first-come, first-served; personal characteristics; and others).

SS2E3 The student will explain that people usually use money to obtain the goods and services they want and explain how money makes trade easier than barter.

SS2E4 The student will describe the costs and benefits of personal spending and saving choices.
Grade Three
OUR DEMOCRATIC HERITAGE

In third grade, students conclude their introduction to United States history by studying the origins of American democracy. The historical strand compares ancient Greek democracy in Athens with that of the United States, and introduces selected Americans who have been important in ensuring our rights. The geography strand relates primarily to the people discussed in the history strand. In the government strand, students begin the study of the foundations of a republican form of government. The economics strand continues the introduction of basic economics concepts.

Historical Understandings
SS3H1 The student will explain the political roots of our modern democracy in the United States of America.
   a. Identify the influence of Greek architecture (columns on the Parthenon, U. S. Supreme Court building), law, and the Olympic Games on the present.
   b. Explain the ancient Athenians’ idea that a community should choose its own leaders.
   c. Compare and contrast Athens as a direct democracy with the United States as a representative democracy.

SS3H2 The student will discuss the lives of Americans who expanded people’s rights and freedoms in a democracy.
   a. Paul Revere (independence), Frederick Douglass (civil rights), Susan B. Anthony (women’s rights), Mary McLeod Bethune (education), Franklin D. Roosevelt (New Deal and World War II), Eleanor Roosevelt (United Nations and human rights), Thurgood Marshall (civil rights), Lyndon B. Johnson (Great Society and voting rights), and César Chávez (workers’ rights).
   b. Explain social barriers, restrictions, and obstacles that these historical figures had to overcome and describe how they overcame them.

Geographic Understandings
SS3G1 The student will locate major topographical features.
   a. Identify major rivers of the United States of America: Mississippi, Ohio, Rio Grande, Colorado, Hudson.
   b. Identify major mountain ranges of the United States of America: Appalachian, Rocky.
   c. Locate the Equator, Prime Meridian, and lines of latitude and longitude on a globe.
   d. Locate Greece on a world map.

SS3G2 The student will describe the cultural and geographic systems associated with the historical figures in SS3H2a.
   a. Identify on a political map specific locations significant to the life and times of these historical figures.
   b. Describe how place (physical and human characteristics) had an impact on the lives of these historical figures.
   c. Describe how each of these historical figures adapted to and was influenced by his/her environment.
d. Trace examples of travel and movement of these historical figures and their ideas across time.
e. Describe how the regions in which these historical figures lived affected their lives and had an impact on their cultural identification.

**Government/Civic Understandings**

SS3CG1 The student will explain the importance of the basic principles that provide the foundation of a republican form of government.
a. Explain why in the United States there is a separation of power between branches of government and levels of government.
b. Name the three levels of government (national, state, local) and the three branches in each (executive, legislative, judicial), including the names of the legislative branch (Congress, General Assembly, county commission or city council).
c. State an example of the responsibilities of each level and branch of government.

SS3CG2 The student will discuss the character of different historical figures in SS3H2a.
a. Describe how the different historical figures in SS3H2a display positive character traits of cooperation, diligence, courage, and leadership.
b. Explain how the historical figures in SS3H2a used positive character traits to support their beliefs in liberty, justice, tolerance, and freedom of conscience and expression.
c. Explain how the historical figures in SS3H2a chose when to respect and accept authority.

**Economic Understandings**

SS3E1 The student will describe the four types of productive resources:
a. Natural (land)
b. Human (labor)
c. Capital (capital goods)
d. Entrepreneurship (used to create goods and services)

SS3E2 The student will explain that governments provide certain types of goods and services in a market economy, and pay for these through taxes and will describe services such as schools, libraries, roads, police/fire protection, and military

SS3E3 The student will give examples of interdependence and trade and will explain how voluntary exchange benefits both parties.
a. Describe the interdependence of consumers and producers of goods and services.
b. Describe how goods and services are allocated by price in the marketplace.
c. Explain that some things are made locally, some elsewhere in the country, and some in other countries.
d. Explain that most countries create their own currency for use as money.

SS3E4 The student will describe the costs and benefits of personal spending and saving choices.
Grade Four
UNITED STATES HISTORY TO 1860

In fourth grade, students begin the formal study of United States history. At this grade, the four strands of history, geography, civics, and economics are fully integrated. Students begin their study of United States history with the development of Native American cultures and conclude with the antebellum period ending in 1860. The geography strand emphasizes the influence of geography on early U. S. history. The civics strand emphasizes concepts and rights developed during the formation of our government. The economics strand uses material from the historical strand to further understanding of economic concepts.

Historical Understandings

SS4H1 The student will describe how early Native American cultures developed in North America.
   a. Locate where Native Americans settled with emphasis on the Arctic (Inuit), Northwest (Kwakiutl), Plateau (Nez Perce), Southwest (Hopi), Plains (Pawnee), and Southeast (Seminole).
   b. Describe how Native Americans used their environment to obtain food, clothing, and shelter.

SS4H2 The student will describe European exploration in North America.
   a. Describe the reasons for, obstacles to, and accomplishments of the Spanish, French, and English explorations of John Cabot, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Juan Ponce de León, Christopher Columbus, Henry Hudson, and Jacques Cartier.
   b. Describe examples of cooperation and conflict between Europeans and Native Americans.

SS4H3 The student will explain the factors that shaped British colonial America.
   b. Describe colonial life in America as experienced by various people, including large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, indentured servants, slaves, and Native Americans.

SS4H4 The student will explain the causes, events, and results of the American Revolution.
   a. Trace the events that shaped the revolutionary movement in America, including the French and Indian War, British Imperial Policy that led to the 1765 Stamp Act, the slogan “no taxation without representation,” the activities of the Sons of Liberty, and the Boston Tea Party.
   b. Explain the writing of the Declaration of Independence; include who wrote it, how it was written, why it was necessary, and how it was a response to tyranny and the abuse of power.
   c. Describe the major events of the American Revolution and explain the factors leading to American victory and British defeat; include the Battles of Lexington and Concord, Saratoga, and Yorktown.
d. Describe key individuals in the American Revolution with emphasis on King George III, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Benedict Arnold, Patrick Henry, and John Adams.

**SS4H5 The student will analyze the challenges faced by the new nation.**

a. Identify the weaknesses of the government established by the Articles of Confederation.
b. Identify the major leaders of the Constitutional Convention (James Madison and Benjamin Franklin) and describe the major issues they debated, including the rights of states, the Great Compromise, and slavery.
c. Identify the three branches of the U.S. government as outlined by the Constitution, describe what they do, how they relate to each other (checks and balances and separation of power), and how they relate to the states.
d. Identify and explain the rights in the Bill of Rights, describe how the Bill of Rights places limits on the power of government, and explain the reasons for its inclusion in the Constitution in 1791.
e. Describe the causes and events of the War of 1812; include the burning of the Capitol and the White House.

**SS4H6 The student will explain westward expansion of America between 1801 and 1861.**

a. Describe territorial expansion with emphasis on the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clark expedition, and the acquisitions of Texas (the Alamo and independence), Oregon (Oregon Trail), and California (Gold Rush and the development of mining towns).
b. Describe the impact of the steamboat, the steam locomotive, and the telegraph on life in America.
c. Describe the impact of westward expansion on Native Americans.

**SS4H7 The student will examine the main ideas of the abolitionist and suffrage movements.**

a. Discuss the biographies of Harriet Tubman and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.
b. Explain the significance of Sojourner Truth to the abolition and suffrage movements.

**Geographic Understandings**

**SS4G1 The student will be able to locate important physical and man-made features in the United States.**

a. Locate major physical features of the United States; include the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the Great Plains, the Continental Divide, the Great Basin, Death Valley, the Gulf of Mexico, the St. Lawrence River, and the Great Lakes.
b. Locate major man-made features; include New York City, NY; Boston, MA; Philadelphia, PA; and the Erie Canal.
SS4G2 The student will describe how physical systems affect human systems.
a. Explain why each of the Native American groups (SS4H1a) occupied the areas they did, with emphasis on why some developed permanent villages and others did not.
b. Describe how the early explorers (SS4H2a) adapted, or failed to adapt, to the various physical environments in which they traveled.
c. Explain how the physical geography of the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern colonies helped determine economic activities practiced therein.
d. Explain how each force (American and British) attempted to use the physical geography of each battle site to its benefit (SS4H4c).
e. Describe physical barriers that hindered and physical gateways that benefited territorial expansion from 1801 to 1861 (SS4H6a).

Government/Civic Understandings
SS4CG1 The student will describe the meaning of
a. Natural rights as found in the Declaration of Independence (the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness).
b. “We the people” from the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution as a reflection of consent of the governed or popular sovereignty.
c. The federal system of government in the U.S.

SS4CG2 The student will explain the importance of freedom of expression as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

SS4CG3 The student will describe the functions of government.
a. Explain the process for making and enforcing laws.
b. Explain managing conflicts and protecting rights.
c. Describe providing for the defense of the nation.
d. Explain limiting the power of people in authority.
e. Explain the fiscal responsibility of government.

SS4CG4 The student will explain the importance of Americans sharing certain central democratic beliefs and principles, both personal and civic.
a. Explain the necessity of respecting the rights of others and promoting the common good.
b. Explain the necessity of obeying reasonable laws/rules voluntarily, and explain why it is important for citizens in a democratic society to participate in public (civic) life (staying informed, voting, volunteering, communicating with public officials).

SS4CG5 The student will name positive character traits of key historical figures and government leaders (honesty, patriotism, courage, trustworthiness).
Economic Understandings

SS4E1 The student will use the basic economic concepts of trade, opportunity cost, specialization, voluntary exchange, productivity, and price incentives to illustrate historical events.

a. Describe opportunity costs and their relationship to decision-making across time (such as decisions to send expeditions to North and South America).
b. Explain how price incentives affect people’s behavior and choices (such as colonial decisions about what crops to grow and products to produce).
c. Describe how specialization improves standards of living (such as the differences in the economies in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern colonies).
d. Explain how voluntary exchange helps both buyers and sellers (such as prehistoric and colonial trade in North America).
e. Describe how trade promotes economic activity (such as how trade between the colonies and England affected their economies).
f. Give examples of technological advancements and their impact on business productivity during the development of the United States (such as the steamboat, the steam locomotive, and the telegraph).

SS4E2 The student will identify the elements of a personal budget and explain why personal spending and saving decisions are important.
In fifth grade, students continue their formal study of United States history. As with fourth grade, the strands of history, geography, civics, and economics are fully integrated. Students study United States history beginning with the Civil War and continue to the present. The geography strand emphasizes the influence of geography on U. S. history. The civics strand emphasizes concepts and rights as outlined in amendments to the U. S. Constitution. The economics strand uses material from the historical strand to further understanding of economic concepts.

**Historical Understandings**

**SS5H1 The student will explain the causes, major events, and consequences of the Civil War.**

a. Identify Uncle Tom’s Cabin and John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, and explain how each of these events was related to the Civil War.

b. Discuss how the issues of states’ rights and slavery increased tensions between the North and South.

c. Identify major battles and campaigns: Fort Sumter, Gettysburg, the Atlanta Campaign, Sherman’s March to the Sea, and Appomattox Court House.


e. Describe the effects of war on the North and South.

**SS5H2 The student will analyze the effects of Reconstruction on American life.**

a. Describe the purpose of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.

b. Explain the work of the Freedmen’s Bureau.

c. Explain how slavery was replaced by sharecropping and how African-Americans were prevented from exercising their newly won rights; include a discussion of Jim Crow laws and customs.

**SS5H3 The student will describe how life changed in America at the turn of the century.**

a. Describe the role of the cattle trails in the late 19th century; include the Black Cowboys of Texas, the Great Western Cattle Trail, and the Chisholm Trail.

b. Describe the impact on American life of the Wright brothers (flight), George Washington Carver (science), Alexander Graham Bell (communication), and Thomas Edison (electricity).

c. Explain how William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt expanded America’s role in the world; include the Spanish-American War and the building of the Panama Canal.

d. Describe the reasons people emigrated to the United States, from where they emigrated, and where they settled.

e. Describe the impact of westward expansion on Native Americans; include the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the relocation of Native Americans to reservations.
SS5H4 The student will describe U.S. involvement in World War I and post-World War I America.
a. Explain how German attacks on U.S. shipping during the war in Europe (1914-1917) ultimately led the U.S. to join the fight against Germany; include the sinking of the Lusitania and concerns over safety of U.S. ships, U.S. contributions to the war, and the impact of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.
b. Describe the cultural developments and individual contributions in the 1920s of the Jazz Age (Louis Armstrong), the Harlem Renaissance (Langston Hughes), baseball (Babe Ruth), the automobile (Henry Ford), and the airplane (Charles Lindbergh).

SS5H5 The student will explain how the Great Depression and New Deal affected the lives of millions of Americans.
a. Discuss the Stock Market Crash of 1929, Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, the Dust Bowl, and soup kitchens.
b. Analyze the main features of the New Deal; include the significance of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, and the Tennessee Valley Authority.
c. Discuss important cultural elements of the 1930s; include Duke Ellington, Margaret Mitchell, and Jesse Owens.

SS5H6 The student will explain the reasons for America’s involvement in World War II.
a. Describe Germany’s aggression in Europe and Japan’s aggression in Asia.
b. Describe major events in the war in both Europe and the Pacific; include Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, D-Day, VE and VJ Days, and the Holocaust.
c. Discuss President Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
d. Identify Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, Hirohito, Truman, Mussolini, and Hitler.
e. Describe the effects of rationing and the changing role of women and African-Americans; include “Rosie the Riveter” and the Tuskegee Airmen.
f. Explain the U.S. role in the formation of the United Nations.

SS5H7 The student will discuss the origins and consequences of the Cold War.
a. Explain the origin and meaning of the term “Iron Curtain.”
b. Explain how the United States sought to stop the spread of communism through the Berlin airlift, the Korean War, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
c. Identify Joseph McCarthy and Nikita Khrushchev.

SS5H8 The student will describe the importance of key people, events, and developments between 1950-1975.
a. Discuss the importance of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War.
b. Explain the key events and people of the Civil Rights movement; include Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, and civil rights activities of Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr.
c. Describe the impact on American society of the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr.
d. Discuss the significance of the technologies of television and space exploration.
SS5H9 The student will trace important developments in America since 1975.
a. Describe U. S. involvement in world events; include efforts to bring peace to the
Middle East, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Persian Gulf War, and the War on
b. Explain the impact the development of the personal computer and the Internet has had
on American life.

Geographic Understandings
SS5G1 The student will locate important places in the United States.
a. Locate important physical features; include the Grand Canyon, Salton Sea, Great Salt
Lake, and Mojave Desert.
b. Locate important man-made places; include the Chisholm Trail; Pittsburgh, PA;
Gettysburg, PA; Kitty Hawk, NC; Pearl Harbor, HI; and Montgomery, AL.

SS5G2 The student will explain the reasons for the spatial patterns of economic
activities.
a. Explain how factors such as population, transportation, and resources influenced
industrial location in the United States between the end of the Civil War and 1900.
b. Locate primary agricultural and industrial locations since the turn of the 20th century
and explain how factors such as population, transportation, and resources have influenced
these areas.

Government/Civic Understandings
SS5CG1 The student will explain how a citizen’s rights are protected under the U.S.
Constitution.
a. Explain the responsibilities of a citizen.
b. Explain the freedoms granted and rights protected by the Bill of Rights.
c. Explain the concept of due process of law and describe how the U.S. Constitution
protects a citizen’s rights by due process.

SS5CG2 The student will explain the process by which amendments to the U.S.
Constitution are made.
a. Explain the amendment process outlined in the Constitution.
b. Describe the purpose for the amendment process.

SS5CG3 The student will explain how amendments to the U. S. Constitution have
maintained a representative democracy.
a. Explain the purpose of the 12th and 17th amendments.
b. Explain how voting rights were protected by the 15th, 19th, 23rd, 24th, and 26th
amendments.
**Economic Understandings**

**SS5E1** The student will use the basic economic concepts of trade, opportunity cost, specialization, voluntary exchange, productivity, and price incentives to illustrate historical events.

a. Describe opportunity costs and their relationship to decision-making across time (such as decisions to ration goods during WWII).
b. Explain how price incentives affect people’s behavior and choices (such as decisions to participate in cattle trails because of increased beef prices).
c. Describe how specialization improves standards of living, (such as how specific economies in the north and south developed at the beginning of the 20th century).
d. Explain how voluntary exchange helps both buyers and sellers (such as how specialization leads to the need to exchange to get wants and needs).
e. Describe how trade promotes economic activity (such as how the Panama Canal increases trade between countries).
f. Give examples of technological advancements and their impact on business productivity during the continuing development of the United States (such as the development of the personal computer and the internet).

**SS5E2** The student will describe the functions of four major sectors in the U. S. economy.

a. Describe the household function in providing resources and consuming goods and services.
b. Describe the private business function in producing goods and services.
c. Describe the bank function in providing checking accounts, savings accounts, and loans.
d. Describe the government function in taxation and providing certain goods and services.

**SS5E3** The student will describe how consumers and businesses interact in the U. S. economy.

a. Describe how competition, markets, and prices influence people’s behavior.
b. Describe how people earn income by selling their labor to businesses.
c. Describe how entrepreneurs take risks to develop new goods and services to start a business.

**SS5E4** The student will identify the elements of a personal budget and explain why personal spending and saving decisions are important.