HAS ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION BECOME COLLATERAL DAMAGE OF THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT?

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ABSTRACT

Public schools stress the need for students to become informed and engaged citizens, however social studies instruction is becoming marginalized in many elementary schools today, the very area where they learn citizenship and about the world around them. This study seeks to: understand the reason for the loss of instructional time for social studies, analyze the role of integrated curriculum and identify value placed on elementary social studies education.

This is a qualitative case study based upon interviews, document review and field observations. The data gathered and analyzed will address the research question, as well as, the intellectual and practical goals of the study. The main research question, How do elementary classroom teachers, given the contemporary restraints of the No Child left Behind Act, negotiate content and pedagogy in elementary social studies at two schools? focuses on the teaching and learning of elementary social studies.

Research was conducted in two elementary schools in the same school district, focusing on grades one, three and five. Teachers and principals were interviewed; curriculum documents, including the districts time allotment policy reviewed, and field observations of social studies content visibly displayed in classrooms and common areas. The three sources allowed for the triangulation of data to be analyzed for patterns or trends.

The data demonstrated a marginalization of elementary social studies instruction, resulting from a reduction of time for the subject area instruction. While the content itself was valued by teachers and administrators, other tested content areas were given priority in the daily schedule. The main factor reported for the reduction in time for social studies was the mandated state testing program which resulted from the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Through
the use of integrating social studies into the literacy block, social studies topics were often read about, but the tasks and activities students were engaged in were to improve literacy skills, not teach social studies content or skills.

The goal of social studies education is the development of tomorrow’s citizens. This can only be done through thoughtful and meaningful social studies education. This research was designed to try and understand if that is taking place in the elementary classrooms in this district and how it is valued by teachers and principals.

*Keywords:* elementary curriculum, NCLB, social studies
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I INTRODUCTION TO DOCTORAL</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THESIS PROPOSAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem of Practice</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical and Intellectual Goals</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems theory</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruner: Developmental theory:</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes of Marginalization</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Lesson Design</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practices in Instruction</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Literature Review</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Qualitative Study</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site and participants</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem of Practice

Elementary social studies instruction is an endangered species. The problem of practice being researched is the loss of instructional time for elementary social studies. In addressing this concern I will need to investigate some of the current issues in education that may be the catalyst for this reduction and the implications for students as they move from the elementary level to secondary education.

The charge of the nation’s public schools is to teach students the history and values of the country (Leming, Ellington and Schug, 2006). For our students to develop into informed citizens, with a global understanding, we need to be sure they have sufficient opportunities to learn these lessons. If the current trend continues reducing time for social studies instruction at the elementary level, these goals will not be met.

Jones and Thomas (2006) reported in No Discipline Behind, that educators nationwide have raised alarm about the limited instructional time allotted for elementary social studies. Mandated testing is driving school districts to devote additional time and resources to improving students’ literacy and numeracy skills so they will be successful on these high-stakes tests. A study conducted of ten school districts conducted by the Center for Educational Policy (2008) reported that since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2001, in over half of the ten districts studied time for elementary social studies instruction had been reduced by 36%.

Bailey, Shaw and Hollifield (2006) stated in The Devaluation of Social Studies in the Elementary Grades that the NCLB Act does not identify social studies as curricular area elementary teachers are being held accountable for, therefore social studies being presented in a minimal fashion. In
addition, professional development presented by school districts usually focuses on English Language Arts and mathematics and social studies is excluded. New approaches need to be incorporated into the elementary curriculum to address this issue. With limited time available, the use of interdisciplinary lessons should be investigated (Jones & Thomas, 2006) as a way to incorporate social studies content and skills into elementary classrooms. Using social studies content to reinforce literacy skills is a viable option for teachers.

**Significance of the Problem**

As elementary teachers and administrators address the issue of student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematics as determined by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the problem arises of identifying additional time during the school day to expose students to additional instructional time for English Language Arts and mathematics instruction. NCLB (2001) has resulted in schools focusing on the state mandated tested areas, ELA and mathematics. Kinniburgh & Busby (2006) addressed this in their article *No Social Studies Behind: Integrating Social Studies During the Elementary Literacy Block*. They believed that the NCLB Act was a major factor in the removing of social studies from the elementary curriculum. Their study reported that 71% of the Alabama schools studied had eliminated subjects (including social studies) from their curriculum if they were not a mandated testing area. Another study conducted by Volger, Lintner, Lipscomb, Knopf, Heafner and Rock (2007), *Getting off the Back Burner: Impact of Testing Elementary Social Studies as Part of a State-Mandated Accountability Program*, noted the impact of social studies testing as part of the state-mandated testing program in South Carolina. They found that after the state included social studies in its testing schedule, it
had a “profound impact” on how social studies was seen by elementary teachers and the amount of time given to social studies instruction at the elementary level.

Students in the 21st century will need the skills to be able to become global citizens. As technology makes the world smaller our students may not travel the world physically, but will do so daily using the newest communication devices at their fingertips. Cole (2010) states “Students of the 21st century need to understand their changing world and be well prepared with the understandings, skills and dispositions for participating in it as caring, informed, critical and active citizens” (p. 5). This is done through the teaching of social studies topics, however, if the trend to reduce the time for elementary social studies instruction continues, students will move onto secondary education with an inadequate background in social studies content and skills. This will have a negative impact on the social studies program at the upper levels. As a country, we will be faced with students traveling the world electronically with no clear understanding of with whom they are interacting with or where they are going!

**Practical and Intellectual Goals**

Maxwell (2005) defines *practical* goals as what will be accomplished or situation changed as a result of the study. The *intellectual* goals focus on understanding and trying to gain knowledge into what is taking place in the event or phenomena under study.

The first practical goal of this case study is to present information, identified through research, to administrators of the current state of elementary social studies instruction. A second practical goal is to use the information to also change the way social studies instruction is delivered in classrooms today. The amount of social studies instruction being presented, issues
of interdisciplinary lessons and finally best practices in social studies education, make up the practical goals this study hopes to address.

The intellectual goal of the study is to seek to identify practitioner perspectives on the reasons for changes in elementary social studies instruction. One major focus will be on the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the role it has played in changing how curriculum is delivered in elementary schools.

**Research Question**

*How do elementary classroom teachers, given the contemporary restraints of the No Child left Behind Act, negotiate content and pedagogy in elementary social studies at two schools?* is the question posed for investigation in this research proposal. The purpose of this question is to seek to identify the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has had on elementary social studies instruction and if the instruction currently being implemented is effectively using best practices in elementary social studies education.

The purpose of the question is to investigate if the research findings presented in the literature review are supported by the results of this research. The research question is designed to try and understand the effect the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has had on elementary social studies instruction, both in time allotments and effective instructional practices. Because social studies is not a mandated tested subject area, literature reviewed suggested that content areas that are not tested often become marginalized in the curriculum.

The purpose of social studies, according to Ogle, Klemp and McBride (2007) is for students to become engaged citizens by learning to read and think critically. The goal of this research is to try and understand how elementary social studies instruction is currently being
taught and if the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has had any affect on its implementation of quality social studies practices.

Summary

This paper is organized to give the reader an understanding of the purpose, background and proposal for study. In the introduction the problem of elementary social studies instruction being marginalized is described as a major concern and how this issue affects teachers is also examined. The practical goal of the study is to bring attention to the issue and identify possible causes for the problem. In addition, the intellectual goal is to contribute knowledge and data to the study of social studies curriculum, and through it, gain support for strong social studies programs at the elementary level. The research question at the heart of this study, *How do elementary classroom teachers, given the contemporary restraints of the No Child left Behind Act, negotiate content and pedagogy in elementary social studies at two schools?* sought to focus the study on the experiences of the teachers.

The next section of the paper presents the theoretical framework which will be used to study the issue. Looking at the problem through the lens of Systems theory and Jerome Bruner’s theories of curriculum development and student readiness will anchor the study. The goal was to use this framework to confirm or contradict the findings of the study as it relates to current educational research. This section is followed by the literature review where studies are presented that have informed the thinking of the researcher and helped to design the methodology for the research.

In the methodology section the research design is presented which outlines the site and participants who engaged in the study. For this research, two elementary schools, six teachers
and two principals provided data through individual interviews. In addition, documents including lesson plans, time on learning policies and curriculum documents were reviewed. The final piece of data to collected was through field observations, identifying instances of “visible” social studies in elementary classrooms and schools. The data gathered was analyzed to identify themes and patterns that emerged.

The next section presents information regarding the protection of the participants and validity issues that could have emerged and how they would be addressed if needed. The final section gives the reader an overview of the study and is followed by the bibliography of texts cited in the paper.

**Theoretical Framework**

The problem of practice this study addresses, the reduction of instructional time for elementary social studies, was studied through a theoretical framework comprised of two theories; Systems theory and the developmental theories of Jerome Bruner served as the lens to frame the study.

**Systems Theory**

The foundation of Systems theory, the whole is constructed of various parts, was first identified by Aristotle, according to Chen and Stroup (1993). However, it wasn’t until the mid-1900s that Bertalanffy introduced *General Systems Theory* as a way to organize and study the various entities of a system (Pascoe, 2006). At the heart of Systems theory according to Chen & Stroup, is the belief that “the whole is more than the sum of the parts” first proposed by Bertalanffy (1972) who writes it can be a way of “seeing things which were previously overlooked or bypassed” (Bertalanffy, 1972, p. 424).
Systems theory is described by Fox (2009) as an entity constructed of interrelated segments, which influences and works in conjunction with each other. In looking at the elementary curriculum as a whole it is important to not overlook the effect change in one area can have on another. Educators must examine each subject area independently to be sure they can then work together to create an effective curriculum. Systems theory focuses on the relationships among various segments of a system, the interdependency of the system and how change affects the system (Pascoe, 2006).

Brint (2007) explains that Systems theory can be a lens to view educational systems as a series of interrelated parts, and educators can improve their organizations if they understand the interdependent nature of the parts (Canavero, Shepperson & Thornton, 2007). Using a Systems theory approach to study the issue of elementary social studies instruction provides a framework which to view not only social studies, but the elementary curriculum as a whole. One cannot focus on an instructional change in one area of the curriculum, without understanding the reason for the change and the effect it will have on the entire system.

If the elementary curriculum is seen as the “whole,” then the parts would be the individual content subjects. Mandated state testing in Massachusetts focuses on reading, language arts (writing), mathematics and science and technology, with social studies as the only core content subject area not represented in the testing program. Each “part” (content subject area) is given a specific amount of class time for instruction, usually approved by the local school committee. The time is usually not equal, but adequate for appropriate instruction. If the policy is followed, it provides a balanced curriculum. A change in one part of the “system”
would have repercussions for all segments. If schools increased time for instruction in the content of the tested areas it leaves another area with reduced instructional time.

Elder-Vass (2007) defines a system as being made up of various entities, explaining that each entity can also be seen as a whole, depending on the content. Through that lens, various elementary content subject areas can be viewed as individual entities with their own particular properties, as well as, part of the larger system, elementary curriculum. In order for the system to regain equilibrium a plan must be developed by the district. One method often implemented to address this issue is the use of an interdisciplinary lesson design. Using social studies content to teach literary skills has resulted in the teaching of social studies content, during ELA instructional time to reinforcing the English language arts skills. Canavero, Shepperson and Thornton (2007) caution any change in a system needs to be well planned and a variety of factors, such as communication and coordination be taken into consideration. A major change to a policy, such as the changing of time allotments for instruction, needs to be done in a manner that keeps the system in balanced. Any organization proposing change needs to be sure that there is a mechanism in place for reassessing the change (Canavero, Shepperson, Thornton). This can help to assure that the balance in the system stays in place.

Systems theory has also been employed as a method to study the sustainability of systems. Porter and Cordoba (2011) discuss the use of systems theory by looking at each part in isolation and then the role each plays by studying the behavior of the system as a whole. One goal of Systems theory is to focus on understanding the way organizations operate by looking at how each part responds separately, and only then, how they work as a whole. It is at that time it
becomes possible to improve a system because the role of each segment is understood by all. The system is sustained as each part is seen as having value to the larger complex system.

Complex Systems theory is defined by three characteristics. First the way in which each part works independently. Second, the way each part contributes to the whole and works to improve the system. Finally, balance or equilibrium is attained as the parts work together and are sustained because of that interaction (Porter & Cordova, 2011). By looking at the elementary curriculum first by focusing on each independent curriculum component and then identifying how they function as a whole, systems theory can be an effective structure to study curriculum as a whole. According to Collinson & Cook (2007) systemic thinking is the ability to see the “big picture”, to focus on the whole not the parts that make it up. However, in order to understand how elementary curriculum works as a whole, it is necessary to study it from a multivariable approach, understanding first the role each part plays. Watson (2006) notes system design is a process that studies changes in a system and what characteristics the resulting organizations should possess.

Chen & Stroup (1993) also support the use of Systems theory as a lens to view complex systems involving multivariable systems. By focusing on the scope and sequence of social studies curriculum kindergarten through grade twelve, it can be viewed as a multivariable system because what happens at the elementary level will have an effect on the middle school level. Systems theory has been used since the 1960s to review school curricular.

Systems theory aided in my understanding of the structure of elementary curriculum, how each content subject area represents one of the segments or parts of the system as a whole. Systems theory viewed the curriculum functions as a whole for the purpose of educating young
students. The research sought will also seek to identify the causes of the change and the effect the change has on the balance of the system, or curriculum, as an organization.

**Developmental theory of Jerome Bruner**

As an educator, Jerome Bruner believed in the interconnections of learning (Forrester, 1991). Systems theory highlights the need for all segments of an entity to work together and connections made between each part for there to be balance. Forrester discusses Bruner’s theory of learning regarding how past behavior influences future learning and that systems dynamics can serve as a framework for learning.

To study the role of social studies in the curriculum and the best practices for teaching social studies content, the developmental theories of Jerome Bruner were used as the theoretical framework to research social studies pedagogy and interdisciplinary learning. According to Bruner (1977), the content students learn should build schema for future lessons. Bruner explained this is done by learning skills which are not only later expanded on, but skills that “continual broadening and deepening for knowledge in terms of basic and general idea” (p. 17).

A readiness for learning discussed by Bruner (1977) identifies characteristics for consideration when focusing on curriculum. The first is *intellectual development*, which Bruner explains is how students view the world based on their intellectual development at the time of learning. In the first stage of learning, children view the world in very simple terms. As they progress through school, they move from seeing the world in very simplistic terms to being able to understand content knowledge based on prior learning experiences. Bruner’s theories on student learning highlight processes which are factors in students learning. The learning of new content can expand on prior learning and also assist students’ needs by being able to organize
and connect to prior knowledge, which is how students engage with this new learning. Evaluation also plays a role in the learning process, and Bruner suggests this should reflect the prior teaching and be authentic.

Bruner’s (1977) theory of a *spiral curriculum* is the most well-known of his developmental theories. He states that any content subject can be taught to students, no matter their age, if it is done in a developmentally appropriate manner using materials that meet the intellectual level of the student. When the topics are revisited in higher grade levels, students have the schema to make sense of the new learning. The content topics can then be expanded and developed in more depth.

Deng & Luke (2008), reflecting on the theories of Bruner, note that content should be taught at the developmental level of the student, while staying true to the discipline. Content should not be compromised, rather it should be taught in an appropriate manner for the child’s cognitive stage. Bruner (1996) explains one of the main reasons for implementing a spiral curriculum is to scaffold student learning. If students are exposed to content in a manner that is developmentally appropriate, they will be able to internalize this knowledge, so when they encounter it again in the future the knowledge will serve to support future learning. Takaya (2008) reports that Bruner believed students needed to be able to understand content so they will then be able to use to expand their knowledge when they encounter the same content in the future.

Bruner’s (1966) theory of instruction presents a lens for looking at the best pedagogy for delivering instruction so students are able to successfully integrate new knowledge into their schema. The theory of instruction is seeking the best methods to present content so it results in
effective learning on the part of students. Bruner highlights four major features of the theory of instruction. The first factor focuses on the learning environment in terms of the relationship between the learner and the teacher. The second is the manner in which the knowledge is structured so it is accessible to students, the third highlights the sequence in which the learning activities are presented. Finally, the way in which learning becomes intrinsic for students is seen as an important factor necessary for learning to take place.

One of the most important roles of educators has always been deciding what students should learn and when they should learn it. These questions have been asked, answered, questioned, and reconsidered since formal education began. The developmental theories of Jerome Bruner (1966) take into account the intellectual development of a child and the various ways in which students learn. This study reviewed his thoughts on students as thinkers to help understand the thought processes of students as learners. It also presented the opportunity to investigate what are the best practices being implemented teach elementary social studies.

The Massachusetts curriculum frameworks present school districts with documents identifying the content standards which should be reached at each grade level, pre-kindergarten to grade twelve. School administrators and teachers use these documents as guides for developing the curriculum at the local level. Discussions concerning the readiness of students for some of the content identified, especially at the primary grades, are not unusual. Bruner’s theories also included the use of a spiral curriculum and discovery education (Takaya, 2008) as a ways for students to be active learners and make learning meaningful.

According to Bruner’s (1966) spiral curriculum, topics presented in social studies, such as civil rights, would first be introduced at a primary level through stories of the life of Dr.
Martin Luther King Jr. and treating people fairly. In upper elementary, students may encounter stories of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad and again visit the topic of treating people fairly. This builds or spirals, in Bruner’s term, on previously learned content or concepts. According to Schiro (2008), Bruner was one of several scholars who developed curriculum based on inquiry. Students were given an active role in learning, using similar methods to adults, making and reporting on their observations. Constructivist theory supports this pedagogy, supporting students building their own knowledge based on learning experiences facilitated by teachers, rather than listening to teacher lectures and presentations (Wright & Grenier, 2009).

Student understanding was emphasized by Bruner (Takaya, 2008) who noted that just acquiring information was not sufficient. It was felt that students needed to be able to expand their knowledge beyond what was presented. Using discovery learning, students would be able to increase their knowledge, and then use this content knowledge in the future. Content understanding by students would serve as background for them to expand on, when they encountered the same topic again. This became the basis of Bruner’s theory of a spiral curriculum (Takaya). This problem of practice researched the implications to the social studies curriculum if the content is not taught using social studies best practices or taught in a limited manner. The results could be students completing their elementary education with little understanding of basic social studies content and skills. This will have implications on the secondary social studies program, which is designed to build on the elementary curriculum. Students will not be able to understand new concepts being taught, if they have no foundational knowledge of social studies. Implementing best practices in social studies instruction is important if students are to achieve.
The developmental theories of Jerome Bruner (1966) served as part of the theoretical framework to study the way in which social studies instruction is presented at the elementary level. It is important to look beyond how much instructional time is devoted to social studies, it is just as important to study how that time is being used. Bruner’s spiral curriculum expresses the belief that any content can be presented to students regardless of their age, if done in a developmentally appropriate manner. Students’ readiness to learn is not necessarily determined by their age or grade level. Secondly, it is important to look at the instructional methods which are used to present new content knowledge to students. The issues focused on in this study were: what content should be taught, how it should be taught and how social studies instruction fits into elementary curriculum as a whole.

The two theories chosen as a framework to research this problem of practice complement each other and support the goals of the study. Systems theory focuses on studying each part of a system and how all of the elements work together in balance to support the whole. Curriculum can be viewed as a system, within which the various aspects that comprise an elementary curriculum need to be balanced and supported. Bruner’s (1966) theory of developmental theories speaks to the various aspects that support teaching and learning. By utilizing these two theories as a framework, this study will sought to understand the balance necessary in elementary education if all content subject areas are to be effectively addressed, and through Bruner’s theories, the study will present a foundation for instruction which supports student achievement.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review examined three main bodies of literature that pertain to each of the following questions:

- What are the causes of loss of instructional time for elementary social studies?
- Are interdisciplinary lessons being designed to integrate social studies content into English Language Arts lessons?
- What are best practices in elementary social studies instruction?

Causes of Marginalization

The first question to be addressed by this literature review concerned identifying the factors which have played a role in the marginalizing of the teaching and learning of social studies at the elementary level. The Center on Educational Policy (2007) conducted a study of elementary instructional time post the No Child Left Behind Act passing in 2001. Their results indicate that on average, 141 minutes were added to the instructional time for mathematics and language arts, while instructional time for social studies and science declined by 75 to 90 minutes. This was echoed in research conducted by Vogler, Lintner, Lipscomb, Knopf, Heafner & Rock (2007), which studied the effect of elementary teachers’ commitment to teaching social studies when it became part of the state-mandated testing program in South Carolina. When social studies was included in the testing program, teachers at the tested grades demonstrated a stronger commitment to teaching social studies than their colleagues at non-tested grade levels (Vogler et al, 2007; Brophy & Alleman, 2008).

Research indicates concern over the amount of time devoted to elementary social studies instruction had been under discussion prior to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). With the
publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1993, the discussion began around the issue of learning standards and high-stakes testing. Even though some questioned the validity of the study, it served to spur a national movement for education reform. The push for “tough standards” in the nation’s schools continued under the Clinton administration. Mathis and Boyd (2009) wrote that concern over elementary social studies instruction began even before the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and reported that since then, instruction in elementary social studies has declined even further.

Rock, Heafner, O’Connor, Passe, Oldendorf, Good and Byrd, (2006) cite the results of a study conducted by the Council for Basic Education and presented by von Zastrow & Janc (2004) which states there was a “waning commitment” to teaching social studies at the elementary level. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was implemented with the stated purpose of closing the achievement gap between groups of students and giving students who were seen as disadvantaged help in reaching academic proficiency (Doppen, Misco & Patterson, 2008). The concern of social studies educators is the NCLB includes all other major academic subject areas and does not include social studies as an area in which students need to demonstrate mastery. Because of this, some teachers’ perceptions of social studies is that it is not as important as the other subject areas (Doppen, Misco & Patterson). Teachers are often given the same impression by administrators (Passe, 2006). While some teachers in the study felt they were well-prepared to teach social studies, others were frustrated that there was little time available to teach social studies because of the pressures to add more time for language arts and mathematics (Hutton, Curtis & Burstein, 2008). A hierarchy of content subjects has been created
due to mandated testing (Vogler et al, 2003). On the top of this hierarchy sits the tested subject areas, and at the bottom, those not tested, including social studies (Kinniburgh & Busby, 2008).

A study by Willis (2007) analyzed what was happening to instructional time for social studies in light of mandated testing in language arts and mathematics. The research conducted in rural elementary schools in southern California which served low-income African-American, Latino and white students found that not only was there a reduction of the scope of the social studies curriculum, there was a decrease in the amount of time spent on developing students’ higher order thinking skills. Another study conducted by Holloway and Chiodo (2009) analyzed elementary curriculum from a school in the rural Southwest. Their findings indicated social studies was being marginalized when compared to language arts and mathematics in the elementary classroom. Researchers have raised the issue of the marginalization of elementary social studies instruction in light of national and state mandated testing (Brophy & Alleman, 2008). In order for students to meet the language arts and mathematics requirements set forth by NCLB time for remediation in those subject areas is needed. This has resulted in the loss of time for social studies instruction (Fry, 2009; McCall, 2006; Olwell & Raphael, 2006) at the elementary level.

An important study in this area is the longitudinal study conducted by Gail McEachron (2010), which presented research on the allocation of elementary social studies instructional time in Virginia and spanned the time period from 1987-2009. The result of her research demonstrated time for elementary social studies averaged less than two hours per week, reflecting the least amount of time assigned to the major subject areas of language arts, mathematics and science (McEachron). McEachron warns this marginalization of elementary
social studies will lead to a further decline in social studies instruction if individual states did not include it as part of mandated testing. The feeling reflected by many teachers is that if social studies was a tested subject area it would be taught (Hutton, Curtis, & Burstein, 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Hinde, 2005; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). This was supported by Mathis and Boyd (2009) whose research presented statistics from several studies. They found that elementary social studies instruction was being limited and in one instance, taught only half of the recommended time. In addition, they noted that social studies was given the least amount of instructional time (33%) compared to other content areas.

Duplass (2007) explored the topic of elementary social studies and advocated for the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) to be the leaders in the reform of elementary social studies instruction. NCSS collaborated with the departments of education in each state, along with professionals in the content area and others to further the cause of a meaningful elementary social studies curriculum. The National Council for the Social Studies has been addressing this issue since the late 1980s, when it reported that only 20% of instructional time was spent on elementary social studies topics. There has been a continual decline in elementary social studies instruction since that time, and now in the 21st century it continues to be an issue for educators. While regional studies have been conducted on this topic, no national studies have been done. According to Fitchett and Heafner (2010), high-stakes testing in the other major subject areas has continued to marginalize social studies in the elementary curriculum and give teachers the impression that the content is not as significant and it has become trivialized in both time allocated and pedagogy.
The mission statement from public school districts across the country contain a common thread, which focuses on students becoming informed citizens. A study presented by Leming, Ellington and Schug (2006) stated when schools only allow limited time for the teaching of social studies, it sends a message to teachers, students and parents that civic education is not important. Cole (2010) noted that as members of a democracy, citizens are often faced with moral issues, and dilemma and in order to address these issues citizens will need to be able to analyze issues from multiple perspectives. It is important that all students, including those at the elementary level, be exposed to lessons which are value-based. The question was raised by Bailey, Shaw and Hollifield (2006) who wrote “How can we morally, ethically and intellectually defend not teaching the United States of America’s future adult citizens the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which are intrinsic to social studies education?” (Bailey, et al, 2006, p.20). Therefore, it is surprising that the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires testing in language arts, mathematics and science with no federal requirement for testing in the area of history and social sciences.

Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere and Stewart (2011) revisited schools that were part their original research they conducted in 2007, to study if there had been any positive changes in social studies education since their original study. They found elementary social studies instruction was still being marginalized. The findings from their interviews noted that in regards to social studies education, the teachers reported that when they “noticed” opportunities to incorporate social studies content into their lessons they discussed events or issues with students. This time generally arose when topics were connected to a reading activity. Social studies lessons weren’t planned in advance, which trivialized the subject, not only for them, but their
students as well. There was still great reluctance on the part of administrators to allow instructional time to be designated for social studies, as time was needed for the tested subject areas or mathematics and reading. This is not a new phenomenon, having been reported by Wade (2002) a decade earlier. Teachers explained there was a marked difference between how social studies instruction was done “then” which was prior to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), and from how it was done “now”. Or more importantly, how it is not done now.

Eleven years after the passage of the NCLB the marginalization of social studies continues. Fitchett and Heafner (2010) report on a study completed by Education Week (Executive Summary, 2009) that notes a decrease in the number of states that have mandated testing in social studies has declined from 30 to 12.

VanFossen’s (2005) study of elementary social studies instruction in the state of Indiana identified three major factors that may play a role in the marginalization of social studies instruction; minimal administrative support for implementing state social studies standards, no state-wide testing in social studies, and a lack of understanding on the part of many elementary teachers on the goals of social studies education. It was noted in this study that many elementary teachers felt that citizenship education was the main goal of social studies education ignoring the other contents (history, geography and economics). This study highlights the lack of content knowledge on the part of classroom teachers of the mission of social studies. Participants in the study ranked social studies fourth in importance of the four major content areas, only slightly ahead of enrichment courses. VanFossen expressed concern for public education, if teachers and administrators believe that the main goal of education is to prepare students to be future citizens, yet are not prepared or committed to teaching social studies.
Another factor that has played a role in the amount of time that is devoted to social studies instruction is the preparation of new teachers. College and universities have different expectations and approaches to social studies education in their teacher preparation programs. While some university programs offer courses in social studies methods, they may not require any courses in social studies content. Research conducted by Bolick, Adams & Wilcox (2010) focused on social studies methods courses at six universities in North Carolina and Virginia. They noted in their findings that social studies education was being marginalized in pre-service programs. Pre-service student teachers participating in a study by Bolick, Adams & Wilcox stated some of the courses they took covered content too broadly and did not focus on what would be needed to teach in an elementary social studies curriculum. Some of the students noted a requirement to choose an area of concentration as part of their teacher preparedness program. At one of the universities in the study, students were told if they chose reading as their area of concentration, they would be awarded additional licensure. Therefore, many chose reading over other content areas, such as history.

A study conducted by Lucey, Hatch and Giannangelo (2010) investigated the content knowledge of pre-service teachers in United States history. They concluded that for teachers to be able to present meaningful social studies lessons they needed to have a solid content foundation. Lucey, Hatch and Giannangelo found that social studies was often integrated into other content areas and did not provide a strong content background in history and that teachers needed to possess a strong content background to be able to teach integrated lessons effectively. Other studies in this area concluded that there was a need for pre-service teacher training to include a strong content course in history, along with the social studies method course (Hinde,
Wineburg (2001) noted that very few college programs designed to prepare teachers, offer courses in teaching history as part of their program. It is recommended that teacher licensure, which is controlled at the state level, needs to be strengthened for teacher preparation programs if teachers are to be ready to teach history content accurately (Van Sledright, 2011).

The literature reviewed has demonstrated that the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has appeared to have played a significant role in the marginalization of elementary social studies instruction. Teachers and administrators have placed priority on content areas that are part of mandated testing, and in order to prepare students for those tests, instructional time for social studies has been reduced. In addition, teacher preparation programs often have not required students to take a content course in history (or geography, economics, etc.) and therefore, new teachers feel unprepared to teach the subject. Results from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reported by Levstik (2008) highlighted that in classrooms where social studies was taught 180 minutes per week score higher on the NAEP exams than students in classrooms where less time was spent teaching social studies. In the conclusion of their study on pre-service teachers and elementary social studies instruction, Mathis and Boyd’s finding reveal a gap exists between the actual practices in social studies instruction in elementary classrooms and training the pre-service teachers receive. They recommend more pedagogical content knowledge is needed as part of pre-service training. These issues have unintentionally combined to result in elementary students having little exposure to social studies instruction.

**Interdisciplinary Lesson Design**

How curriculum integration is designed and implemented addresses a second topic for this literature review. The response to the limited time being allocated for elementary social
studies has led educators today to look for ways to integrate social studies with other content areas in order to include it into the elementary classroom. Using literacy time has become an option for many teachers (Kinniburgh & Busby, 2008; Parker, 2012). Reading time is a natural fit; stories about real people capture students’ attention and increase their curiosity about the personalities they are reading about.

John Dewey (Hinde, 2005) advocated for integrated curriculum in the 1930s, believing that an integrated curriculum made learning more meaningful for students, as opposed to teaching facts in isolation. Integrating curriculum can also be found in the philosophy of the progressive movement, which focused on a more child-centered curriculum. Kinniburgh & Busby (2008) by using appropriate methods, interdisciplinary lessons could become an integral part of the elementary curriculum.

Integrated curriculum is defined by Parker (2012) as “a curriculum approach that purposefully draws together knowledge, perspectives and methods of inquiry from more than one discipline to develop a more powerful understanding of a issue, person event, or big idea” (p.397). In integrating social studies and English Language Arts, schools often develop a curriculum that focuses on myths, holiday celebrations and biographies with little attention paid to actual historical events (Brophy & Alleman, 2008).

Integrating curriculum has been put forward as a way to enhance content, assist with time management and support the teaching of skills, as well as, knowledge (Brophy & Alleman, 2008). Research notes that this premise is correct, but the implementation is much more complex than some think. In order for curriculum integration to be successful, there needs to be
an understanding on the part of the classroom teacher of the social studies curriculum goals and
target skills for the grade level.

Reading becomes a tool for social studies. The purpose of reading is to make meaning
from print and social studies gives relevancy to the reading process (Kinniburgh & Busby).
Reading strategies can be integrated effectively into social studies lessons simply by using pre-
reading strategies such as picture walks, which can activate students’ prior knowledge on a topic.
Students can also make predictions about the topic under study and use guided reading as
another language arts strategy that can be implemented when students work in flexible groups.
Using books at a variety of reading levels, but the same social studies content, can give access to
the curriculum to students of all ability levels. Social studies is often regarded as a vehicle for
reading. (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere & Stewart, 2008).

integrated multidisciplinary approach is particularly important for elementary students because,
as they strive to make sense of their world, young children’s thinking and understanding can
become fragmented, poorly connect and even distorted”( p. 6). New learning must be able to be
connected to prior knowledge so they can make sense of the new information and teachers need
to be given the freedom to integrate content subject areas and not worry about discrete time for
each subject area becomes a win-win for both teachers and students (Jones & Thomas, 2006).
This is especially important at the primary level where teachers often find it difficult to schedule
social studies lessons into their day.

Parker (2012) identified “pitfalls” of integrating curriculum, but notes that there are ways
to avoid these factors and be able to develop a high-quality social studies program. He explains
that integration is a strategy, not a goal. The purpose is not to take content and try and create integrated lessons if they do not really compliment each other. Not all content should or needs to be done simultaneously. Teachers and curriculum developers need to be sure it is the appropriate approach for the subject and skills being taught. Parker explains that teachers should be sure that integration is right for the content, writing that integration is not right for every situation.

Curriculum also may get trivialized if integration is not done thoughtfully. If neither content area is given the appropriate amount of time during the interdisciplinary unit, it will result in a meaningless learning experience. Parker (2012) highlights the teachings of Jerome Bruner, stating that learning should be something that “serves us in the future” (p. 398). Content that is learned will provide the background knowledge for additional learning in higher grades.

In designing lessons, teachers need to find a balance between presenting content information students need to comprehend, and identifying an appropriate pedagogy to convene that material. Classrooms should be stimulating, challenging and active and it is important for teachers to capitalize on the natural curiosity of children to understand their world (Maxim, 2003). This will aid in helping teachers and students view social studies as an important part of their day.

Schug and Cross (1998) noted seven myths about curriculum integration. Even though their article was published over a dozen years ago, the issues raised are still being debated in schools today. Some educators believe that by designing lessons that integrate social studies and English Language Arts (ELA) it will serve to support each subject area. However, because the skills and vocabulary of each subject area is different, it takes highly trained teachers to be able
to successfully integrate the subjects. Teachers must be confident in their subject matter knowledge in each area to understand how the two can be integrated (Schug & Cross; Hinde, 2005). Conversely, if a teacher is not comfortable with the content area, integrated lessons will primarily present one subject area and the other will play a minor role in the lesson (Hinde).

Curriculum integration does not assure there is good teaching going on. The pedagogy being used needs to be appropriate for both subject areas and used in a way that supports student learning.

Those who advocate for integrated curriculum note that in the “real” world, people do not compartmentalize their work. It is believed that by teaching students through the use of an integrated curriculum they will be better prepared to enter the workforce. This perspective is not shared by all educators. According to Parker (2012), some educators believe that various content areas or jobs have a specialized vocabulary and protocol and do not lend themselves to integration. The same is often true in the classroom.

In order for curriculum integration to be successful there needs to be connections made between the subject areas. There are many places within the social studies and English Language Arts curriculum where natural connections occur. When studying the American Revolution and the many historical figures who were part of that period in history, it can be the catalyst for an English Language Arts lesson on biographies. Using these natural connections assist in supporting curriculum by using literacy skills to support social studies content. These connections need to be natural and not forced. Just putting topics together to try and cover material in a shorter time period is not the answer. The role of the teacher in integrating social studies with English Language Arts is important so that there is a focus on the skills and content
in each subject area. Levstik (2008) writes “Hoping for students to understand social studies in any meaningful way simply by literacy happenstance cannot be supported by current research (p. 57).

The ideas of curriculum integration, first identified by those of the Progressive Movement, has much to offer but only if it is done in a thoughtful manner that supports both the curricular areas. A study conducted by Boyle-Baise et al (2008) suggests that social studies was often taught not as a stand alone subject, but rather as a “by-product of reading”. In reflecting on the data collected from thirteen student teachers in six elementary schools across the mid-west, the study highlighted several categories in answering the question “What is happening to social studies?” The first of the categories was the pressure of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) had requiring more time for reading and mathematics. Because of that, social studies was being “blended” or “embedded” into reading classes.

Another category identified by Boyle-Baise et al (2008) was Teaching as Telling in which social studies instruction was reduced to a question and answer exchange between teacher and students. There was no expectation of higher order thinking, inquiry or other social studies pedagogy such as role-playing or discussion. The third category was Integration, here again, social studies was seen as a vehicle to improve reading proficiencies. While the integration of social studies content and reading instruction can be a valuable tool for elementary teachers, it is often reported that no purposeful social studies content or skills are focused on, rather just literacy instruction. Reading comprehension is the focus of the integrated lessons, rather than trying to present social studies content.
Current literature reviewed on interdisciplinary learning highlighted the work of Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart (2008) present research on how integration can be done effectively. They have identified pedagogy, which can lead to successfully integrating social studies and literacy lessons. Schug and Cross (1998) and Hinde (2005) also present research from their studies which supports the integration of social studies and English Language Arts. All of these studies have indicated that social studies and the English Language Arts curricular can be integrated effectively if the parameters described by these researchers are adhered too.

Levstik (2008) reports that in districts where social studies was required to be integrated into the literacy block, little professional development was provided for teachers to learn how to develop integrated lessons. Levstik also notes that minimal planning time for social studies resulted in the marginalization of social studies as a content area. In some cases, social studies has become consumed into reading programs as schools focus on English Language Arts and mathematics (Levstik).

While English Language Arts and social studies content knowledge are two curriculum areas that are easily integrated, educators need to be sure any integration is done is a purposeful and thoughtful manner. If not, instruction becomes haphazard and neither content area is taught in an appropriate manner. Choices of pedagogy should support the purpose of the lesson, whether it is a reinforcing a literacy skill or historical content knowledge students are required to master. This body of literature provides important background knowledge necessary to address the problem of practice identified in this study.

**Best Practices in Elementary Social Studies Instruction**
What does the scholarly literature present as best or wise practices in elementary social studies, is the focus of the third question in this study. It is important to review pedagogy, which is designed to support effective social studies instruction. Social studies content and skills need to be seen as having particular instructional practices that support learning.

It is important to understand that social studies has its own pedagogy. Simply incorporating literature that addresses social studies topics into the curriculum does not constitute teaching social studies, if pedagogy for effective social studies instruction is not used. The National Council for the Social Studies has noted five strategies for effectively teaching social studies: integration, challenging, value-based, effective and meaningful. Content material learned needs to be presented to students in meaningful ways in order for the content to be understood and retained by students (Cole, 2010). The goal of social studies education goes beyond students learning specific content. A common complaint about the subject area is that it is all about memorizing names and dates. In order to support students becoming informed citizens, educators must realize that students will, in fact, be global citizen. They need to learn skills, strategies and content in order to deal with the moral issues and dilemmas, which often arise when studying events and topics in social studies classes. In addition, values, tolerance, respect and responsibility are frequently the center of social studies lessons (Cole, 2010).

Pedagogical content knowledge, according to Duplass (2008), is the integration of subject matter knowledge, curriculum knowledge and pedagogy. Duplass raises the question of how to choose pedagogy, the strategies used to present content to students, which are the most effective and supports the use of active learning strategies to engage students in the process of learning.
In their book, *Doing History*, Levstik and Barton (2011) identified what they believe are basic principles for teaching history. One of the principles, *Teaching and learning must have purpose*, explains the necessity for students to have a main purpose of learning content. If students believe they only need to learn material in order to receive a grade, it will not result in lasting knowledge. However, if the student understands why it is important to acquire that particular content knowledge, it aids in long term memory of the content and motivates the learner. Levstik and Barton note “Education without purpose not only robs children of the desire to learn, it undermines the ability to learn” (p.12).

*Learning means in-depth understanding* points to the importance of students developing in-depth knowledge about a topic, not merely learning facts. Being able to state facts about a topic does not demonstrate understanding. According to Levstik and Barton (2011) students need to be able to integrate the new knowledge into prior learning and make connections so that it will lead to long-term, more in-depth understanding. *Instruction must build on students’ prior knowledge* is noted by these researchers as important because it gives teachers the opportunity to help students make important connections between new learning and prior knowledge. By tapping into student schema whenever possible, it helps the teachers provide students the opportunity create the links to the new learning. Levstik and Barton also note that learning should not be passive and students need to build and relate new knowledge to what they already know.

The fourth principle listed by Levstik and Barton (2011) is, *People learn through disciplined inquiry*. By their nature, children ask questions starting at a very early age, and as educators, we need to be able to capitalize this and use it when designing lessons. By asking
questions, teaching students how to locate information and draw conclusions about what they have learned, Levstik and Barton point out teachers are able to build on students “natural enthusiasm” for learning. Studies have indicated that by fostering students’ learning through the exploration of topics using meaningful questioning and presents students with authentic learning experiences, which will lead to a deeper understanding and give students the ability to be able to retain what they have learned and be able to apply it in other learning situations.

*Teaching means scaffolding* is identified by Levstik and Barton (2011) as a way to connect to the “real world” outside of the classroom. Most people work in a collaborative setting, in those work environments, experienced workers serve as models for the novices. After a short time period the newer workers are given more responsibility. By modeling, students are able to understand how to successfully complete the task. They will be able to have a sample for comparison of their final product and be able to determine if they have met the standard. Finally, *constructive assessment* is identified by Levstik and Barton who emphasize that the assessment should serve a *constructive* purpose. They discuss assessment as being beneficial to both the teaching and learning aspects of education. Assessments should be developed in a manner that allows students to be able to show what they know, rather than what they do not know (p.19). In addition, they emphasize that assessment should be authentic; replicating what students may be asked to do in situations outside of school. Students will be more engaged in learning, if the tasks they are being given to do strive to have them make their own connections and build knowledge rather then being ask to repeat back information presented to them. It makes students want to learn the material at a deeper level and be more invested in the act of learning (King, Newmann and Carmichael, 2010).
It is important for teachers to be confident in their teaching materials for social studies. Because pre-service training for elementary teachers in the area of social studies is sometimes limited, teachers often rely on teachers’ editions and packaged programs provided to them by their school. Frequently, these programs are not very well developed and many times have inaccurate information. It is also noted that resources which accompany the text do not use effective social studies teaching strategies. Therefore, what little social studies instruction is presented is often fragmented and inaccurate (Brophy, Alleman and Knighton, 2009). Teachers should be able to incorporate authentic literature into social studies lessons, which will draw out students’ prior knowledge and allow social studies lessons to be rich in social studies content, while engaging students (Brophy and Alleman, 2008).

Very often, social studies textbooks are written above the reading ability of many of the students using them. Best practices in social studies calls for students to be actively engaged with challenging materials. The “challenging term” was meant to describe the amount of thinking a student needed to do, not his/her ability to decode their textbook. Content knowledge is not something to be “delivered” by the teacher and repeated back by students on a test. The content of social studies is meant to help students explore the many different topics that are part of any good social studies program (Sumrall and Schillinger, 2004).

Parker (2012) has identified historical understanding and civic competence as the two major goals of teaching social studies. He has listed three subgoals: social knowledge, attitudes and values, and skills as important for successful social studies instruction. Knowledge looks at social studies education through three different lenses; discipline, themes and topics. The disciplines includes the seven social sciences; history, geography, civics and government,
economics, sociology, psychology and anthropology. Themes refer to the 10 themes highlighted by the National Council for the Social Studies for effective social studies programs. Topics are generally identified as objectives in state and local curriculum guides.

Attitudes and values speak to the dispositions, traits and virtues. It is through the teaching of attitudes and values that citizens understand social responsibilities and the concepts of democracy. Finally, skills is made up of skills such as comparing and contrasting, writing and presenting, distinguishing facts from opinion etc.

VanSledright (2011) reports that many professional organizations, such the Carnegie Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Organization of American Historians and the Teaching American History program that have begun to research changes in teaching practices. These groups are studying how historical knowledge and instructional pedagogy interact.

Student collaboration plays an important role in implementing developmentally appropriate pedagogy for teaching social studies. Using inquiry skills and hands-on activities, students become immersed in constructivist learning tasks, rather than the usual reading, answering questions and completing worksheets during social studies instruction. Brophy and Alleman (2008) report on the teaching methodology of Barbara Knighton who employs a narrative approach when teaching social studies to young students. Knighton presents social studies lessons as narratives, which allows them to ask questions and interact with other students (Brophy and Alleman).

McCall (2006) discusses area that should be the focus for professional development in area of elementary social studies. In order to present quality instruction for students, McCall stressed the need for more subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical-content knowledge
training, as well as, classroom support and supervision in the areas of critical thinking and problem solving.

Research on best practices in social studies, as highlighted in the research for addressing question three, demonstrates the need for educators to understand that in order to present social studies lessons successfully; the pedagogy needs to be anchored in social studies content and skills. Professional development opportunities for teachers needs to be made available in order for classroom teachers to not only be comfortable with the content, but able to present it effectively.

**Summary of Literature Review**

Three major themes have emerged from this literature review; loss of instructional time for elementary social studies instruction, interdisciplinary curriculum and best practices for social studies instruction. Some research exists on these topics; however, there are voids in the literature. This research addressed these issues and attempted to fill in some of the gaps in the current literature by seeking answer the questions posed in this literature review.

More research was needed to understand the complexity of factors leading to the marginalization of elementary social studies instruction. Some research had been presented on the role the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and pre-service teacher education has played in this problem of study, but more was needed that reflects what is going on in Massachusetts. How the integration of curriculum can be done effectively and identifying the best practices for social studies instruction led me to design my own research study on elementary social studies instruction. Historical thinking and geographic literacy need to be investigated to move social studies instruction beyond the simple presentation of facts and dates. Research studies need to be
able to understand how the various disciplines within social studies work in tandem to present an effective social studies program.

Further research on various best practices methodology and the use of interdisciplinary learning is needed so the social studies content and skills elementary students need to master can be successfully presented. In terms of professional development in the area of social studies education, van Hover (2008) states it is important that best practices in social studies education be identified so that professional development can be presented based on those best practices.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction to Qualitative Study

To explore this problem of practice a qualitative case study approach was chosen. According to Stake (2010), researchers choose to use qualitative research when their goal is to improve the issue/problem under study using a holistic approach to researching the phenomena. Maxwell (2005) states qualitative research can be categorized as an inductive methodology because it has both intellectual and practical goals. The first intellectual goal addresses understanding the meaning for those who are part of the study and addresses their perceptions and how they are influenced by the issue. For this research, it was important to be able to clearly understand the perceptions of the teacher participants in terms of what had changed from past practice and what was currently taking place in terms of social studies instruction.

Another intellectual goal addresses the context in which the participants act. Maxwell (2005) notes this is often done with qualitative studies where the studies are generally done with a small number of participants. This allows the researchers to understand the interaction of the respondents in the natural setting where the events or issues at the core of the study are taking place. By using a small, purposeful sampling of teachers and principals in this study and conducting the research within their home school, it supports the criteria set forth as necessary for a qualitative study. By using a specific criterion to choose subjects to participate in the study, it also supports the use of a qualitative study to complete this research (Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2009).

Maxwell (2005) highlights three practical goals of a qualitative study, the first being that the study results should be credible to the researcher and the participants. Secondly, a practical
goal is the study should make a positive change in the issue being investigated and not simply report on the data collected. This study sought to not only identify if social studies was being taught at the elementary level, but also address the second practical issue, identifying best practices in elementary social studies instruction. The study hopes the findings will improve current practice in elementary social studies instruction.

Research Question

In designing a qualitative study, the research question serve two purposes; to understand the issue that the study is trying to understand and to focus the study by providing direction on how to conduct the research (Maxwell, 2005).

The question posed for investigation in this research proposal was: How do elementary classroom teachers, given the contemporary restraints of the No Child left Behind Act, negotiate content and pedagogy in elementary social studies at two schools? The proposition of this research was based on earlier studies (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006, O’Connor, Heafner, & Groce 2007, Willis, 2007), in which the findings demonstrated instructional time for elementary social studies had been reduced in order to increase the instructional time for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. One reason being identified for this phenomenon is ELA and mathematics are mandated testing areas as part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) (Fitchett and Heafner, 2010; Olwell and Raphael, 2006; Vogler and Virture, 2007). The impact of this legislation on the teaching and learning of elementary social studies was one of the main focuses of this investigation. The purpose of the question was to investigate the research findings presented in the literature review and confirm or deny if it was supported by the data collected by the teachers and principals who were participants in the study.
Methodology

A case study method was designed to investigate the question posed by this study. The case study methodology provides the researcher with the ability to collect a wide variety of data; documents, interviews and observations (Creswell, 2009). All the data in case studies are generally collected by the researcher on site, with the researcher interacting directly with the participants. The case study methodology used in this research study was chosen because a key factor in the case study design is the phenomena under study can be investigated within an authentic setting with multiple sources of data being collected for analysis (Yin, 2009). Data collected for this research was done by the researcher on-site at each school setting.

Stake (2010) identified special characteristics that are found in qualitative research. One of the factors noted is qualitative research can be viewed as interpretative because the data collected reflects the perceptions of the participants and how the researcher interprets those findings. In this study, it was reflected in the interviews with the staff. A second factor reported by Stake is qualitative research is personalistic. Here, the researcher served as the main source of data collection and had the opportunity to reflect on the point of view of each participant then decide what, if any, role it played in their responses. Qualitative research, such as case studies, are designed to be flexible and allow the researcher to be able to adjust the study in order to “follow the data” if it requires a change in focus. Maxwell (2005) referred to as “identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences” (p. 22), who refers to this as one of the five intellectual goals of a qualitative research design.

An important feature of case studies is the research takes place in the natural setting. Collecting data on the phenomena in the authentic setting, allows the researcher to understand
the topic in its natural context (Yin, 2009). Additionally, Yin writes that the case study designs include the triangulation of many various data points, collecting information from real-world situations to analyze. These permeable boundaries allow the researcher to study the phenomenon in a real-life situation and how it relates to its natural environment.

Using a case study approach for this research was appropriate and met the criteria for using a case study methodology. My research was conducted in an authentic setting with a purposeful sampling of participants. The size of the study, six teachers and two principals, along with the types of data collected (documents, interviews, and field observations) supported the case study design (Stake, 2010). In addition, the purpose of the study, to understand how educators have experienced the effects of NCLB on elementary social studies instruction, was appropriate for being investigated through a case study design as it sought to determine how this situation occurred. Finally, the role of the researcher as the collector of the data and need to establish a relationship with the participants in order to collect data, were factors that support the use of a case study design for this research. In the case study process, the phenomena cannot be manipulated and data collection includes multiple sources, such as a variety of documents and access to subjects to interview (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2009). The triangulation of data in qualitative studies supports the credibility of the study design and confidence in the results, due to the use of the multiple sources of data (Stake).

**Site and participants**

This research was conducted in a school district that consisted of eight elementary schools, two of which were chosen for the study. The schools vary in size from 200 to 725 students in grades kindergarten through grade five (with one exception of a K-4 building). This
district was chosen as the site for the research, as it is the system in which I serve as the Social Studies Coordinator. The district was the most appropriate for my research because of my access to classroom teachers and administrators with whom I had a professional relationship. By interacting with staff in the system, I was able to choose from a cross-section of participants provided the data needed for this study. It allowed me, as the researcher, to more effectively avoid internal dynamics that an outside researcher would have not been aware of coming into a new system.

The schools chosen for this study reflected a medium and high population school. The focus was on three grade levels; grade one representing a primary classroom, grade three where content become more of a focus and grade five in which students were being prepared for middle school. Two teachers from each grade level were interviewed, for a total of six teachers. The teachers chosen were asked to provide data (lesson plans) on how social studies is implemented at their classroom and participated in individual interviews. Since the elementary teachers are responsible for teaching basic social studies content and skills, it is important that curriculum and time allotments are followed in order to provide the necessary content knowledge background for students as they move onto to the secondary level.

The purposeful sampling of teachers was representative of various grade levels and the two schools in the study, and provide the cross-section of participates that provided data which investigated the research question posed. Choosing participants from a small sample “purposeful selection” achieves representativeness, according to Maxwell (2005). Systematic sampling can be used to be sure the responses are representative of population.

Data collection
Data in the form of documents, interviews and field observations was collected in order to answer the question posed by this research. It was necessary to collect data from a variety of sources in order to provide validity to the results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 2010). Data from interviews will included specific information, such as the actual number of minutes social studies is taught each week, identifying the documents teachers relied on when designing lessons etc., as well as, teacher perceptions of what administration was requiring and advocating for in terms of social studies instruction. By holding individual interviews with teachers, it gave me the opportunity to gather data that was not compromised by participants being influenced hearing the answers of others. The teachers represented three different grade levels and two different schools. Some of the questions used were from prior studies and used with permission as noted on the interview sheet in appendix.

The third piece of data collected was through field observations. The purpose of the observations was to gather data on the amount of “visible social studies.” This was done by noting social studies observed during walk-through visits, for example student work displayed and decorations posted that are social studies based (words of the Pledge of Allegiance, pictures of presidents, maps etc.). Lincoln and Guba (1985) note it is important for the researcher to be cognizant of the “salient” issues that arise during the observations. It is essential that the researcher be open-minded when gathering data during field observations. The findings may not be what the research anticipated, but the data needs to be gathered first and then analyzed. During the observation period it is important not to look for data that supports the premise of the research, rather, collect the raw data for later analysis.
The protocol for the interviews was individual conversations with each of the eight participants. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Data collected from teachers included a teacher profile identifying their professional experience, teaching assignment and classroom schedule. Teachers were interviewed and questions focused on specific curriculum topics regarding their familiarity with the district curriculum documents, including the time allotment policy. Participants were also asked what message they believe they had received from their principal regarding the amount of time that should be allotted to social studies. Teachers were asked if they perceive a lack of formal or informal of support for social studies instruction (i.e. students are pulled from social studies classes for remediation in English Language Arts (ELA) / mathematics, time for social studies reduced in order to provide additional time for lessons on ELA or mathematics). Respondents were asked to identify their own beliefs of the importance of the various content areas by rank ordering subject areas. In addition, teachers were asked questions regarding their lesson plan development, including resources used and their own content knowledge background in the area of social studies.

Through the interview process, information was collected which was analyzed to identify the current status of elementary social studies instruction in the district and changes that were real or perceived by the teachers. Patterns and themes were identified and connections made to the research question posed by this study.

**Data analysis**

Yin (2009) provides suggestions for novice case study researchers, suggesting data analysis begin by connecting the data collected to the question posed by the study,
it is then important to identify how the data will be presented. The proposition of this case study, NCLB has had a negative impact on elementary social studies instruction, helped to focus the analysis on certain aspects of the data collected, while deeming other data not as relevant.

Each of the three types of data collected was analyzed independently and then as a whole to identify patterns that emerged and to determine if the evidence collected in each area (interviews, document review and field observations) supported the same conclusion. The school district time allotment policy was reviewed as well as sample lesson plans were analyzed. In addition, teacher knowledge and use of the document was noted. Field observations provided evidence of social studies being made visible to students. The types of displays were analyzed to identify if it is “true social studies” being displayed or if it reflected a literacy lesson that used social studies content. Reflective memos were kept and included in the final analysis.

Maxwell (2005) suggests setting up a matrix as a means to organize data. It provides the researcher with a means to analyze the data collected and also identify the connections between each piece of data to the question under study. By placing data into “organizational bins” it helps to facilitate analysis according to Maxwell (2005) who also stresses the importance of choosing analysis strategies that are compatible with research question posed.

The triangulation of these three data sources provided sufficient data to successfully address the question regarding the amount of social studies instruction taking place in elementary classrooms, identified the practices used and noted the support of administration.

Coding is a method in which data is organized into chunks or segments according to topics or themes prior to being analyzed for meaning (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2010). The goal of coding is to identify connections between the data (Maxwell, 2005). The general steps in...
analyzing data includes organizing data, initial reading, development of codes, analysis, representing findings graphically and interpreting the findings (Creswell, 2009).

Stake (2010) suggests designing a graphic plan to display data, which will help to facilitate its interpretation in the analysis section of the study. Maxwell (2005) notes that the categories, or topics, identified serve as bins for sorting data. *Theoretical sampling* will be used in analyzing data for this study. Theoretical sampling is a responsive approach and allows the categories to be established as the data is analyzed, rather than established prior to the analysis process beginning (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Once only used in grounded theory, theoretical sampling is currently employed by a wider variety of methodologies. By implementing this method, the categories and themes grow during the analysis process.

When organizing data into categories, the researcher should first use the “actual language” of the respondents, which is referred to as *in-vivo* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009). This represents the first column of the matrix. The second column is the *emerging themes*, followed by the *central themes*, which become emerged as most relevant to the study. Finally, the last column displays how the data relates to the theoretical framework on which the study determine the codes, this study analyzed the raw data and allowed the categories to emerge from the analysis (Creswell, 2009). Information highlighted in the final column of the chart, was used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>In-vivo</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Central Themes</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Principal</td>
<td>#1 Principal</td>
<td>#3 Gr. 1 Teacher</td>
<td>#4 Gr. 1 Teacher</td>
<td>#5 Gr. 3 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 Gr. 3 Teacher</td>
<td>#7 Cr. 5 Teacher</td>
<td>#8 Gr. 5 Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Interview Data Matrix (sample)
to compare the themes identified after the analysis of the interview responses. These themes, or patterns of responses, were analyzed as they related to the theoretical framework of the study. The researcher sought to identify data that confirmed or contradicted the theoretical framework by looking for connections between the two.

Comparative analysis of the data gathered further allowed the researcher to identify common trends and themes. Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to constant comparisons as a methodology to compare incidents when organizing data. By focusing on comparisons it helps the researcher differentiate the data into the various categories.

The act of writing memos as part of qualitative research was discussed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) who described various types of memos and the importance of including them in the analysis process. By writing memos, the researcher is able to capture their thought process throughout the during data collection. When beginning the in-depth data analysis, these memos serve to track the transitions the research has taken over time. The act of writing memos gives the researcher an opportunity to begin to think about the data early in the research process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also make the distinction between field notes where observations are made, and memos which are lengthier and reflect a thought process, rather than just simple observations written as part of field notes. The final stage of data analysis is interpretation, or making meaning from the data (Creswell, 2009).

Validity Issues

Lincoln and Guba (1985) list four issues that qualitative researchers need to consider when designing their study; truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Truth value refers to the need for the participants to feel confident in the results of the study. In studies, such
as this one, the need for the subjects to have confidence in the process is immeasurable. In order for them to respond truthfully, they need to have confidence not only in the researcher, but that the results will truthfully reflect their input. This is reflected in the trustworthiness of the study, how it is viewed by others. The credibility of the study can be supported by the belief of the participants that the research has been carried out in a thoughtful manner and respects the contributions of the respondents.

In addition, applicability plays a role in qualitative studies, as researchers try to determine if the results would be similar in other contexts, Lincoln and Guba (1985) raise the issue if the results of the study could be generalized. This is also reflected in the consistency factor; would the same results be found if the study was repeated in another context? However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that it is not the purview of the researcher to generalize their results, rather that should be done by others reading the study. Finally, neutrality refers to ability of researchers reviewing studies to believe the study truly reflects the findings and that bias and or the perspective of the researcher did not influence the results.

The credibility of a study can be viewed through multiple lenses identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Those lenses included prolonged engagement, persistent observation and the triangulation of data. By prolonged engagement, they referred to the need for the researcher to spend sufficient time studying the phenomena within its natural content, which allows ample time to build trust between the researcher and subjects. Lincoln and Guba (1985) write when studies take place in the context or setting under study, it adds to the credibility of the research. By conducting research in a naturalistic setting, they stress the importance of understanding the culture. Conducting research in my own district allowed me, as the researcher, to have insight
into the setting for the study, and be able to acknowledge any issues that arose. *Persistent observation* gives the researcher time to be able to identify the important factors on which to focus the study. These factors can only be identified if the researcher takes time to observe the participants in the context of where the study is taking place. Lastly, the triangulation of data supports the credibility of the study as multiple sources of data is collected and analyzed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2010). In addition, member checking during the analysis process will ensure credibility as the data has been verified (Lincoln & Guba).

Teachers invited to participate in the study were regular education classroom teachers, with at least seven years of experience in the Plymouth system. Experienced teachers with professional status were asked to participate in order to provide a historical perspective of changes, if any, they had noted in recent years. Since I had no evaluative responsibilities at the elementary level, and information reported by teachers not shared with principals or other administrators, there was no conflict of interest and their responses were confidential.

The potential bias that arose as part of this study was the direct role I have played in the development of the curriculum documents for elementary social studies. It was necessary for me to take a step back and listen to what the teacher participants said about the resources they used when planning lessons and remain objective. By being cognizant of this issue, I believe I was able to be objective as I collected and analyzed the data gathered.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

As a researcher conducting a study in the school system in which I am employed, it presented issues that need to be addressed when working with participants who are also school employees. In qualitative research it is the role of the researcher to provide protection for the
subjects involved in the study (Stake, 2010) and the purpose of the study should be communicated to the subjects, so there is a common understanding between the participants and the research as to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2009). This is especially true when both the researcher and subjects share a connection to the same school district.

Protocols were identified and instituted to protect the participants, including informed consent (Yin, 2009; Stake, 2010). In this study, six elementary teachers were solicited to be part of the interview. Teachers were given a detailed outline of the study in order for them to make an informed decision if they wanted to participate in the study. Since I am not the evaluator for teachers at the elementary level, there was no concern on the part of participants that their responses would be reflected in any formal or informal evaluations.

Another important factor noted is the need for the researcher to share with the subjects who will have access to the raw data and how the findings will be used or distributed. Also, how long and how the data is stored may also be important to share with subjects depending on the type of data collected (Creswell, 2009). In this study the raw data was kept confidential and teachers chosen not identified beyond their grade level assignment and number of years teaching in the district.

Participants’ rights need to be clearly explained by the researcher. In addition in qualitative research when the researcher is conducting observations or interviews on site, they must be respectful of the institution in which they are collecting their data. Onsite interviews were held, not only at the convenience of the participants, but also in a setting that was familiar and comfortable for them. Participants were also instructed they were able to decline answering specific questions or stop the interview process at any time.
The researcher and the participant may be seen as collaborators in the process, but the responsibility for protecting the subjects lies with the researcher (Stake, 2010). Steps should be taken to be sure the participants do not feel coerced into taking part in the study. The teachers and principals invited to participate in this study based on their years of teaching experience and grade level assignment was on a voluntary basis. Both the researcher and the participants should benefit from the results of the research (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2010). The participants were provided a summary of the results at the conclusion of the study, and the raw data kept secure.

Creswell (2009) notes that studies should be designed that show consideration for participants, research sites and the readers of the study. The researcher is responsible for the protection of the participants and seeking to reduce any conflicts of interest that may arise (Butin, 2010). It is up to the researcher to be responsible that the research design meets the criteria of an ethical study. I believe that based on my fifteen years in the system as a teacher and twelve years as an administrator, I was able to secure willing participants contributed to the study through participation in the interview process. Because of the large size of the district, interactions with the teachers participating in the study are minimal. Some of the teachers I had never had any interactions with prior to this study. I did not seek out participants with whom I may have a more personal connection.

The design of this study posed no serious ethical issues for the participants or researcher (Maxwell, 2005). Every effort was taken to protect the subjects and the results of the study share to in order to be beneficial to both the researcher and the participants.

**Conclusion**

The issue of elementary social studies instruction being marginalized by other content
areas which are tested in accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was the focus of this study. The case study methodology was designed to triangulate data from three sources; interviews, document review and field observation of “visible” social studies in classrooms and hallways. In analyzing the data, the focus was on identifying phenomena which affect elementary social studies instruction. This was accomplished by the coding of data, creating a matrix which first identified the responses of the participants, secondly the themes that emerged and the resulting central themes that were revealed through the analysis process. These were studied through the lens of the theoretical framework.

In order to address the issue of validity in this study, six teachers from two schools were involved. The teachers chosen through purposeful sampling, two teachers from three different grades levels. This provided credibility because of the use of two sites as each school is under the leadership of different principals. Since I do not serve as the evaluator at the elementary level, there was no conflict of interest issue. Choosing participants from small sample “purposeful selection” according to Maxwell (2005) helps achieve representativeness, reflecting entire range of teacher population of the schools involved.

The protocols for qualitative research state the researcher is the person who collects the data and is at the center of the study. By conducting the research within the context of my own school district, it provided the opportunity to understand the culture of the schools in the district, be able to build on positive relationships with teachers and hopefully make a meaningful contribution to elementary social studies instruction. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note two important factors in establishing the trustworthiness of a study, transferability and dependability. Transferability speaks to the research findings being similar if conducted in another district,
while dependability would focus on the process of the study, noting if the methodology design was valid.

Through the purposeful sampling of teachers, gathering of data from a variety of sources and analyzing the data independently then collectively, this study was able to address the initial question posed, *How do elementary classroom teachers, given the contemporary restraints of the No Child left Behind Act, negotiate content and pedagogy in elementary social studies at two schools?*

This case study was designed to focus on elementary social studies instruction, seeking to understand major changes identify by teachers and school administrators and the reasons for the change. In addition, instructional strategies being implemented by the study participants were analyzed for current best practices for teaching and learning in social studies education.

Public schools profess that their mission is to prepare students to be informed, responsible citizens, yet there is concern among many educators that social studies education is being marginalized. This study engaged teachers and administrators in order to gather and analyze data regarding current practices in social studies education and present the findings identifying if schools are meeting their goal of, preparing students to take their place as active, informed adult citizens.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction to Results

This study was designed to analyze elementary social studies instruction in two elementary schools with a focus on three specific grade levels. Three different data sources were chosen to support the qualitative design of the research. Each provided a lens to analyze how social studies instruction was being implemented in the classrooms of the study participants. This section is divided into three parts and presents the analysis of the following: the document review, the walkthrough data and the participant interviews. By using three different data sets, a picture emerged of the current practices of the participating educators, both teachers and principals. That picture provided a glimpse into the realities of the status of social studies instruction at the elementary level. Through a comprehensive review of district documents, interviews to assess the commitment to social studies education and finally seeking out visible signs of social studies engagement in schools, this study sought to provide insight into how social studies instruction is being carried out in today’s classrooms.

The document review presents the results of the analysis of the elementary social studies curriculum for grades one, three and five, along with the district time allotment policy and sample lesson plans from the teacher participants. The curriculum documents were reviewed individually, followed by an overview of the complete curriculum guide for each grade level as a whole. Sample lesson plans were also studied for alignment to the curriculum documents, use of effective social studies pedagogy and alignment with the time allotment for social studies instruction at the particular grade level.
The second section presents an analysis of the visual social studies observed in each school. Through the use of field notes and photos taken during observations, detailed information was gathered about the degree to which social studies content was “visible” in the hallways and classrooms. “Visible” meant any bulletin board, posters, maps or book displays etc, that are visible to students and staff and support social studies content. It also provided evidence of the degree to which the materials displayed reflected effective social studies practices. Researcher memos written during the data collection were useful to track the thought process while collecting and analyzing the data.

The final section presents data from the interviews with principals and teachers. The data collected from the interviews with participants were analyzed using open coding. Open coding was chosen because, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), it encourages the researcher to allow the data to guide the analysis by not beginning the process with pre-conceived ideas of what the data will reflect. The matrix was designed to organize the data and be able to identify themes and patterns that emerged during the analysis.

The triangulation of these various sources of data provided a rich and detailed analysis of the research by addressing the questions posed by this study. The data chosen for inclusion in this analysis was based on its support in answering the research question. Data gathered that did not contribute to confirming or contradicting the research presented was not cited.

Section 1: Document Review

According to Yin (2005) the use of document review in a case study methodology is seen as strength because it provides a stable source of evidence that can be reviewed repeatedly, and documents are “unobtrusive” sources of information that were not created for study. Butin
(2010) also notes documents can provide data which is unanticipated by the researcher at the start of the study. This supports the qualitative analysis by allowing the data to drive the study and to change its direction if needed. The documents give the researcher the ability to discover if the information confirms or contradicts data gathered from other sources, such as interviews (Yin. 2005).

**First, Third and Fifth Grade Curriculum Materials.** The first documents reviewed were the social studies curriculum for grades one, three and five. They were formatted in the same manner with multiple sections, each providing information regarding the instruction of social studies at that specific grade level. The document cover provided the course title, which was aligned to the Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework for the grade level and an “Overarching Understanding” for each course was also noted.

**Social Studies Report Card Benchmarks.** The first section of the curricular document was the Social Studies Report Card Benchmarks for the grade level consisting of a three by four matrix. In the first column were the Report Card Standards: Uses social studies tools to identify people, places and environments; Identifies the roles that individuals or groups play in shaping our community/country/world: and Demonstrates understanding of concepts, content and vocabulary presented. The last three columns contained the expectations for each of the three grading terms. Each defines for teachers what students would need to do to “meet” the expectations for that term. An example from grade three is shown in Table 2.

The second item reviewed was entitled Content and Skills presents the Overarching Understanding, followed by the three report card standards and finally suggestions for each of the standards as shown in Table 3 on the following page. The standards have also been further
Table 2 Social Studies Report Card Benchmarks Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses social Studies tools to identify and environments</td>
<td>Uses social studies tools to identify and environments with teacher assistance</td>
<td>Uses social studies tools to identify with minimal teacher assistance</td>
<td>Consistently uses social studies tools to identify people, places and environments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

defined into “skill, content connections and content”. This document gives teachers specific models of what students should know and be able to do to meet the expectation for each standard.

In addition, it provides a Focused Skill and Essential Question for the term. An example of a focused skill presented during the study of Early European Explorers states students would be asked to “analyze fact and opinion from multiple points of view using primary and secondary sources.” This gives teachers the opportunity to present skills in an organized and meaningful way and allows for a spiraling of learning around specific skills. Example for grade five is found in Appendix.

The final piece of the curriculum document review contains information for teachers connecting the Learning Standards from the state framework to unit questions, vocabulary, activities and assessments for each unit. This is the “how to” section of the document and presented the specifics for lesson plan development. It referenced the resources provided to the teacher, such as textbooks and supplemental material, all teachers at the grade level can access. Sample of grade three unit can be found in Appendix C.

The documents in this review each provided teachers with expectations for teaching and learning, with the final document providing the detailed resources. How the curriculum was
disseminated to staff was not identified in the district curriculum documents reviewed, nor was a plan identified that outlined a district plan for curriculum review. However, it was revealed that a new curriculum website is currently under development at the district level which will allow for more consistency in how teachers access the curriculum documents.

The curriculum as a whole presents teachers with a comprehensive document designed to support the development of lesson plans and provide consistency at each grade level across the various classrooms. Teachers interviewed noted they use the resources provided by the district or their school, but none specifically mentioned the district curriculum documents. A review of the in-service professional development plan for the last three school years (2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12) reveal a predominance of sessions devoted to literacy and mathematics, with only one session for social studies out of the twenty-three held during that time period.

A review of sample lesson plans demonstrated appropriate content, but did not reflect the specific state standards from the Framework. For example, several lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr. at the grade one level, only listed “Martin Luther King Holiday” as the reason created Dr. King’s boyhood home, instructing students to “count by fives”. This lesson reinforced mathematics skills over social studies content. The document review also highlighted that there was no standardized district form for lesson planning and the lessons from teachers within the same building varied.

**Section 2: Field Observations**

The two schools in this study represent a medium and large school from among eight elementary schools in the district. The schools have been given pseudonyms and will be referred to as Cedar Elementary and Brewster Elementary for the purpose of this study.
Entering Brewster Elementary you find a large staircase reflecting its original purpose as the town’s high school. The large brick building blends into the colonial architecture of the downtown area. The three story building has large windows, some overlooking the harbor and others overlooking Town Hall across the street, which had also served as the high school at one point in time.

Inside, the wide corridors have creaky wooden floors and dark stained woodwork. There are copy machines located in hallways and closets serving as small offices, highlighting the growth the school has undergone. The schools motto “Where generations have learned” is appropriate for the school which is turned one hundred years old this year.

### Grade 3 – Social Studies – Content and Skills

#### Overarching Understanding

- Massachusetts and the town of Plymouth planed an important role in the founding of our country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Connections</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses social studies tools (maps, charts, graphs, timelines and photographs) to identify people, places and environments.</td>
<td>Identifies the roles that individuals or groups play in shaping our community/country.</td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of concepts, content, and vocabulary presented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Interpret a map using information from its title, compass rose scale and legend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify the locations of certain physical and human features on maps and globes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Create and use charts, graphs, atlases and maps to interpret information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop and use different kinds of maps.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Identify and use primary sources for reconstructing the past.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Interpret a map using information from its title, compass rose scale and legend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Identify the locations of certain physical and human features on maps and globes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Create and use charts, graphs, atlases and maps to interpret information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Develop and use different kinds of maps.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Identify and use primary sources for reconstructing the past.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Skills and Content**
Cedar Elementary School is referred to as a “satellite” school, one of four schools built in the 1980s, all with the same design, in areas of town with growing populations. Driving up to the school, you can see small classroom windows, a large glassed in lobby and main office behind a glass wall. The building is a one level, box design, with classrooms located in “pods”, each containing several rooms. The tiled corridor connects the pods with the library, gymnasium and cafeteria.

Walkthroughs were conducted in mid-September and mid-October and consisted of walking the corridors of each building and visiting a classroom at each grade level, one through five. The classrooms were chosen at random and the walkthroughs done before and after school when no students were present. Photos were taken and notes recorded as to the grade level, and location in the building where each display was observed. Occasionally dialogue was possible with teachers who were either present and gave additional information, or through a follow-up contact with the teacher when there were questions about the display. The results are reported by grade level, presenting the data for classroom visits, corridors and common space in each of the two schools in the study.

**Grade One**

The walkthrough visits found no evidence of social studies in the grade one classrooms in either building. However, next to a first grade classroom in Cedar Elementary there were two small flags positioned with a sign that read “9/11 We Shall Always Remember” (Appendix F Figure 1). The teacher, Amy, explained she uses a story entitled *The Littlest Chapel That Stood* about a historic chapel in New York City was used as a rescue center during the aftermath of the attack on the Twin Towers. She noted her focus with first graders is “We will remember”
as opposed to “Never Forget”, which she believes is a more positive and developmentally appropriate for primary level students.

**Grade Two**

At Brewster Elementary, baskets in a second grade classroom were labeled with continent names. In addition there were the totes on student desks materials holding markers and crayons that also had continent names affixed to them (Appendix F Figures 2 & 3). This reflected part of the grade two curriculum, which focuses on learning continent names.

The other grade two classrooms visited at Brewster and Cedar in September and October had age appropriate maps displayed, but no other visible signs social studies instruction in terms of content or student work.

**Grade Three**

A walkthrough of a third grade classroom at Cedar Elementary in September showed posters of local monuments, which is part of the grade three curriculum. There was also a listening center set up for students to visit independently and listen to an audio recording and read the social studies textbook, *Massachusetts Our Home*. The teacher was present during this visit and highlighted the area, describing it resulted from literacy workshops she attended and learned about the need to incorporate more nonfiction in the English Language Arts program. While the content of the listening center was social studies, the tasks students were asked to complete were to reinforce literacy skills. At Cedar a hallway display about the presidential election was observed on the third grade corridor (Appendix F Figure 4).

When visiting the school the following month, an election display was posted, that included student work, drawings of campaign posters for authors, book characters and favorite
books (Appendix F Figures 5 & 6). In addition on the grade three corridor at Cedar, student created maps of the New England states were displayed on a bulletin board. It reflected the appropriate content for social studies topics for term one (Appendix Figure 7).

**Grade Four**

Both fourth grade classrooms had maps and posters which reflected the social studies content related to the grade four curriculum, regions of the United States. At Brewster, the fourth grade classroom had a large US rug (Appendix F Figure 8) which directly connects to the grade four content. In addition at Cedar Elementary, student work on display outside the grade four classrooms connected to the social studies curriculum. This included student draw compass roses (Appendix Figure 9) and a bulletin board of student reflections on 9/11 (Appendix F Figure 10), not a formal part of the grade four social studies curriculum, but reflected “current events”.

**Grade Five**

The fifth grade classrooms in both buildings had very limited social studies visible. At Cedar there was a US map and a poster of Mount Rushmore, while at Brewster there was a world map and one small regional map of California (Appendix Figure 11). The teacher explained she was using the California map to show the location of the current novel students were reading as part of the English Language Arts curriculum. In the hallway adjacent to the grade five classrooms at Cedar, a Constitution Day bulletin board (Appendix Figure 12) was displayed. This content reflects the social studies curriculum for the grade level. A second visit to Cedar Elementary found student work had been added to the Constitution Day bulletin board in the form of illustrations of various phrases from the Preamble (Appendix F Figure 13).

**Common Areas**
In addition to displays posted in the classrooms and hallways at Cedar Elementary other materials relating social studies content were visible in other common area. In the library there was a sign posted reflecting the upcoming election (Appendix Figure 14) along with grade five student work focused on citizenship (Appendix Figure 15).

During the September walkthrough at Brewster Elementary, the lobby hosted a bulletin board of pictures drawn by primary students of what they thought life would be like in another hundred years (Appendix F Figure 16). This could have been an assignment as part of a social studies lesson; however, it was part of an art class with no social studies content addressed. The majority of Brewster Elementary hallways have large wall murals of the covers of familiar picture books lining the hallways and a few small corridor bulletin boards. Most of the corridor bulletin boards displays in September were “Back to School” themed, welcoming students. There were no “content” based boards or ones showing student work either in September or October. The corridor walls offered less opportunity than at Cedar because of limited formal bulletin boards; however, there appeared to be wall space available that could have been used to display student work. At Brewster during the October visit a bulletin board in the lobby of the school was shown promoting the Kids Voting program was displayed (Appendix F Figure 17). It encouraged students to participate in the mock election on November 6th. Another corridor bulletin board was visible which displayed students’ drawings with the title “Mexico” (Appendix F Figure 18). This art work reflected the visual arts curriculum not social studies.

**Summary of Field Observations**

There was a sharp difference in the amount of social studies displayed in the two elementary schools. The September walkthrough found Cedar Elementary’s hallways contained
bulletin boards that supported the social studies curriculum at various grade levels, as well as the upcoming presidential election. At Brewster Elementary the September hallways were devoted to back-to-school themes. Most classrooms in both building had maps visible, United States and world maps were displayed which were poster size and grade level appropriate. Several classrooms also had the words to the *Pledge of Allegiance* posted. The October walkthrough at Brewster Elementary did not reflect any student work with social studies content in the hallways or classrooms.

At Cedar Elementary social studies content was much more visible in the examples of student made regional maps and compass roses hanging in the hallways. In addition there were displays that reflected the upcoming election on the corridors of several of the various grade level hallways and common areas.

During discussions with teachers and the administrator at Brewster Elementary, there was verbal support for social studies, but this was not reflected in the materials being displayed during the walkthrough visits.

While social studies content can be successfully integrated in other content area, some of the visible social studies observed supported the pedagogy of only one of the areas. For example, the listening center in the grade three room used social studies textbooks, but the focus was on an ELA standard in writing. There was no checking for understanding on the social studies content, just the writing activity students completed.

Social studies content was observed more often in the hallways and common areas in one of the two schools in the study. Student work or content focused posters and learning materials are displayed under the guidance of teachers. The school that consistently displayed work
around the theme of the presidential election, demonstrated the teachers in that school were highlighting social studies during this time period. It also reflects that all teachers are able to make decisions about what is identified for display in hallways and classrooms, as reflected in the variety of displays observed.

Section 3: Interviews

Participants

The third data source collected was interviews with teachers and principals from the two elementary schools where the field observations were held. Harry had been the principal of Cedar Elementary for twelve years and taught in the system prior to becoming an administrator. He had a good historical view of curriculum issues at the elementary level, as well as, problems that arise because of the schedule. We met in his office, an interior room with metal walls and no windows. Peg, the principal of Brewster Elementary, is in her second year as principal in the district, having previously been a principal for six years in two other districts. She answered having the additional perspective of how things were run in other districts. We met in a classroom that has been converted to a conference room. The space was large has high windows along one wall that faced the brick Town Hall across the street. This area was larger than her office which was a few doors down, was small and cramped. This is not surprising, as the century old school had to be creative and use every available space for students, staff and supplies. Copier machines were located in hallways and larger closets transformed into small offices.

All of the teachers in both buildings were interviewed in their classrooms. Beth’s first grade classroom at Brewster was bright with large ocean facing windows. Her classroom was
next door to my first classroom in the district when the building housed the middle school. I remembered the view, also the creaky wooden floors, wooden windowsills and chalktrays stained dark brown along with the antiquated heating system of large radiators running along the walls. Beth had to unplug a computer so the tape recorder used during the interview process could be plugged in. Being an older building, Brewster has been a challenge when trying to incorporate new technology, but Beth had been able to set up several student workstations for computers and include a small rugged area where the class could gather for story or circle time.

This contrasts Amy’s first grade classroom at Cedar Elementary. Her classroom had small windows, two blocked by several large storage closets on wheels. The student desks were arranged in small groups with large colorful posters on the wall. We sat for the interview at student desks in order to have the recorder reach an electrical outlet. Sitting in a small first grade chair seemed appropriate to learn about the social studies activities Amy uses with her students. Besides the visible social studies posters hanging up, Amy shared other lessons by taking out materials from the cabinets she had used with students earlier in the semester. Soon the cluster of desks was covered with resources and instructional materials.

The third grade classroom in Brewster had desks in rows facing the blackboard. Denise’s desk was in the back corner of the room and we met in another corner at the reading center. There were maps as well as, other content area posters covering the walls. Bookcases lined the back wall and were filled with stories and reference materials for students. The large windows looked out over a cement courtyard to the backyard of a neighboring house. Fran’s fifth grade classroom was on the top floor and again had a beautiful view of the harbor. As a veteran teacher, Fran had lots of materials and used bookcases to designate various areas of the room.
Because of this and the student desks were spread around the room and the classroom space appeared a bit cramped. Again the lack of electrical outlets forced us to sit close to one of the side walls. Both of these classrooms had the dark stained wood and uneven wooden floors common in buildings of this age. The teachers had worked to try and create pleasant, safe learning environment for their students.

The classrooms of Carol, grade three, and Elaine, grade five, at Cedar Elementary were more spacious than their counterparts at Brewster, but the overall structure sterile with carpeted floors and one wall of small windows with bookcases underneath. Student desks were arranged in groups in each classroom and minimal social studies content was noted hanging anywhere in the room. The bookcases beneath the window were filled with books and resources and math charts were posted on the wall. In Carol’s classroom there was a listening center set up with carpet and a small table. The spacious classrooms were able to easily accommodate student desks, computer stations and reading areas.

Findings

Through the interview processes I was hoping to learn how often social studies was currently being taught in classrooms, the pedagogy used in delivering instruction, and the value placed on social studies by both teachers and administrators. The participants were very open and honest about their beliefs and sharing information, and through this process I was able to learn about the status of social studies instruction in these two schools.

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data; time, integration, materials and value. Time, or more appropriately the lack of time, for social studies instruction was cited by participants as a major factor hindering the amount of social studies instruction
students’ were receiving. Teachers and principals highlighted integration as a means to be able to incorporate more social studies instruction, but the how that integration was designed was more important. Materials and resources became an important theme, as those interviewed discussed the district curriculum documents and instructional materials provided to educators. Finally, support and values became a significant theme as teachers provided their personal connection to social studies and the principals shared methods for supporting social studies education.

**Decline in Instructional Time**

*Time.* When asked if they believed instructional time for social studies had declined over the past five years, all teachers indicated they had seen a decline, with one exception, a teacher who responded “Not in my classroom”. It is important to note that this teacher does not have a self-contained classroom; she teaches two social studies, while her colleague teaches two science sections. Most teachers believed that one of the major reasons for the decline in time allotted to social studies instructed was the mandated state testing program, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Of the four major content areas, English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, science and social studies, only social studies is not included in the testing program. Beth, a first grade teacher who noted a slight decline, added that they are using much more literature now as part of the ELA program and social studies topics are often being addressed during the literacy block. She added “Every grade is doing their best with the limited amount of time.” The teachers felt that even if social studies time was becoming marginalized, at least some topics were able to be addressed through the literature program. Grade one teacher, Amy said “Social studies is supported by the principal, is integrated with other subject area, (through) the use of nonfiction, and library and literacy support (by) purchase leveled readers.’
However, Amy did acknowledge the decline in time social studies time reporting “reading and writing workshop, which are important” as one reason social studies time is being reduced. When asked if students missed social studies instruction because of being taken out of class to other services, Carol said “This is inclusion classroom, so I have students who go to OT, speech and language, and counseling” often leaving during social studies time. Fran shared that her students “come out for IEP time, testing IEP counseling, instrumental lessons, and health twice a month”. Teachers also expressed concern over students being taken out of their limited social studies instructional time for a variety of purposes. Students were often pulled for instrumental lessons, testing for special needs students, counseling to meet the requirements of an individual educational plan (IEP), speech and language therapy or physical therapy. There was also concern expressed by teachers that students were repeatedly missing the same subject each time they were pulled. Whole school assemblies were often scheduled for the end of the day when a majority of teachers were presenting their social studies lessons. Elaine, a fifth grade teacher stated, “In my 35 years of teaching, I have never taught social studies before lunch!” At Brewster Elementary, time for health instruction was taken from social studies time and science time, as well as time for “Big Buddies” (meetings with the kindergarten students), which happened about once a month.

Peg, the principal at Brewster Elementary noted that pulling students out during social studies happened, but was not a conscientious decision to choose social studies. She added “no one subject area was targeted” but acknowledged that students often were taken out of social studies. Teachers in Harry’s building voiced concern students often missed the same subject area. But he reported working on a new schedule so this would not happen as frequently, but
added “We keep being asked to do more with the same amount of time it is just physically impossible to do”. Scheduling also becomes more complicated when schools have to share personnel, which limits the scheduling options for specialists assigned to work with students. Several teachers also noted that since science had become a tested area, time was needed to be sure all the science concepts students needed to learn for the grade level were being presented.

Teachers were asked whom they believed made the decisions about how instructional time was used at the elementary level. First grade teacher Beth felt the teacher determines how many minutes for each subject, but the remaining five teachers mentioned there was a school committee policy. However, none of the teachers who mentioned the school committee policy reported teaching the amount of minutes written on the policy. Denise, a grade three teacher, was over by 30 minutes and the rest significantly under the time listed on the district policy. Table 4 below shows the amount of time required by district policy and the individual teacher responses.

Table 4 - Teacher Responses / Instructional Time

**How much instructional time do you estimate you devote (on average) to social studies per week?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>District Time Policy</th>
<th>In-vivo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Teacher gr.1</td>
<td>140 min</td>
<td>45-60 min / three 20 min lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 Teacher gr. 1</td>
<td>140 min.</td>
<td>Would say, all told, about 60 min, mostly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integrated with ELA and math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 Teacher gr. 3</td>
<td>150 min.</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 Teacher gr. 3</td>
<td>150 min.</td>
<td>2 hours a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 Teacher gr. 5</td>
<td>165 min</td>
<td>I do about 135 min. per class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 Teacher gr. 5</td>
<td>165 min</td>
<td>1 hour of direct instruct. I try to link as many subjects as I can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time was reported by a majority of teachers as the biggest barrier to social studies instructions. Amy, a first grade teacher, at Cedar also highlighted the amount of assessments that
needed to be done for ELA and mathematics that took time away from other subject areas.

Trying to find time for social studies instruction emerged as a common theme during the interview process.

While both principals stated they were supportive of social studies, the teachers believed that their principal had made ELA and mathematics a priority. The principals were in agreement that time was the biggest barrier for scheduling social studies instruction. They felt there was so much that had to be fit into the school day, not everything was going to be able to be given the amount of time they would like. When discussing the school schedule, Peg, principal of Brewster, stated “Some things get blocked out” and Harry, principal at Cedar, noted “We keep being asked to do more with the same amount of time and it is just physically impossible to do.”

When asked if students missed social studies instruction because of being taken out of class to other services, Peg noted that pulling students out during social studies happened, but was not a conscientious decision to choose social studies. Harry stated students were taken out of during classroom instruction, but no one subject area was targeted. However, teachers in Harry’s building voiced concern students often missed the same subject area. This is reflective of issues that arise when schools share personnel, which limits the scheduling options for specialists assigned to work with students.

Finally, when asked if they had seen a decline in social studies instruction over the last five years, both principals responded that they had and when asked what they attributed the decline to again both responded “MCAS”.

**Integration of Content Area**
Integration. Because of the difficulty fitting everything into the limited time available, both principals encouraged teachers to integrate their teaching whenever possible. By integrating subjects, they felt teachers would be able to present social studies content during a literacy block.

When asked if they taught social studies in a specific time slot or integrated with another subject area, a majority of teachers reported they integrated subjects whenever possible to be able to “fit” social studies content into their schedule. Most commonly, social studies was integrated into the literacy block. However, it was also noted that while there is a wealth of literature supporting social studies, they were limited by the district ELA program on choosing outside titles. Grade five teacher Fran reported that “a lot of social studies content is embedded into ELA so kids do not see social studies as a separate subject.”

Curriculum Materials

Materials. In planning social studies lessons, all teachers reported using the resources provided by the district for instruction at their grade level. They reported supplementing with literature, websites, field trips and guest speakers. Grade three teacher, Carol, also spoke of limited funding for purchasing new materials related to social studies. Carol said “I know budgets are limited “she felt the majority of the school’s budget was being directed towards materials and resources for ELA and mathematics. However, she said that the principal had purchased biographies of people from Massachusetts for the school library to support the grade three social studies curriculum.

The lack of a spiraling curriculum, topics being revisited throughout the Scope and Sequence was noted by Carol, a grade three teacher, as a weakness. However, this is more of a reflection on the Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework, which is not designed to
spiral as the mathematics or literacy frameworks are designed to do, repeating topics at each grade level. The only spiral found in the Framework is the skills section which states students are responsible for all skills up to that grade level, and then introduces new skills to extend their learning.

While the grade three and five teachers at Cedar Elementary felt students were now entering their classrooms with stronger map and globe skills, the grade five teacher, Elaine, spoke of students inconsistent skills, which demonstrates that not all teachers in grades one through four in that building were spending the same amount of time devoted to social studies instruction. Beth said “I think there is a lack of connectivity between the grades, there is no spiral.” At every grade level teachers rely on their colleagues in the preceding grade to teach all of the content and skills contained in the grade level curriculum. If some topics eliminated because of time issues, students move to the next level without the prior knowledge needed learn new content. At Brewster, grade five teacher Fran felt that students in her building had strong geography and map stills and she believed it was because the earlier grades could probably devote more time to social studies since there was no MCAS at the primary level.

None of the teachers felt they lacked materials or resources to teach the content for their grade level. The appropriate materials in place at each grade level and teachers were comfortable supplementing with online resources, including new readings or planning field trips to enrich their lessons. Teachers did not specifically mention using grade level curriculum documents when planning lessons.

Valuing Social Studies


*Value.* The finding of *value* was surprising in light of earlier studies focusing on elementary social studies instruction. Teacher participants were asked how they believed principals would rank order social studies in terms of the value in the curriculum. None of the teachers felt the administrators would rank social studies as having *high* value. Respondents believed principals placed *some* value on social studies, but because of other constraints such as MCAS testing and a new literacy program, it was not as much of a priority as the tested content areas.

When teachers were asked to rank order the major subject areas one to four in order of importance, the results were the same for five of the six teachers with English Language Arts and mathematics ranking one and two in that order, science ranking third, and social studies listed as last by five teachers. The sixth teacher ranked ELA one and mathematics two, but she ranked social studies three and science fourth; however, this teacher did not teach science. Teachers noted this was due to English Language Arts and mathematics and science because they were tested areas, noting they personally valued social studies and presented instruction in their classrooms.

The principals were asked how they felt teachers valued social studies content and both reported they believed teachers *highly valued* social studies. However, Peg stated that because of the requirements of the English Language Arts and mathematics curriculum, social studies gets “moved to the back of the line”. When ranking the four major subject areas, Peg ranked the content areas in an identical manner as a majority of the teachers while Harry had science and social studies “tied” for third place. Harry also noted that while the district had spent time over the past several years completing comprehensive reviews of the English Language Arts and
mathematics programs, no time or resources had been devoted to looking at social studies and science. Harry stated, “this was one of the weaknesses” in the social studies program.

**Summary of Interviews**

Through the interview process, themes began to emerge. Value being the most significant, as it contrasted earlier studies. Teachers and administrators both agreed time was also an important factor because of the growing demands for time needed for the English Language Arts and mathematics programs. While integration of subject areas was most commonly identified as a way to increase social studies time, the objective of the lessons often supported literacy skills and not social studies skills. Teachers stated they had the resources necessary to teach social studies and expressed support for the subject area. Administrators, while expressing support for social studies, accepted the reality of time and the need for teachers to focus on the content areas that were part of the state testing program.

**Summary of Findings**

**Summary.** The data gathered reflects a decline in social studies instruction, with limited time in the school day emerged as an important factor. The reason for the limited time was universally voiced as the need for additional time for English Language Arts, mathematics and science, which are the subjects tested by the mandated state testing, MCAS, put in place to address the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Principals and teachers both stated their support of social studies education and value its inclusion in the curriculum, but note the demands from other areas, as limiting the time they can use to devote to social studies instruction. Even at the primary level, where no state testing takes place, grade one teachers Amy and Beth reported
feeling the stress of trying to have students meet the benchmarks for literacy and mathematics for their grade level, which have increased over the years as a result of the NCLB (2001).

Teachers often use an integrated pedagogy in order to address social studies content, which was supported and advocated for by principals. However, the integration needs to be done in a thoughtful manner that supports the content of each subject area. The teachers interviewed for this study were working diligently to keep social studies instruction part of their classroom routine, while meeting the demands of the tested subject areas, through efforts to integrate subject areas and team teaching. Principals were faced with the dilemma of implementing new programming in the tested subject areas, as well as finding time for students who need additional services. Both teachers and principals believed they had the resources necessary for teaching social studies.

*Time* emerged as one of the central themes in this study. How to fit all the demands of the state and district into the school day presented an enormous task for principals and teachers. When other issues arose, such as students who need to have special services included in their day, the time issue becomes even more exacerbated. This confirms previous research, which reported elementary social studies instruction as being marginalized by mandates and the structure of the school day (Fry, 2009; McCall, 2006; Orwell & Raphael, 2006). The principals stressed that they look at the schedule often, trying to find a way to fit everything into the day. As more mandates are made because of the adoption of a new ELA programs, such as writer’s workshop, or state mandates for new curriculum around issues such as bullying, principals are finding it difficult to fit everything into the current school day schedule.
Teachers and principals both noted the lack of a spiraling curriculum, which is the structure of the literacy and mathematics programs, but not social studies. It is difficult to compare a skills based curricular areas to ones that are more content based, like social studies. Some topics do repeat, being introduced at a lower level and revisited in upper grades. This provides background knowledge for students and is presented developmentally appropriate for the grade. However, for most of the social studies content in the *Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework*, the spiraling of the content is weak.

The most important result of this study was all participants felt that social studies was valued at their school and important for students to study if they are to become informed citizens. They saw social studies as a time when students could become active, perhaps through service learning as noted by Peg, principal of Brewster Elementary. She said, “I think we can do more activities that would facilitate learning about other cultures”. Teachers were seeking out authentic lessons, through the use of speakers and field trips to enhance the limited time available to them for social studies instruction. While attempts at integrating curriculum were observed and the desire to include more social studies time discussed, the data collected reflects a marginalizing of the elementary social studies instruction at these two schools.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and state mandated testing in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics has “squeezed” social studies out of the elementary curriculum (Good et al, 2010; Wills, 2007). Wills refers to ELA and mathematics as the privileged curriculum areas because of their status as testing areas. Good et al. (2010) noted teachers and administrators felt forced to increase time for tested content areas and, as a result, prioritize subject areas, spending time on English Language Arts and mathematics and marginalizing those non-tested areas, such as social studies. Vogler and Virture (2007) wrote that social studies instruction at the elementary level was not only being marginalized at the classroom level, but also receiving less federal funding.

The purpose of this study was to research the dynamics of elementary social studies instruction in one district since the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Prior studies (Fry, 2009; McCall, 2006; Orwell & Raphael, 2006) indicated that since social studies was not a tested area, instructional time was being reduced in order to increase time for literacy and mathematics. As a result, social studies content was not being addressed, or it was being integrated into other content areas and often without the use of effective social studies practices.

The question posed for this study was: How do elementary classroom teachers, given the contemporary restraints of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), negotiate content and pedagogy in elementary social studies instruction?

Research Approach

The research conducted for this study took place at two elementary schools within the same district. I interviewed six veteran classroom educators about their perspectives regarding
changes in the amount of social studies instructional time, the resources they used to plan their lessons and their beliefs about the degree to which social studies was valued by their peers and administrator. I also interviewed the building principals about their perspectives regarding social studies instruction in the classroom, their efforts to support social studies instruction and their perceptions about the degree to which teachers valued social studies as a content area. Prior to the interviews, I visited each school and toured the schools looking for visible evidence of social studies instruction. I visited one classroom at each grade level, first through fifth grade, during each visit, and I also explored common areas such as hallways, the lobby and the library. I gathered field notes to document the presence of displayed items that reflected social studies lessons. Finally, I reviewed the curriculum documents that the district provided teachers for clarity and evidence of resources developed to support social studies instruction.

**Discussion of Findings**

This study resulted in three findings: (a) some teachers value social studies and strive to keep it as part of the curriculum, while others only provide minimal social studies instruction; (b) there is a lack of time dedicated at the elementary level for social studies instruction; and finally, (c) there is a lack of professional development in social studies education for elementary teachers. In the following sections I discuss the findings, how they connect to the broader conversation about social studies instruction in the contemporary context, and their implications for ongoing practice and inquiry.

**Valuing the Curriculum / Consistency of Curriculum**

The first finding was the most significant. Research indicated teachers had devalued social studies because it was not a tested area, and therefore did not feel compelled to present
social studies instruction (Doppen, Misco, and Patterson, 2008;) Doppen, Misco and Patterson (2008) reported elementary teachers perceive social studies as not as important as the other content areas that were part of the mandated testing program. In addition, teachers reported that social studies was not valued by principals because it was not a tested area. This was both confirmed and contradicted by my study.

The participants in this study felt they had been given the message by their administrators that social studies was not as important a subject area as those being tested by the state. The teachers believed their administrators prioritized subjects and social studies was not high on the list. However, they did note ways in which the principals supported social studies by advocating for integration of subject areas or by purchasing additional resources for classroom use. Analysis of the data collected for this study indicates that while social studies appeared to be valued by both teachers and administrators in this district, it had nonetheless become marginalized.

Principals believed that social studies instruction was valued by teachers and was being included in the classroom schedule. They did recognize; however, state tested content areas overshadowed it. Teachers within the district and also within the same school had different points of view about the value of and need for social studies education. A relationship between the degree to which a teacher valued social studies as a content area and the degree to which he/she incorporated the delivery of the social studies curriculum in his/her practice emerged as the third major finding of this study.

Data analysis indicated that some teachers valued social studies and fought to be sure it was included in their curriculum, while others felt they were granted leeway in their classrooms to make the choice to minimize social studies time as long as they were completing all the
necessary instruction in English language arts and mathematics. At the same time, some of the teachers’ efforts to include social studies instruction contradicted earlier findings from the literature. For example, Holloway and Chiodo (2009) found that teachers reported not having enough time to for social studies instruction, so it had become less important in their planning. Some of the teachers participating in this study “fought” to keep social studies in their classrooms. They shared ways in which they incorporated and integrated social studies into the lessons they developed. They stressed that they wanted to be sure social studies had a voice in their classroom, suggesting that they understood the value associated with social studies instruction and content.

This contradicted earlier research, which found that teachers did not have a clear understanding of the mission or purpose of social studied education. Research conducted by VanFossen (2005) for example, reported that elementary teachers saw the function of social studies solely as it related to teaching citizenship, ignoring the other social studies disciplines of history, geography and economics. Boyle-Baise et al (2008) presented research stating social studies was being devalued by elementary teachers, who were not using best practices and who also did not have a good understanding of the purpose of social studies education at the elementary level. This misunderstanding of the purpose of social studies was also reported by Tanner (2008) who wrote that most elementary teachers did not have then necessary content courses in college and therefore understood pedagogy but lacked content knowledge. This limited view was not found in my research. The teachers shared resources and lesson ideas, which demonstrated an ability to incorporate all strands of social studies into their presentations. While the literature has shown a greater degree of ambivalence about social studies curriculum
development in the elementary school, I found rather that there is a relationship between a teacher’s interest in and commitment to social studies and the degree to which he/she incorporates it in the day-to-day classroom experience.

Permission to Marginalize

In prior studies, teachers reported that if social studies were a tested area, it would be taught (Hutton, Curtis & Burstein, 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Hinde, 205, Vogler & Virture, 2007). This raises the question, if social studies did become a tested area, would more emphasis be placed on it by principals?

More research is needed into the reasons some teachers are designing limited lesson plans focusing on direct instruction in social studies. Studies have revealed that often teachers do not feel adequately prepared for the content they are assigned to teach (Bailey, Shaw & Hollifield, 2006). At the elementary level, teachers are expected to be competent in all content areas, a Herculean task. However, they need to be adequately prepared with the content knowledge to implement the curriculum.

In conversations with teachers, many suggest that there is no real push on the part of their school administration for social studies to be seen as on the same playing field as those tested subject areas of English language arts, mathematics and science. The teachers felt they valued social studies more than their building administrators. Principals readily noted their focus for classroom instruction was on literacy skills and mathematics. Principals supported the integration of social studies in other disciplines, which could be why teachers felt it was not being valued as an independent instructional area. The issue then becomes how to make social studies valued by all administrators.
Finding Time for Everything in Light of NCLB

The second finding dealt with the lack of time for social studies instruction. This finding was not a surprise to me, but it did provide further evidence of the marginalization of social studies presented by earlier research. Both the participating teachers and administrators in the study expressed frustration with the limited amount of time in the school day and the long list of things that need to be included in each student’s day. The data analysis revealed that the major cause for the reduction in instructional time for social studies was the state mandated testing. This finding confirmed earlier studies that found the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001), from which state testing is derived, was responsible for the marginalization of elementary social studies instruction (Brophy & Alleman, 2008; Fry, 2009; McCall, 2006; Orwell & Raphael, 2006). Both teachers and principals interviewed were realistic that their major focus should be on preparing students for the state testing. They understand that the content areas that are part of the state and local mandated testing area would take the largest percentage of available class time.

District programs in literacy and mathematics had been introduced for the purpose of raising students’ skills in those areas. Both required not only classroom time, but also professional development time for teachers to become familiar with the various components of the programs. Here again, the findings of this study reflect those found nationally. In a report from the Center on Educational Policy, Choices, Changes, and Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era (2007), the authors stated that 62% of the 349 districts in their nationwide survey reported increasing time for English language arts and mathematics since the implementation of NCLB. The study then asked each district to identify where the time was taken from in order to make increases in ELA and mathematics. The districts identified social
studies, science, art, music, physical education lunch and recess as areas in which time had been reduced (CEP, 2007). The data analyzed from this study reflects the same reductions.

Systems theory (Pascoe, 2006) provided the lens for analyzing and describing the landscape of elementary social studies instruction in the site district. It aided the researcher’s focus on how the curriculum was functioning within a classroom, highlighting the extent to which the various content areas were working in concert with each other to support student success. In addition, when the curriculum was found to be out of balance, Systems theory was employed to try and identify the cause of the imbalance. According to Pascoe (2006), Systems Theory argues a change in one area of the system could have a positive or negative impact on another and the relationship and interdependence of each segment as it relates to the whole. A negative impact discovered at the conclusion of this research, was between the amount of time stated in the district time allotment policy and the actual time social studies instruction was being presented in the classrooms given district policies.

If the curriculum were represented as cogs running a machine, the cogs, depending on their function, would be different sizes in order for the machine to operate efficiently. However, if even the smallest cog is reduced or taken away, the machine will not function properly. In terms of the elementary curriculum, if the small social studies cog was missing or minimized because the time dedicated to other content areas was inflated, the whole process is affected and the original design becomes damaged and the system does not run successfully. Historically there has never been the same amount of time devoted to social studies instruction at the elementary level as there has been to English language arts or mathematics. However, to keep
the curriculum in balance, social studies must be presented as an integral part of the system or the whole system fails the student.

The district policy in place indicated the amount of time that should be devoted to each content area, and that time was not divided evenly. The policy reflects what is believed educationally necessary for effective instruction in each content area. This study is not implying all subjects should be given the same amount of instructional time, because, as Systems Theory suggests, not everything needs to be equal; however, it does need to be balanced for optimal student success. Certainly social studies cannot be taught if students did not have the prerequisite skills of reading and writing; therefore, adequate time needs to be spent on ELA instruction for students to access the social studies curriculum. At the same time, social studies content and skill sets are also necessary, giving students the opportunity to meet the goals of social studies education, which according to Parker (2012) are social understanding and civic competence. The fact that time for social studies instruction is being reduced throws the system is “out of balance.” This was not a surprise in the findings; however, teacher efforts to find time for social studies were noteworthy.

**Addressing the Scheduling Issues**

The reduction of instructional time for social studies in the elementary schedule emerged as a factor, playing a major role in the limited time available to present the entire curriculum. The approximate six hours per day that students spend in elementary classrooms needs to be shared by many different content areas and specialists. Rock et al (2006) reported their study found 66% of the teachers in their study stated they spent a majority of their instructional time on literacy and mathematics. Social studies was being “pushed aside” according to Brewer (2006)
so more time could be devoted to the tested subject areas. Teachers are yielding to the pressures of mandated testing when planning their instructional time (Heafner and Fitchett, 2012).

In any given day, according to policy, students should be exposed to English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies curriculum for specific amounts of time. The remaining part of the day is filled up with art, music, health, library, and technology. It is during these times when students who have Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) are often “pulled” from the core academic subjects to be tested by the special needs staff or receive remedial services. Similarly, the classroom teachers must be given their “prep” periods that are protected in the contract. In some cases, students are also leaving the classroom during instructional time for music lessons, which once again interrupts instruction for all students. All of the participants in this study expressed dissatisfaction with these processes, but expressed feeling helpless to find any new solution. Overall, finding adequate time for the school to fill its myriad obligations complicates the instructional time allotments.

It is important to remember, in light of Systems theory, that when problems are identified the organization facilitates change which will correct the problem (Canavero, Shepperson and Thornton, 2007). If the district time allotment policy is found to not being implemented as written, the result is the system is not functioning in a manner that will lead to student achievement and therefore the system, in this case the school district, needs to put new procedures in place to be sure the policy is being adhered to by all teachers and principals.

The role of social studies in preparing students for participation in a democracy, according to Parker (2008) who also adds that students need to be taught so they not only know about democracy but are then inclined to do democratic things. Leming, Ellington and Schug
(2006) reported findings from their research noting American students are leaving public education with a very poor understanding of social studies. They go on to state that as the world grows more complex is it vital that Americans have a better grasp on history, government and economics. They write “Arguably, the very future of the American Republic could be at stake” (p. 322). As citizenship is the mission of social studies and public education, it becomes increasing more important for schools to understand the need for its inclusion in the curriculum, and that policies that are in place to assure its instruction need to be followed.

**Pull outs / Disruptions for enrichment opportunities**

It was reported that students are being taken out of core academic subjects in order to receive services from the special education department and enrichment programs. Concern was expressed that if students are continually missing direct instruction in the same content area, there will be gaps in their knowledge when moving to the next grade. While not all classroom disruptions can be prevented, members of the district administration can set priorities and non-negotiable times in the elementary schedules during which students are not pulled from instruction and create policies that prevent students from being pulled repeatedly from the same content class. The analysis suggests that a certain amount of re-configuring the elementary schedule will assist teachers and principals in adhering to the district’s time allotment policy and ensure that all students have equal access to content instruction. Parker (2012) states children with special needs should not be denied access to the curriculum, while Brophy and Alleman (2007) write of the importance of student expose to curriculum plays a role student success, which supports the need for students to participate in direct classroom instruction in all content areas.
In addition to special education or counseling services, some students were leaving classrooms during instructional time for private music lessons in some of the elementary buildings. This is another scheduling issue that has been reviewed over the years by various administrators within the district with limited success. However, there is a new proposal from the music department to reorganize how the elementary lessons are delivered, which should lead to less disruption of instructional time in the classroom. Student lessons will be clustered at the various grade levels, which will allow for better scheduling and less disruption to regular classroom instruction. Examples like this, where educators create different approaches to managing the existing constraints, help to mitigate the challenges associated with limited instructional time.

Teacher flexibility and preparation time

Teachers in the site district are given flexibility to create their own classroom schedules. While flexibility is great for the teachers to be able to work with various groupings of students within their rooms and provide extended lessons, the apparent lack of consistency with district policy regarding time allocations is an area of concern. It fosters the inconsistency of social studies instruction throughout the elementary level. Students are not experiencing the same educational opportunities across the district, and often times even within the same school and grade level. Principals need to have more oversight of individual classroom schedules if there is to be consistency in the delivery of all content areas in their schools. This issue is not unique to this district. Leming, Ellington and Schug (2006) report that the majority of teachers in their study did not believe that social studies was seen as important in their schools. It was also noted that
the amount of time for social studies was less than other content areas, or wasn’t taught as a separate content, rather done in an integrated approach. The result being inconsistent delivery of social studies instruction.

Another scheduling issue that arose concerned the principals’ ability to schedule teacher “prep” periods; this is a cumbersome task, especially in the larger elementary schools. Students’ enrichment classes provide the necessary time for teachers to have the required preparation time outlined in their contract (Plymouth Public Schools, 2012). This again is another factor that plays a role in the development of the elementary classroom schedule. Certain changes at the elementary level could mitigate some of the problems and those will be described in the implications section to follow. It is the role of the principal to make sure no content area is left behind. Brewer (2006) appeals to “educational gatekeepers” to keep social studies instruction as a major component of the elementary curriculum.

**Teacher Training / Professional Learning**

The final finding reflected a need for increased professional development for elementary teachers in the area of social studies. How well prepared teachers are in regard to content knowledge in the area of social studies has been found to play a role in how effective they are as social studies educators in their classrooms (Bailey, Shaw & Hollifield, 2006). Two factors that affect teacher confidence are the collegiate programs that train teachers prior to their entering classrooms and the training they receive from their school districts once employed.

Pre-service programs are under investigation for how well prepared new teachers will be when entering elementary classrooms. Bolick, Adams and Wilcox (2010) presented a study that indicated that pre-service programs present content too broadly and not aligned to what
classroom teachers were being asked to teach. Brophy, Alleman and Knight (2009) noted poor pre-service training for elementary teachers along with professional development in the area of social studies being of “low priority” by most school district as factors in limited social studies education. The teachers interviewed were all asked if they felt prepared to teach the content matter. They replied they felt their training in college, along with subsequent workshops, summer institutes and work experiences had given them the background needed to teach social studies.

Furthermore, data analyzed from this study found that there was a significant lack of opportunities for teachers to attend social studies professional development sessions. The district professional development calendar for the last two school years was reviewed to identify the areas in which professional development training was provided. It was found that the main focus had been on literacy and mathematics during this time period. During the current school year, for example, a two hour in-service for elementary teachers focused on social studies content and pedagogy was included as part of the in-service program. Following that program, teachers acknowledged to me the need for more presentations in social studies stating it was nice to be focused on a different content area.

One of the participating principals shared during the interview that he felt the lack of attention at the district level on social studies was one of the factors for social studies becoming marginalized in some classrooms and schools. He noted that the district had spent a large amount of time reviewing and revising the English language arts and mathematics programs, but had spent no time on social studies.
In discussing pedagogy, Duplass (2008) states that teachers need both content knowledge and curriculum knowledge to develop meaningful lessons. In order to choose the best practices to incorporate into their lessons, teachers need to have a strong pedagogical understanding of how children learn. Hinde (2005) reflects on the teachings of John Dewey, noting his advocacy for not teaching facts in isolation, but rather in a way that is meaningful to students.

Professional development in the area of social studies is also neglected in the schools in favor of training in new initiatives in ELA and mathematics (Willis, 2007; McGuire, 2007). In the study district, the strong focus on ELA and mathematics has pushed other non-tested content areas aside and forced teachers to scramble to find time to include the non-test subject areas in their grade-level curriculum. Professional development is needed to share best practices with teachers to assist in planning and pacing lessons so they can help students be successful in all content areas.

**Integrating Curriculum: A balance between content and pedagogy**

Many of the educators interviewed for this study described “integrating” social studies into other disciplines as a means to teach the social studies content. According to Parker (2012) integration is a pedagogical approach, not a goal. When designing lessons, the purpose should be the presentation of the curriculum for each area in a way that honors both or multiple subject areas in both content and skill. Parker explains that best practice in one area may not be the most effective means to present or explore *all* content knowledge.

When social studies stories are matched with reading and writing workshops, students have the opportunity to develop a more in-depth understanding of the social studies concepts, both engaging with the content and improving literacy skills. Through the meaningful and
purposeful integration of social studies content and literacy skills, teachers are able to provide appropriate learning opportunities for students (Kinniburg & Busby, 2008). This supports Bruner’s (1966) developmental theories, reflecting the importance of developmentally appropriate instruction. It takes a dedicated teacher to be able to integrate disciplines without trivializing one of them.

Social studies should students the opportunity to explore and question the content, not just memorize facts which is sometimes the pedagogy observed in many classrooms Brophy and Alleman, 2007; Cornbleth, 2010; Volger & Virture, 2007; Sumrall and Schillinger, 2004). For social studies instruction to be done in a meaningful manner, students should not just be limited to recalling facts concerning people and events. Social studies lessons should provide students with opportunities for critical thinking and time to explore historical perspectives. Cornbleth (2010) defines meaningful social studies teaching as “teaching for learning and critical thinking that incorporates diverse perspectives and students” (p.215). Zhao and Hoge (2005) also believed teachers need to stress the importance of social studies to students by making real-world connections, helping them see social studies not as a list of names and dates, but rather a necessary set of skills for becoming an effective citizen. If done correctly, integrating social studies content, while reinforcing literacy skills, provides elementary classroom teachers with a pathway to support two content areas by using best practices in effective teaching and learning.

During the field observations, I found some student work on display that appeared to integrate actual social studies instruction into a literacy lesson. For example, student writing on 9/11 posted by a grade four teacher reflected students’ understanding of the event, as well as the opportunity to practice literacy skills. However, this appears to be more of the exception than
common practice. It would be much more common to see a story read about a social studies topic with an assignment that focuses only on a literacy skill being reinforced. Parker (2012) noted that some time planning an integrated lesson can trivialize learning, as some topics and skills would be better served as separate lessons. He refers to this as disintegration, when teachers understand the need to present topics independently as to not minimize the importance of either.

Parker (2012) wrote of the connection between reading and social studies, noting they should not be separate activities. Rather, he felt it was an opportunity for students to improve their literacy skills by reading social studies material from various informational texts. Similarly, teacher participants in this study reflected on using social studies content as part of their literacy block.

There has been an initiative within the district to include more informational text in classroom libraries and teachers had embraced this as an opportunity to add social studies titles to their collections. The focus of the district literacy program over the last several years on informational text has proven to be beneficial to the social studies program. Many teachers, librarians and principals have all sought out titles for their collections that enhance the social studies curriculum at various grade levels. With the passage of the Common Core Standards for English language arts, the strong research component might a better landscape for integrating the two subject areas.

Similarly, in their 2008 study on elementary social studies, Kinniburg and Busby (2008) concluded that one way to prevent social studies from disappearing from the elementary curriculum was for it to be integrated into the literacy time block. Bolick, Adams and Wilcox
(2010) wrote that teachers report integrating social studies content into literacy lessons as a way to *slip* social studies into the curriculum, otherwise it might be missing completely. In addition, in her longitudinal study on elementary social studies programs in Virginia, McEachron (2010) reported it was the policy-makers at the state level who were advocating for social studies content to be integrated into the English language arts block.

Schug and Cross (1998) found that teachers often had difficulty in designing interdisciplinary lessons. If educators did not have the necessary content knowledge background, integrating subject areas became a burden, rather than an efficient tool to deliver quality curriculum. During the interview process the teachers shared activities presented in their classrooms that integrated social studies content with literacy skills effectively, but with a stronger emphasis on literacy standards.

**Implications for Practice**

The problem of practice addressed by this study, the marginalization of elementary social studies instruction, was evident in the two participating schools. The data sources were analyzed for causes of this phenomenon and several themes emerged. The most significant finding shows that some teachers valued social studies and struggled to keep it viable in their classrooms. These were the more veteran teachers who taught pre-NCLB, and who had not only experienced many changes on the educational front over the years, but had a strong conviction that social studies would be taught in their classrooms.

The issue of *time* was also found as an important factor which had direct affect on classroom teachers. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) indeed left social studies behind. Classroom schedules were driven by the need to increase the amount of time required
for the ELA and mathematics programs. A report issued by the Center for Educational Policy (2007) reported that since the implementation of NCLB, only 9% of the districts noted increasing the length of the school day and the average length was 18 minutes. The report also stated that the reasons for the increase in the school day were not included in their survey results.

In the research site district, an increase in the length of the school day would be difficult to implement. The simple act of adding an hour to the school day would be a huge fiscal burden on the town’s budget, and it would have major implications for sports and other afterschool programs. The review of the district policy on time allotment clearly defined time for social studies and all other content areas within the current elementary time frame. A focus on how to schedule within those parameters is needed. This would be a start in providing equity and balance of curriculum delivery within the system.

Another factor regarding the issue of time was the integration of curriculum. In order for other non-tested areas, such as social studies, to be present in classrooms, teachers found it necessary to integrate the content or ignore it altogether. Integrative methods were found to be in place in all classrooms, predominately in the primary grade classrooms. Teachers were using an integrative approach as a means to include social studies topics in their literacy lessons to expose students to some content knowledge. In order for integration to be an effective instructional tool, though, professional development is needed to assure it is done in a manner that supports each content area.

Professional development is the third implication for practice emerging from this study. Segall (2010) used the curriculum pedagogical content knowledge when writing about the connection between curriculum and instruction. He noted pedagogy and content need to be
blended smoothly by teachers, but the two are often seen as two separate entities. Best practices in all content areas should be an integral part of the professional development opportunities school districts offer their teaching staff.

The final implication for practice identified was the effect of limited elementary social studies instruction on the middle school program

**Transferability of Research**

Data collected from the interviews and field observations can reasonably be applied to other schools within the district, since all schools share the same central office administration, curriculum and professional development plan. The goals of the individual buildings are also similar: to provide effective instructional practices that result in student learning. As the testing program does not include social studies, measureable goals of the schools are focused on English language arts, mathematics and science; however, social studies is an integral part of the instruction in the later grades and an important component of student learning.

What this study cannot do is assume the same results would be found in other school districts. The factors of limited time in the school day and pressures from standardized testing are common to all school districts. However, without additional data collected in other sites, the study results can only be attributed to schools in this particular study. At the same time, given the level of description provided, it is likely that schools outside the district might be able to use these findings to support action toward mitigating loss of social studies instruction in their own contexts.

**Importance of Findings**
The findings of this study may not reflect the status of elementary social studies instruction in multiple districts, but this specific research is important because it reflects the efforts of the teachers in the study to fight the disappearance of social studies instruction from the elementary curriculum, which contradicted earlier research (Holloway & Chiodo, 2009). A significant finding of this study was the belief demonstrated by the administrators and teachers that social studies education continues to be important. The participants’ belief that social studies education was valued at their school was noteworthy; as were the obstacles they face in realizing the goal of including it.

The findings did echo the literature that showed teachers and administrators believe their first priority is instruction in the tested areas of English language arts, mathematics and science. All participants reported there was no intentional plan to shrink the amount of social studies instruction, but the pressure of mandated testing was making it difficult to “fit” everything into the school day. Support for social studies content was expressed, but they had to be realistic in their planning in order to give students the skills and content needed on the high-stakes exams. While the results of this study demonstrated teachers and administrators valued social studies as a content area, it was evident they felt it was more important for students to be prepared for the state testing, even if it meant limiting instruction in the area of social studies. This was evidenced by the amount of time teachers reported they were able to schedule direct social studies instruction per week.

This research highlights the need for increased professional development in both social studies content and best practices for integrating curriculum areas. The results could shed more light on the topic by presenting the data to organizations such as the Massachusetts Council for
the Social Studies, the leading organization for social studies education in the state. Through their affiliations, perhaps momentum can be gained at the state level to pursue a more even playing field for all content area curriculums and place more of an importance on the teaching of social studies in our schools.

**Future Research**

Much more research is necessary if social studies is to be viewed as an important and vital subject in every elementary classroom and school. For one thing, research is needed about the re-structuring of the elementary school schedule. There needs to be an effort to find ways in which all content subject areas are able to be given adequate time for instruction is needed. Pressure also needs to be exerted at the state and federal level to be sure social studies education is funded and supported. Only when social studies is seen as important enough to test will it be viewed as important enough to teach.

Finally, additional work needs to be done regarding how to effectively integrate curriculum at the elementary level. This is an area which could also address the issue of time spent on instruction, assure best practices in pedagogy are in place and be sure that all students have the opportunity to be exposed to rich and meaningful curriculum.

**Conclusion**

This study was designed to research the impact of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) on the teaching and learning of social studies at the elementary level. It looked at two schools and focused on how the social studies curriculum was being implemented. The study supported the findings of Kinniburg and Busby (2008) who wrote “Eliminating social studies from the elementary curriculum is an unintended yet serious consequence of NCLB” (p. 56).
The conclusion can be drawn that the demands placed on principals, teachers and students, as a result of this federal mandate, has led to the marginalization of elementary social studies instruction. The study should serve as the catalyst for re-thinking the elementary daily schedule. *Time* emerged as the leading cause of limited social studies instruction and the federal No Child Left Behind Act as the reason for the lack of instructional time. The elementary schedule should become a focus with regard to how changes can be made to provide all students with a well-balanced and thoughtful curriculum. Curricular integration can be implemented to create opportunities in the absence of additional time, but needs to be paired with professional development.

Why is social studies education important” Parker (2012) stated the following:

Without historical understanding, there can be no wisdom; without geographic understanding, no cultural or environmental intelligence. Without economic understanding, there can be no sane use of resources and no rational approach to decision making and, therefore, no future. And without civic understanding, there can be no democratic citizens and, therefore no democracy (p.3).

So what is the future look like for elementary social studies? Will it become a subversive activity, only taught when teachers blatantly ignore English Language Arts and mathematics mandates? To make real changes in elementary social studies instruction, advocacy is needed at all levels.

The mission statements from our schools reflect a desire for students to become engaged and informed citizens. Indeed, this has been the mission of public education from its inception. Thomas Jefferson believed that an educated citizenry was necessary for the new democracy to survive (Tyack, 2001).

Where will our students learn the democratic values on which our country was built without social studies classes? Who will give them the tools to be able to understand historical perspective, know
how the economy works or where in the world they are located, if not for social studies? Our students will not become the effective global citizens our schools’ mission statements call for if time for social studies instruction continues to decline.

Social studies classes can activate students toward action. It is not only the place where they learn about social injustices, it is where they learn what they can do about it. Social studies teaches the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. It should not be seen as a long list of names and dates to memorize. Social studies content is rich with stories of people who have affected the world, in both positive and negative ways. Students need to understand not only the roles played by the Founding Fathers, but learn what their own roles are as members of a democracy.

It is up to social studies educators to become strong advocates for their subject and for the students as well. Students need a strong foundation in our nation’s history to be able to be successful. Efforts to marginalize social studies need to be addressed at all levels. Parents and legislators need to become educational partners and speak out to strengthen social studies education. Social studies needs to come out of the shadows of English Language Arts and mathematics and take its rightful place in our classrooms.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was put in place to be sure all students have access to strong and meaningful educational experiences. However, it inadvertently left social studies curriculum and instruction behind, making it collateral damage of the legislation. Our students deserve better and it is our job as educators to make sure social studies curriculum and instruction maintains a priority in our schools. According to Tyack (2001) “Democracy in education and education in democracy are not quaint legacies from a distant and happier time. They have never been more essential to wise self-rule than they are today” (Tyack, 2001, p.8).
References

Agreement Between the Plymouth Public Schools and the Educators Association of Plymouth and Carver, 2012.


curricular and assessment sprawl to blame? *The Social Studies*, September/October, 222-224


Sample Letter to Participants

Dear Colleague;

I am writing to invite you to be interviewed as part of my research on elementary social studies instruction. The focus on the study will be on how social studies instruction is being implemented in elementary classrooms in the post *No Child Left Behind Act* era.

All individual responses will be held in the strictest confidence and no information which enables the identification of any of the individual participants will be published or disclosed. Only summary information, with no identifying information will included in the study data.

If you are willing to participate, I would like to set a time to discuss your participation and answer any further questions you may have. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and take place at your school. Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Babini
Social Studies Coordinator
Appendix B ~ Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher Interview Questions

Part 1.

1. What grade level do you teach? How long have you been at that grade level? How long have you taught in your current system? Have taught in any other school districts?

2. How much instructional time do you estimate you devote (on average) to social studies instruction per week?

3. Do you believe the amount of time for social studies instruction has declined over the last five years? If yes, to what do you attribute this decline?

4. What value (high, some value or no value) do you believe your building administration places on teaching social studies at your grade level?

5. How are decisions made regarding how instructional time is used for social studies?
   - Administration determines how instructional time will be used
   - Teachers determine how instructional time will be used in their classrooms
   - A set policy exists for the district

6. Are students taken out of social studies instruction time for other purposes? If so, how often and for what purpose?

7. What resources do you use in planning your social studies instruction?

8. What do you see barriers to social studies instruction?

9. Are you satisfied with the amount of time that you currently allot for social studies instruction?

10. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of social studies education in your school?

11. What do you think affects what and how social studies is taught in your school?

12. Given your personal background and training, do you feel comfortable teaching the social studies content assigned to your grade level?
Part II: Please complete the following questions:

13. Rank-order your school’s commitment to the following subject areas in order from
   1 – most important to 4 - least important

   ___ Reading/Language Arts
   ___ Mathematics
   ___ Social Studies
   ___ Science

14. Please indicate how you would rank the following reasons for teaching social studies:
   1 - most important to 7 least important

   ___ because it is required by state standards
   ___ to teach student content knowledge
   ___ to teach students life skills
   ___ to teach student an appreciate and awareness of their community, nation and
      the world
   ___ to prepare students for the next grade level
   ___ to prepare good citizens
   ___ to develop skills in language arts/reading.

15. For the following questions, please answer: Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or
    strongly disagree

    ___ I have the flexibility to make curriculum decisions about social studies content.
    ___ I have the flexibility to make decision about how social studies will be taught in my
      Classroom

16. How do you teach social studies?

    ___ Integrated with other content areas,
    ___ Taught as a stand along subject during a particular portion of each school day (or
      week).
    ___ Combination of both integrated and as a stand along subject
    ___ Rarely/never teach social studies

17. Use the following scale to answer the following questions:
Almost daily / frequently (1-2 times weekly) Occasionally (2-3 times per month) Rarely (1-2 times year) Never, does not apply to my curriculum

When you teach social studies, how often do your students:

- __________ Interact with primary source documents (photographs, artifacts, etc)?
- __________ Study multiple perspectives
- __________ Discuss current events
- __________ Learn about different cultures
- __________ Study economic concepts
- __________ Learn about how the government is organized
- __________ Use the textbooks
- __________ Complete worksheets
- __________ Use videos or film
- __________ Read social studies trade books
- __________ Read historical fiction
- __________ Use atlas, maps or globes

Questions used with permission from:


# Grade 5 Social Studies Curriculum Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Focused Skill</th>
<th>Essential Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Term 1 Units** | UNIT 1 ~ North American Civilizations and European Exploration  
Pre-Columbian civilizations (2 weeks)  
European Explorers (3 weeks)  
UNIT 2 ~ Jamestown & Plymouth (3 weeks) | Analyze fact and opinion from multiple points of view using primary and secondary sources  
Observe and describe local or regional historic artifacts and sites and generate questions about their function, construction and significance. | What are some ways in which people are affected by their physical environment and social conditions? How do people adapt or change? |
| **Term 2 Units** | UNIT 3 ~ Colonization and Settlement to 1700 (3 weeks)  
UNIT 4 ~ Setting the Stage for the Revolution (3 weeks)  
UNIT 5 ~ The Revolution (4 weeks) | Analyze and explain events and information presented on graphic organizers include timelines.  
Identify & use various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letter, diaries, maps, & photos | State examples of tension between an individual’s beliefs and government policies and laws. |
| **Term 3 Units** | UNIT 6 ~ Forming a new government (3 weeks)  
UNIT 7 ~ American Constitutional Government (3 weeks)  
UNIT 8 ~ The Louisiana Purchase the Lewis and Clark Expedition (2 weeks)  
UNIT 9 The War of 1812 (2 weeks) | Interpret the past within its own historical context rather than in terms of present-day norms and values.  
Compare and contrast different stories or accounts about past events, people, places or situations identifying how they contribute to our understanding of the past. | What are the basic values and principles of American Democracy?  
Explain the purpose of government. |
## GRADE THREE SOCIAL STUDIES SAMPLE UNIT

### Unit 1 ~ Physical and Cultural Geography

**Unit Questions:** Can you locate Massachusetts on a map, name the capital of Massachusetts, name a major river in Massachusetts. And identify the important landforms in Massachusetts? What are some important sites, buildings and monuments in Massachusetts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standards &amp; Concepts and Skills</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Activities and Assessments</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 3.1 On a map of the United States, located the New England States and the Atlantic Ocean. On a map of Massachusetts, locate major cities and towns, Cape Ann, Cape Cod, the Connecticut River, the Merrimack River, the Charles River, and the Berkshire Hills. | cape island valley reservoir Harbor Cape Cod Cape Ann Merrimack River Charles River Berkshire Hills Burial Hill Pilgrim Hall Harlow House Spooner House Plymouth Rock Mayflower Forefathers Monument Boston Plymouth | **Teacher Resource Book**  
**Student Pages**  
- Locating Massachusetts on a Map pg. 17  
- Northeastern Map Mix-up pg. 18  
- Locating a City pg. 20  
- Where is your Town? Pg. 21  
- Cape Cod Canal pg. 25  

**Extended Learning Activities** pgs.13-15  
- Your Town or City  
- Map It Out  
- Around Massachusetts  
- Label a Map  
- Make a Relief  
- Make A Massachusetts Quilt  
- Write a Poem About Massachusetts  

**Enchanted Learning Activities:**  
[www.enchantedlearning.com](http://www.enchantedlearning.com)  
State Maps – Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Facts, Map & Symbols  
Regional Maps / Quizzes  

**Big Map Activity:** Use large mural paper & trace a map of Massachusetts. Using slips of paper with names of places, landforms or waterways, students label the map.
Appendix E  District Time Allotment Policy

## PLYMOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RECOMMENDED TIME ALLOWANCES

**(MINUTES PER WEEK)**

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<th>Subject</th>
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<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
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Appendix F

Field Observations Photos

Figure 1 Grade 1
Cedar Elementary

Figure 2 Grade 2
Brewster Elementary

Figure 2 Grade 2
Brewster Elementary

Figure 4 Grade 4
Cedar Elementary

Figure 5 Grade 3
Cedar Elementary

Figure 6 Grade 3
Cedar Elementary
Figure 7 Grade 3
Cedar Elementary

Figure 8 Grade 4
Brewster Elementary

Figure 9 Grade 4
Cedar Elementary

Figure 10 Grade 4
Cedar Elementary

Figure 11 Grade 5
Brewster Elementary

Figure 12 Grade 5
Cedar Elementary
Figure 13  Grade 5
Cedar Elementary

Figure 14
Cedar Elementary

Figure 15
Cedar Elementary

Figure 16
Brewster Elementary

Figure 17
Brewster Elementary

Figure 18
Brewster Elementary