LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD: A PHENOMENOLOGY USING STUDENT VOICE TO UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL STUDIES AMONG HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty in the Curriculum and Instruction Program of Tift College of Education at Mercer University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Shannon. Without your love, compassion, and support, I would not be where I am today. Thank you for everything, I love you. Additionally, Brianna, Emery, Noah, and Glory, thank you for all your love, patience, and support.
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ABSTRACT

JOHN MANGANO
LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD: A PHENOMENOLOGY USING STUDENT VOICE TO UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL STUDIES AMONG HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS
Under the direction of GERI COLLINS, Ed.D.

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind, current high school seniors left elementary school experiencing less instructional time for social studies compared to other subjects. The dominance of standardized tests led students to conclude that only tested subjects are important, which excluded social studies. The purpose of this research was to listen to student voice to hear the current perception of social studies and determine what factors form those perceptions. To understand the current perception of social studies, a phenomenology was conducted using social learning theory. A student perception survey of social studies was created and administered to 111 high school seniors in a large southeastern urban high school.

From those 111 students, three were selected to participate in a series of three interviews. During those interviews, it was found that two students had a positive perception of social studies with the main factors being parental influence and the use of engaging teaching methods and instructional strategies. Students cited lack of relevance as a leading factor to a negative perception of social studies. They found social studies as an important content area but held a negative perception of the individual social studies
classes. Parental perception was a strong factor in forming a positive perception of social studies. Student 3 found social studies a dead subject due to the teacher bias and lack of relevance. He did not understand the purpose of taking social studies. All three students continually cited curriculum overlap between United States history and political system as a factor in a negative perception of social studies.

After listening to student voice, the researcher determined that the seniors in the study viewed the content area of social studies with a positive perception but saw lack of relevance within individual social studies classes. Teachers must strive to make class engaging and use effective instructional strategies to ensure a positive perception of social studies. Further research should include curriculum overlap and teacher preparation programs to ensure teacher candidates are taught effective instructional strategies.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

One major purpose of education is to change the individual and offer growth opportunities (Bruner, 1966; Taba, 1962). The goal of social studies is to produce effective citizens (Saxe, 1991). Near a century since the most influential year of social studies education, it is time to question if social studies has changed students or made effective citizens. Near a century since the most influential year of social studies education, social studies has been used neither to change students nor make effective citizens (Symcox, 2002). The social studies have been used as propaganda in times of war, assimilation of new citizens, and preparation for life (Daniels, 2004; Ravitch, 2000; Saxe, 1991; Watras, 2002). Since the passage of No Child Left Behind, teachers in elementary schools have given social studies less instructional time causing teachers in all levels to change to their instructional planning that ensured assessed subjects were given more instructional time (Au, 2009; Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Pederson, 2007; View, 2012; Vogler, 2003; Vogler, 2005; Winstead, 2011). In order to produce effective citizens, a public education system with strong social studies must be in place. Public education has existed since the founding of the United States. The concept of public education was conceived before the creation of the Constitution; not as a matter of federal policy but as laying the groundwork for public education.

With the passage of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, public education became part of the privileges and immunities guaranteed to all citizens (Hegreness, 2011). By
allowing public funding, a debate began as to what level of government would have power over public education: the states or the federal government. The Articles of Confederation make no demand or call for public education but many early important figures envisioned public education as a means of fulfilling the idea of America. Thomas Jefferson opined

The first stage of this education being the schools of the hundreds, wherein the great mass of the people will receive their instruction, the principal foundations of future order will be laid here. Instead therefore of putting the Bible and Testament into the hands of the children, at an age when their judgments are not sufficiently matured for religious enquiries, their memories may here be stored with the most useful facts from Grecian, Roman, European and American history such as, when further developed as their judgments advance in strength, may teach them how to work out their own greatest happiness, by shewing [sic] them that it does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed them, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits. (Jefferson, 1787, Query XV)

The America Jefferson was helping to create would be one where talented citizens would be educated lead to led the new country. Freedom in all just pursuits can only happen when citizens understand their potential for impact by being fully knowledgeable citizens. Every social studies class should lay the foundation for becoming effective, active citizens.

Jefferson viewed self-sufficient, politically active citizens to be the goal of education (Carpenter, 2004). If schools were to produce self-sufficient, politically active
citizens, the issue becomes who creates curriculum and how it should be taught to students. Carpenter shared that Jefferson favored a balance between the traditional teaching methods of lecture with the more constructivist methods that allow students to construct their learning through shared experiences within the classroom. Jefferson’s desire to have a country of citizen farmers was echoed in the best mode of teaching: the farmer only becomes better by farming, a student only becomes better by learning, and a teacher only becomes better by teaching. Jefferson was also intrigued with the writings of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Pestalozzi viewed an educated populace as the solution to societal ills (Gutek, 2011).

In colonial America, social mobility and self-improvement were twin pillars of the new republic (Howe, 2009). These two pillars help explain why education was mandated in the Northwest Ordinance. Funding from the Ordinance was never tied to curriculum mandates, for these were decisions left for the local level. Bennett (2006) describes how sectionalism quickly took hold of the young country, and the role of the new federal government would become the focus of the Constitutional Convention. Vast differences between the industrial North and agricultural South, along with the debate over representation between small states and big states, created a central government with expanded but limited powers. Article I, Section 8, grants Congress specific powers, which excluded education. The federal government would not force control over local schools until the twentieth century (Ravitch, 2000).

During the first 150 years of American history, local government determined educational decisions. Educational systems emphasized the 3 Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic, which left little instructional time for history. Watras (2002) identified the
years between 1892-1937 as the starting point for a national discussion on how to teach elementary and secondary students. College professors led these discussions with no voice from the federal government. Those professors stressed concern over how history was taught. Their concern centered on the lack of teacher preparation programs. The Committee on the Social Studies issued its groundbreaking report in 1916 only to be derailed by World War I in 1919. After the Great War, there was little official discussion regarding how to teach social studies out of fear of encouraging or being charged with sedition. With the launch of Sputnik in 1957, math and science became the focus of first major federal education legislation, which pushed social studies aside for the first time.

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 put an emphasis on a perceived need for a standards or test-based approach to education. In 2002, the call for curriculum standards and test-based reforms produced *No Child Left Behind*, which led to decreased instructional time for social studies in elementary school, because social studies was not part of required standardized tests (Au, 2009; Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Pederson, 2007; View, 2012; Vogler, 2003, 2005; Winstead, 2011).

At every incident and ensuing reform, the areas of math and science have been given preferential treatment while social studies has been devalued (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006). Currently, elementary teachers are reducing instructional time, and secondary teachers are not being taught proper, constructivist methods that would ensure their students are provided with engaging instructional strategies while in a social studies class (Fragnoli, 2006); the need for social studies is greater today than ever to ensure equality and respect are fostered for all people. Social studies must be maintained as a
content area equal to others, which is measured by instructional time (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

While there is research regarding student perceptions and attitudes towards social studies, the lack of qualitative research warrants a need to qualitatively investigate high school seniors’ perception of social studies. Symcox (2002) shared the ebb and flow of the popularity and political use of social studies, and discussed the attempts made to measure the historical knowledge of American high school students, and found historical knowledge was severely lacking among high school studies. Fouts (1987) found that student attitude towards social studies in high school was, in part, determined by classroom environment. Classes that were engaging fostered a positive perception of social studies. Students in classrooms with friends and teachers who provide personal and academic support had a positive attitude toward social studies. Haladyna, Shaughnessy and Redsun (1982) found that students enter high school with negative views of social studies, but good teaching affects student attitude towards a subject. Their sample size was 486 high school freshmen with 90% of them being White.

Corbin (1997) found that students had a positive attitude towards social studies in the first three years of high school but experienced a decline in their senior year, and parental attitude towards social studies affects their students’ attitudes on the subject. Fernandez, Massey, and Dornbush (1976) found that students viewed social studies as the least helpful subject in preparing them for their career choice. Their sample size was 772 randomly selected, racially diverse high school students in San Francisco. While this
body of research is important for the advancement of social studies, there is a lack of qualitative research in the area of student perception of social studies.

This phenomenology examined the perception of social studies among high school seniors. This design helped the researcher to use student voice to understand how almost twenty years of standards and assessment-based learning has affected students’ perception of social studies. Social studies were identified as the area of study because, as a content area, it has not been included as an area for required standardized testing or national standards. These omissions have caused elementary teachers to decrease instructional time for social studies and led to a student attitude of what is tested is most important (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Pederson, 2007; Vogler, 2003, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a phenomenological study using student voice to explore the experiences of high school seniors of and what factors have formed their perception of social studies. Further, the researcher investigated how high school seniors describe their experiences in social studies classes. This study attempted to provide understanding about how classroom environment, career choice, and parental attitude have shaped their perception of social studies. The results from this study can provide insight for social studies curriculum developers and those in teacher preparation programs to help ensure that students have a positive perception of social studies. The insight gleaned from this study could inform curriculum writers to the needs of students taking social studies and how to prepare social studies teachers for classroom instruction.
Research Questions

The research questions for this study are listed below.

1. How do high school seniors describe their experience in taking high school social studies classes?

2. Does classroom environment, the presence of friends, teacher relationships, and interest in the subject impact the perception of social studies among high school seniors?

3. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by career choice?

4. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by parental attitude towards the subject?

Theoretical Framework

High school students are social beings and learn in many ways. Social learning theory identifies that learning occurs “by vicarious, symbolic, and self-regulatory processes” (Bandura, 1977, p. vii). Bandura goes further to explain his theory and how learning is affected by numerous sources. Reading is a major avenue for learning but students only read if they find interest in what is given to them. Russell and Pellegrino (2008) echoed this sentiment when they challenged social studies teachers to find interesting reading passages and primary sources for classroom lessons. When students find primary sources interesting, they learn. Within social learning theory parents have a significant part as well, “experiences generated by behavior also partly determines what a person becomes and can do” (Bandura, 1977, p. 9). If a student grows up never talking about current events or seeing their parents as active participants within the American
democratic system, they will grow up not learning their role in society. Parental anxiety has long been established as affecting students’ perception of math (Soni & Kumari, 2017). Furthermore, Corbin (1997) found that parental attitude towards school subjects directly affect their student’s perceptions of those subjects.

Parents are not the only influence on student learning; having friends in a class and having personal support from a teacher influences a student’s perception of a subject (Fouts, 1987; Chiodo & Byford, 2004). The placement of value by friends and family can be implied by Bandura’s concept of informative function. According to Bandura (1977), people learn what responses are appropriate for their surroundings, so students observe their parents’ and friends’ perceptions regarding a school subject and mirror those perceptions to fit in with these two social groups. The family and friends would reinforce this perception, and once their perception is rewarded, its value increases. When students begin school, their perceptions of subjects can be reinforced or changed by their friends (Bandura, 1997).

A teacher serves as a reinforcement function when instruction is given and how much time is devoted to each subject, so teachers begin to enforce the mindset of what is tested is most important. Lack of instructional time for social studies occurs often in elementary school (Bailey et al., 2006). As students advance through school, they model this behavior of placing value over certain subjects and begin to form their perceptions of social studies. Applying the idea of reinforcement coupled with the idea of teachers assuming authority and earning respect in the class, students will place value in the same subjects as their teachers.
Social learning theory is best explained by the concept of reciprocal determinism. Within social learning theory, Bandura (1977) identified three factors that affect learning: behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors. A congruence of these factors shapes and forms students’ perceptions of social studies. While this triad has not been applied to student perception, these characteristics can explain student perception. Learning is affected by the student’s behavior and thoughts regarding a subject. Their parents, friends, and teachers align with the personal factors, while classroom environments and instructional practices comprise the environmental factors.

Current research has not identified if any of the three are more important in forming students’ perception of social studies. But within social learning, Bandura (1977) does describe a sort of hierarchy. Parents serve as the first source of teaching, modeling, and reinforcing. When students matriculate through school, teachers become the second most important line in teaching behavior and perception. As students grow, friends become the main enforcer of behavior (Chadwick, 2006).

Significance and Rationale

Myriad experiences shape students’ perception of social studies; among a few are parental involvement, student and teacher relationships, and career choices (Corbin, 1997; Fernandez, Massey, & Dornbush, 1976; Fouts, 1987). While these indicators of perceptions have been researched, researchers have not asked students to articulate their perceptions or experiences of social studies. The goal of this research is to use social learning theory to address how students describe their experiences in social studies and describe what factors form their perceptions of social studies as a content area. Listening to students’ experiences and their perceptions has the potential for curriculum developers
to learn what may be missing from or too redundant in current social studies curriculum; for teachers to learn which instructional strategies may be the most effective; and for parents to learn how best to support their students in appreciating all content areas. It is critical for curriculum developers, teachers, and parents to listen to student voice and to allow students to become full, active participants in their learning.

Limitations and Assumptions

This research was conducted during fall semester of 2015 and spring semester of 2017 at a large, multicultural suburban high school in Northeast Georgia. Seniors were chosen that have attended this high school for their entire high school experience. Some limitations could have included students unwilling to talk about their experiences in social studies to protect a teacher from harsh criticism. Students could have been reluctant to talk about their experiences and perceptions because no one has ever asked about their experiences and perception of social studies. I serve as an assistant principal at this school, which could have caused the students not to fully share the experience because of their fear of putting me in position where I may have to address some of their experiences with their teachers.

Summary

Students learn and form perceptions based on three powerful factors: behavior, relationships, and environment (Bandura, 1977). Research suggests that students base their perception of social studies on parental involvement, career choice, and student and teacher relationships (Corbin, 1997; Fernandez, Massey, & Dornbush, 1976; Fouts, 1987). During the twenty-first century, social studies has experienced a deep decrease of instructional time and teacher value in elementary school (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield,
2006; Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Pederson, 2007; Vogler, 2003 & 2005). Within the STEM movement, research is only beginning to ask how students perceive social studies (Chiodo & Byford, 2004). This research will attempt to bring to show how high school seniors actually perceive social studies and what factors help form their perceptions. The power of this study has the potential to develop effective social studies curriculum, define impactful, engaging instructional practices while learning the power of student voice.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Students learn based on behavior, personal factors, and environment (Bandura, 1977). Research suggests that students base their perception of social studies on parental involvement, career choice, and student teacher relationships (Corbin, 1997; Fernandez, Massey, & Dornbush, 1976; Fouts, 1987). Educational reforms of the twenty-first century caused social studies to lose instructional time in elementary school, and teachers began to perceive less value in social studies due to lack of testing in early grades (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Pederson, 2007; Vogler, 2003, 2005). Student voice is beginning to be heard and used to improve school curriculum (Cook-Sather, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Friend & Caurthers, 2012; Kirby & Gardner, 2010; Sanacore, 2008; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). Despite this vast research, there is a lack of qualitative research using student voice to understand the perception of social studies among high school seniors.

This study hopes to use student voice to determine the perception of social studies among certain high school seniors. Using student voice will ensure that students become active participants in their education. Engaging students in their own education will ensure that they become lifelong learners. Encouraging the use of student voice can help curriculum developers and writers to create new and exciting curriculum while encouraging teachers to engage in new instructional practices.
Student Voice

Over the last decade, research into the power of student voice has become popular (Cushman, 2003, 2006; DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Mitra, 2008; Sanacore, 2008). The premise behind using student voice stems from the idea that if all policy, all instruction, and all decisions affects students, they should have a voice in the decision making process. If all these decisions are aimed at increasing student achievement, policymakers, curriculum writers, and teachers should “go straight to the source” (Mitra, 2008, p. 20). Mitra describes the success of using student voice at Whitman High School in San Francisco.

Mitra (2008) shared that Whitman High School had a 57 percent graduation rate with students that entered as freshmen, a 50 percent student population with free or reduced lunch, and 50 percent of students that were English language learners. Presented with these facts, teachers saw the need for reform. The school’s reform team turned their eyes to the students and welcomed them as partners in the process. The team conducted surveys with focus groups. During these focus groups, teachers began to appreciate the power of student voice. Focus groups deciphered survey data, which allowed the teachers and students to become partners in the school’s success. Sharing decision-making created strong personal relationships among students and teachers. Students and teachers credited the use of student voice as the major reason for the change in school culture and increased student success. Students reported “studying harder,” taking more responsibility in their learning while taking part in extracurricular activities (Mitra, 2001, p. 93); teachers shared that they understood students better while becoming better teachers (Mitra, 2001).
Cushman (2006) describes how other schools around the country were also using student voice. The common method for hearing student voice is by completing a questionnaire upon entering high school. These questionnaires allowed students to voice their strengths, worries, and academic goals, and teachers could begin to learn their students before they walked into the classroom. Cushman further found that when students have their voices heard they feel “like partners” in their education and not “prisoners” housed within the schoolhouse (p. 36). Cushman’s work is similar to Sanacore (2008) where teachers found an increase in student learning and achievement when students were allowed some decision making into what is learned.

Using student voice to make instructional decisions increased student interest in school and helped them become independent learners (Sanacore, 2008). When traditional teaching methods of lecture and worksheets dominate instruction, students exhibit very little interest in class. Sanacore identified that many teachers still use “interrogation approach” to teaching (p. 41). This method included lecture while asking only literal questions to students. Teachers use this approach because they feel they have to teach students rudimentary skills and until these skills are mastered, students cannot participate in higher-ordered thinking activities. Sanacore also identified that this thinking was flawed because students deserved challenging learning opportunities, and that students do not use rudimentary skills to engage in higher-ordered thinking activities. A challenging classroom is a community-based classroom.

DeFur and Korinek (2010) identified that students described positive relationships with teachers as one of the best features of school. When students had a positive relationship with teachers, they felt empowered and validated. Students only felt
comfortable at school when they felt like they belonged. When students felt comfortable and safe they were more likely to take risks with their learning and question what they were learning. When students felt respected, valued, and heard, classroom management was not a challenge. Teachers must find ways to make class engaging and purposeful. When class is engaging, students become willing and active participants. Teachers must solicit student voice, reflect upon it, and form instruction around it.

This study hopes to do that for social studies. When student voice is utilized, students will become effective citizens. Citizens feel effective when they are heard; when they are heard, they participate. Social studies classes and teachers must be an incubator of free thought and student voice. DeFur and Korinek (2010) identified that when students took ownership of their learning they saw value in their class. When students see value in their social studies classes, they will become more engaged and reflective students.

Producing Effective Citizens

A long-standing goal of social studies is to help produce effective citizens (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991). Producing effective citizens was extremely helpful during the early twentieth century when America experienced the greatest influx of immigrants (Daniels, 2004). One of surest, quickest ways to ensure that high school students become effective citizens is for teachers to have a political classroom (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). In their study, Hess and McAvoy identified the characteristics of a political classroom, why a political classroom is successful, and how teachers can maintain a political classroom.

Hess and McAvoy (2015) explained that the purpose of a political classroom is to offer students an opportunity to pose, answer, and reflect upon current political questions.
Within this environment, the teacher served the role of mediator: chose questions, moderated debates, and ensured all views were respected. The objective of producing effective citizens was fulfilled within the walls of these social studies classrooms. When social studies teachers denied students these opportunities for discussion and debate it served as an “abdication” of their responsibility to help produce effective citizens (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 4). By allowing students to engage in political discussion, students learned how to debate. They learned to how to hold political conversations and compromise, which are pivotal to living and participating in a democracy. As students discussed and debated within a safe setting, they learned fundamental respect for each other. Students were afforded the opportunity of learning how to deliberate by engaging in classroom discussions. Deliberation is what makes all citizens equal (Sanders, 1997).

There have been long conversations, discussions, and debates over the role of social studies education (Ravitch, 2000; Saxe, 1991; Symcox, 2002). White, Marsh, and McCormack (2011) suggested that social studies teachers should understand and realize that they teach “social education” (p. 34). Social education should require students to do social studies. When students do social studies, they learned how to think critically. The use of critical investigations allows students to formulate questions and develop answers to societal questions, which helps create productive effective citizens. One significant way to conduct critical investigations is using primary sources (Russell & Pellegrino, 2008). Teachers must strive to frequently include primary sources within their lessons.

Within the walls of a social studies classroom, students should gain the knowledge and skills to critically question past decisions and analyze their outcomes. Students gain this knowledge by constructing their own learning with historical inquiry
embedded with analyzing primary documents. Teachers must take a proactive stance when picking primary sources. Russell and Pellegrino (2008) found that primary sources could pique students’ interest in history. Historical inquiry provides opportunities to students to master the five standards put forth by the National Center for History in Schools: it enables students to think chronologically, it teaches students historical comprehension, students become historical analyzers and interpreters, students learn how to research history, and, lastly, students become historical decision makers (UCLA Department of History, National Center for History in Schools, n.d.). As students learn these skills, they learn that history requires more than the memorization of facts and dates but a true understanding of the lived experience of the human family that allows students to think, question, and reflect. Having students think critically within a classroom does stir controversy. Stanley (2005) described the current struggle of whether social studies classes and teachers should focus on transmission or transformation.

School is the common place where students learn citizenship and “receive formal training as citizens” (Stanley, 2005, p. 282). Stanley described the three common perspectives on social studies: Reconstructionist Challenge of George Counts, Dewey’s Critique of Social Deconstructionism, and the Conservative Critique of Education for Social Transformation. These three perspectives center on the debated purpose of social studies classes: transmission of knowledge or transformation of society. George Counts wanted schools and teachers to expose what he saw as flaws in democracy and capitalism. Dewey advocated for a social aspect for school but was interested in schools creating a “method of intelligence” (p. 283) not teachers spreading propaganda or a specific ideology. Stanley identified three traditions that contradict Counts and Dewey:
“democratic realism, individualism, and free market theory” (p. 284). These three traditions called for citizens to be knowledgeable to they can be full, active participants within the contexts of American democracy. Unlike Counts and Dewey, the conservative critique calls for “knowledge of history and social sciences to be the bedrock of social studies education” (p. 286). To understand the struggle over the purpose of social studies and lack of student voice within social studies education, the origins of social studies must be sought.

Origin of Social Studies

To know where a people are going, they have to know where they have been. Producing effective citizens has driven history and social studies education for more than a century. Between the years 1892-1937, Watras (2002) identified that the discussion began among teachers as to how they should teach history at each grade level. At the same time, college professors furthered the inquiry by asking the purpose of teaching history. The debate also included the nature of teaching history and why many would advocate change by creating something new: social studies. America during this time was changing quickly. The economic base was changing from agriculture to industry, which caused a mass exodus from family farms. Also, there was an influx of new immigrants from southern Europe with no common history among the citizens to share (Daniels, 2004). Geographic differences and lack of common history served as the impetus for the creation of social studies in schools. These new citizens came to America with no history of democracy or Western European history that created the need for a more inclusive history curriculum. During World War I, teachers would begin to implement social change with great caution for fear of being labeled a troublemaker or
even worse a traitor (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991). This fear was caused by the axiom that the government cannot be criticized during war, because if people began to critically question the government it would be treasonous.

The Committee of Seven

In 1892, the Madison Conference was called to review the purpose of public school and its relationship to college along with what subjects should be taught. During the late nineteenth century, public education was a complete state issue with haphazard curricula and no standardization of teaching methods (Saxe, 1991). A good, properly written textbook was seen just as important as the teacher, Greek and Latin were falling out of a favor with non-divinity students, and the traditional liberal arts subjects wanted more inclusion within public education (Saxe, 1991). Historians, eager to maintain voice within the Conference, formed a committee aimed at reforming history education, the Committee of Seven. This Committee realized that there was a problem within history education, researched the problem, and recommended changes (Saxe, 1991). Out of this Committee, Saxe (1991) identified six major points within the Committee’s final report: (a) history should be required of all students in secondary settings, (b) all students should have the same curricula, (c) history should be divided into eras (d) students should not be taught a general history curriculum (e) the purpose of history should be to develop the intellect of students, and (f) teachers should be taught effective pedagogy.

These recommendations were very forward thinking (Ross, Mathison, & Vinson, 2014). By offering history to secondary students, they would learn critical thinking and reasoning skills that make effective citizens. Only in the secondary school setting were students able to understand the function and purpose of history (McLaughlin et al., 1898).
Suggesting all students take the same history curriculum illustrated that history was for everyone, and all students were capable of learning (Bohan, 2003). The idea of offering a different curriculum to different levels of students became very popular. All students benefited from taking history. The Committee of Seven called for this course work for all students regardless of “age, sex, or ability” (Saxe, 1991, p. 57). Calling for a universal course offering was unique at the turn of the century, which illustrated the liberating power of education.

In his seminal work on the history of social studies, Saxe (1991) identified two global values to history and seven specific values as presented by the Committee. The global values enforced the idea that education creates better citizens by learning about past events, people, and cultures. These global values were consistent with the mission of public education: make good citizens. These specific values of history have been lost over time but restoring these values would place great importance on social studies (Kahne & Westheimer, 2014). Studying history, students learned the value of cause and effect. Cause and effect allowed students to learn that every action yielded a result that had lasting implication while studying past decisions, good, present decisions can be made. Studying history allowed students to think, question, and reflect on decisions (Ravitch, 2000). This critical questioning allowed for an appropriate dissent from authority while maintaining full respect. Most importantly, students that study history realized that they were part of a much bigger world; they studied the rise and fall of great societies; they studied great political movements, which help them realize they were part of a huge human family and played a very significant role within it (Wineburg, 2001).
The Committee of Seven (1898) identified the four common divisions within the history curriculum: ancient, medieval, modern, and American. While the Committee did not make any changes to these divisions, they enforced the need for the division. Their argument for establishing the divisions caused more instructional time for history and provided enough time had passed for ancient history to be separated and taught as an independent subject (McLaughlin et al., 1898).

The glaring omission within this division was the lack of diversity with a Eurocentric view. Today, many strides have been made to create a more representative world history curriculum but it is still Eurocentric (Au, 2009). Avoiding general histories was a laudable goal and students should be presented with in-depth curricula that cause thinking, questioning, and reflecting. This suggested course of study is similar to the course of study commonly required for graduation: students would study ancient history with emphasis on Greece and Rome during the first year of high school, medieval and modern history in tenth grade, English history in eleventh grade, followed by American history in twelfth grade (Saxe, 1991). The current suggested social studies path is very similar: ninth grade geography, tenth grade world history, eleventh grade United States history, and twelfth grade government and economics. While the current path represents a well-rounded social studies curriculum, the path provided by the Committee of Seven offered depth and complexity that many reformers sought. Still, there was much room for improvement.

Teacher preparation.

At the time of the Committee of Seven report, many viewed textbook selection more importantly than teacher selection (Saxe, 1991). Much debate and discussion went
into textbook creation because college professors wrote so many. Textbooks, at the time, were really the only source of knowledge for both teacher and student. When textbooks were written, chronology was the theme. Teacher preparation, especially in social studies, was still a contested topic. Wineburg (2001) identified the reason: psychologists conducted research into history pedagogy not teachers and historians. The failure of teachers and historians to conduct research has only resulted in knowing that traditional instructional practices of lecture coupled with call and response had been ineffective. Researchers are now only beginning to attempt to study effective history pedagogy.

At the time of the Committee of Seven, many professors in favor of traditional history preferred history taught chronologically and by traditional methods: lecture and direct textbook reading. This chronological theme ran contrary to the suggestions made by the Committee of dividing history into eras. It was not entirely the fault of teachers for the continued use of failed traditional methods of teaching, because teachers were taught those traditional teaching methods. While in college, students learned how to teach from historians; however, historians taught history differently from the method they learned it. To learn history, historians relied on primary sources and seldom relied on secondary sources. Primary sources provided an unfiltered glimpse into the past. However, an unfiltered glimpse is denied when traditional methods are employed instead of allowing students to construct their own knowledge.

The Committee of Seven identified three major traits all teachers must possess: deep historical knowledge, passion, and story-telling ability (McLaughlin et al., 1898). These three traits are just as important to current teachers as they were to teachers at the time of the report. All teachers must have deep content knowledge, but within social
studies education there is much debate as to certifying pre-service teachers (Fitchett, 2010). Pre-service teachers were certified in broad field social studies: geography, history, economics, civics, and the behavioral sciences. While this practice was very practical and made teachers more marketable, it did not provide teachers with the deep content knowledge advocated by the Committee. One example is in the State of Georgia, teachers choose areas in which they are certified rather than the broad field certification practice used before. Those proposing a new certification process had the hope of certifying content knowledgeable teachers but allowed teachers to become certified simply by passing a content-based test, but they would be highly qualified (Schuster, 2012). While this test validated the content knowledge, it did not demonstrate the ability of the teacher to tell the story of history or the passion in which to teach it as suggested by the Committee of Seven (McLaughlin et al., 1898).

A teacher cannot just tell a story and assume that students will learn. Teachers must know how to weave the story together while laying foundation to future events and making connections to the past. During student teaching, pre-service teachers mirror the supervising teacher while having very little creative freedom. Lack of freedom can prevent pre-service teachers from trying a new strategy, because the supervising teacher may only use traditional methods. Once employed and teaching on their own, new teachers realize all they did not learn in college: mandatory meetings, Individual Education Plans, or their extracurricular or coaching responsibilities. Many of these non-taught job requirements can be tremendously overwhelming, and force new teachers to abandon any constructivist ideas they may have in favor of traditional methods, for mere
survival. Among the three traits of deep historical knowledge, passion, and story-telling ability, storytelling is the hardest trait to acquire (Selwyn, 2014).

Constructivist Suggestions

The Committee of Seven offered an entire section devoted on history pedagogy, which begins with the statement that “no other subject in the high-school curriculum is stigmatized as an information study simply, rather that an educational study” (McLaughlin et al., 1898, Methods of instruction, para. 4). The Committee of Seven identified history, which later became social studies, as an educational study. The common perception of social studies then and now appears the same: lecture, memorize, and recite back on a test. These three strategies, along with lack of historical inquiry, have plagued social studies for more than 100 years (Selwyn, 2014).

Bruner (1966) stated that every generation of teachers must look at the aims of education and question if those aims are met. If the aims of education are not met, teachers must find, name, and implement any needed changes. Social studies teachers have failed to question their aim within the classroom; they have stuck to the traditional methods of instruction and have not questioned the aims or effectiveness of those methods, which has contributed to the devaluation of social studies. When students are not asked to critically think and question nor analyze historical decisions, they fail to grasp the importance of social studies and view it as “cramming the memory with indigestible facts and mental confusion” (Saxe, 1991, p. 65).

When social studies classes are viewed as purely informational, students endure the teacher’s lecture, which does not allow students to construct their own learning but forces them to accept it as truth. Acceptance without question should not exist in any
class. Acceptance without question has led to the evils that have occurred throughout history: slavery, fascism, Nazism, nuclear weapons, the Killing Fields, segregation, and racism (Bennett, 2006 & 2007; Schweikart & Allen, 2004). This acceptance forces people into a status quo as Thomas Jefferson reminded the world in the Declaration of Independence “that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed” (para. 2).

Social Studies in Secondary Schools Statement of Chairman of the Committee on Social Studies

Not long after the recommendations by the Committee of Seven, there were calls for change. Saxe (1991) identified three groups that emerged: those who wanted a strict traditional history curriculum, those who wanted change but wanted to stay within the guidelines of the Committee, and those who wanted a complete reform of the content area. These arguments were not discussed until the publication of The Social Studies in Secondary Education in 1916. At the time of the recommendations of the Committee, most schools could not comply with the request of not offering general history classes but only classes based around the four major time periods: ancient, medieval, modern, and American.

Supporters of traditional history methods felt that dividing history left it void of cause and effect and would not allow students the time to examine history as a whole. Critics of traditional history methods felt it “championed rote memorization of unrelated or disconnected facts, and relied heavily on uncontested generalizations” (Saxe, 1991, p. 85). Both ideas have merit and show the failure of not having a well-rounded social studies curriculum. At the secondary level, history should not be taught in generalized
courses. Teachers should give students the opportunity to delve into history that is broken into the periods to fully understand the past. Unfortunately, when taught in generalities, history does tend to become rote memorization (View, 2012). When taught properly, teachers should expose students to primary sources with opportunities to critically think and question decisions and events.

In 1913, several of the concerns raised in the Committee of Seven report were addressed in the Statement of the Chairman of the Committee on Social Studies, which is where term *social studies* was used for the first time. This report has been long out of print but Saxe (1991) offered it in its entirety. The Statement does not define social studies but offers topics under the social studies umbrella:

- Community health, housing and homes, public recreation, good roads, community education, poverty and the care of the poor, crime and reform, family income, savings banks and life insurance, human rights versus property rights, impulsive actions of mobs, the selfish conservatism of tradition, and public utilities. (p. 82)

The Statement did not define the purpose of social studies in high school, which was always to produce effective citizens, but offered topics to study under this new subject. The list is not finite and encourages much latitude for schools to add and detract.

To accomplish the goal of effective citizenship, the Statement suggested the ancient history be sacrificed for modern history. While the goal of effective citizenship is laudable, one topic should never be sacrificed for another. When within the content area one area is sacrificed for another, the entire content area becomes devalued. While topics were provided to teach social studies, five major units were suggested: “(a) community civics and, (b) European history to 1600 or 1700, (c) European history since 1600 or
1700, (d) United States history since 1760, and (e) Economics” (Saxe, 1991, p. 183). Bohan (2003) shared that there was much discussion and debate regarding the teaching of economics within social studies. Teachers, at the time, wanted economic conditions taught, but economics as a whole was thought “too advanced a topic for high school study” (p. 87). After a review of the topics, it was obvious the Statement was serious about sacrificing ancient history for modern history, for there was no mention of ancient or world history.

Here began the Eurocentric curriculum, which failed to acknowledge the roles of Asia, Africa, and South America within the story of the human family. Another interesting feature of the Statement was the call for field trips and the “personal visitation and first-hand information is a distinctive feature of the course” (Saxe, 1991, p. 183). Visiting history enabled students to understand and learn history. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the Statement was the call for curriculum integration. Teachers were reminded that in community health and biology class, students could study the impact of public sanitary departments and the effects of people dying from preventable causes. After a review of the topics and Statement from the chair, it was obvious that the Progressive Movement had an instrumental impact on the Statement.

The Progressive idea of building better citizens was present within these topics along with the idea that history should become an encompassing content area, not just one of dates, places, and people (Bohan, 2003). Schweikart and Allen (2004) shared how the Progressive Movement, when America transitioned from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, described how the role of government became more dominant and many citizens demanded that their government take a more active role in their lives.
Government at the state level became more responsive to the people by the creation of the referendum, initiative, and recall; corruption at the federal level was curtailed by the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment. President Roosevelt ushered in Progressive legislation: the Elkins Act, Pure Food and Drug, Federal Reserve Act, Meat Inspection Act, and the Clayton Antitrust Act were among a few. During the Progressive Movement, many called on social studies to examine the role of government critically but with the end of World War I many viewed critical attitudes towards the American government as seditious (Saxe, 1991). Another immense issue at the turn of the twentieth century caused many to questions the purpose of history: immigration (Daniels, 2004).

**Immigrant Assimilation**

Before the twentieth century, immigrants to the United States came mainly from Northern Europe. These new Americans had little problem assimilating, for much was shared between their old and new countries: similar religion, government, and language. The turn of the century experienced a changing immigration pattern: an influx from Southern Europe. This changing tide caused much fear within America. The Know-Nothing party and various other anti-Catholic groups illustrated this fear among the native-born population (Daniels, 2004). Catholics and Southern Europeans were not the only targets of nativists groups; the Chinese were targeted with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. These immigrants did not share the same characteristics, and, thus, began the call from a new purpose of the history classroom.

Saxe (1991) shared the purpose of history classes was to quicken the intellectual skills of students, but with the influx of these new immigrants, many called for the classroom to become a place for assimilation. While many agreed that assimilation was a
worthy, noble endeavor, Jane Addams voiced dissent citing a growing gap between children and parents claiming that schools were creating a “cruelly widening gulf” between immigrant fathers and their children who are ‘Americas in process’” (Saxe, 1991, p. 86). A generational gulf still exists today as evident by the subsequent generations born in America losing all cultural identity of their parents. This dissent from Addams works in favor of the assimilation argument and should be carefully considered when discussing whether to dismiss or reject the cultures of new Americans.

While changing immigration patterns called for new discussions regarding the place of history, many still had arguments with the Committee of Seven.

Problems with 1916 Social Studies Committee Report

Some found flaws within the framework offered by the 1916 Social Studies Committee. Saxe (1991) identifies the four common flaws cited about the Committee: (a) the recommendations lacked rigor, (b) the recommendations placed too much emphasis was on university methods of teaching, (c) modern history was not given enough instructional time, (d) the Committee tried too hard to connect secondary school with college admittance. At the time, these were valid concerns. Concerning rigor, many believed teachers could not properly teach ancient, medieval, and modern history within the span of secondary school. Fear of rigor before the standardization movement serves as a precursor to today. Today, rigor in the classroom is among the top concerns of policymakers and teachers (Vogler, 2005). At the time of the report, teachers were allowed to determine what topics were most important to fill the 180-day school year. However, with the advent of standards and standardized testing, teachers felt pressure to teach to the test (View, 2012). This fear is validated when students take standardized
tests that question a student’s knowledge of trivial facts not the connectedness of social studies (Au, 2009).

The Committee’s dominance placed on the textbook encouraged the traditional teaching method of lecture. Reliance on lecture caused many to question the teaching practices that flowed from the work of the Committee. Rote memorization was the by-product of traditional teaching methods. With the threat of world war on the horizon, many began to demand that students be able to critically understand and question the decisions of governments. Once war began, critically questioning the actions of government became seditious, which made traditional teaching methods the norm in school (Saxe, 1991).

The Teaching of Community Civics

The emphasis on creating effective citizens over preparing for college resonated throughout the 1915 report *The Teaching of Community Civics* distributed by the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education. The report gave the purpose of civics, its value to students and community, teaching methods, and the aims of teaching civics. Also present within the report was a call for a scientific approach to teaching civics.

An effective citizen was defined as one who acted with the welfare of the community in mind (Saxe, 1991). While this definition was important, it was clear why many would worry about socialist tendencies within social studies (Ravitch, 2000). Effective citizenship required citizens who care for society and have knowledge of the workings of society. These character traits of care and knowledge were most important in the teaching of the social studies. Within the classroom students learned how government operates, creates laws, and responds to citizens while understanding their
role within the government. Reviewing the section on stages of development revealed the lasting impact of this document on the elementary and secondary social studies curriculum. Family was identified as the first place where students learn civics because it was within the family that children learn “cooperation and responsibility” (Barnard, Carrier, Dunn, & Kingsley, 1915, p. 6). Family was extended once students entered elementary school. Once students entered elementary school, they were encouraged to learn about the people within their community: postman, police, and fireman (Saxe, 1991). Along with national holidays and characters, this standard still comprised the foundation of social studies in Georgia for kindergarten (GPS By Grade Level, K-8, 2015). The report recommended that teachers introduce students to history and community civics with an emphasis on the social thought and action.

For high school students, social studies should be taught in the totality, which included history, economics, and civics (Barnard, Carrier, Dunn, & Kingsley, 1915). All these recommendations had the same goal: creating effective citizens. Coming out of the Progressive Movement, creating effective citizens became the goal of social studies not rote memorization (Evans, 2004). When the standards-based movement arrived, high test scores became the goal, which left rote memorization as the dominant teaching method in social studies.

Within all three levels of school, the curriculum would include community civics. According to Barnard, et al., (1915)

The aim of community civics is to help the child to know his community—not merely a lot of facts about it, but the meaning of his community life, what it does for him and how it does it, what the community has a right to expect from him,
and how he may fulfill his obligation, meanwhile cultivating in him the essential qualities and habits of good citizenship. (p. 8)

When reviewing this aim of social studies, the importance of this content area was obvious. Within social studies, students should learn how to identify and solve problems by analyzing past decisions to ensure better ones are made in the future and critically questioning the actions of business and governmental leaders. But the content, now, only consists of rote memorization. The report stated that each person had a different role in society and that students should understand the difference between citizens and officials. However, students are no longer taught distinctions between roles of citizens and officials. This lack of knowledge was evident in various studies and surveys conducted in the late twentieth century (Symcox, 2002).

The Social Studies in Secondary Schools

The 1916 Committee Report on social studies gave birth to social studies and served as the last significant reform given for social studies (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991). This Committee report was part of a boarder committee whose hope was the restructure and reorganization of secondary school. The Progressives at the meeting desired, once again, that history should serve a means of improving the life of the students not just impart political facts. They even suggested that recent history was far more important than ancient and medieval history. On the chopping block was traditional history and teaching methods. The hope was to focus students on real societal problems and help develop ways to solve those problems. Out of this report came a new history where chronology and politics were out and students’ interest dominated instruction. In designing curriculum, the Committee encouraged secondary schools to shake off the
shackles of past and look at school anew and not feel bound to any present trend (McLaughlin et al., 1898).

The 1916 Committee Report identified social studies as a subject that related to the “development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups” with the sole purpose of creating effective citizens (Nelson, 1994, p. 9). Within the Committee Report were curriculum suggestions for junior and senior high schools: in grades seventh, eighth, and ninth students were to take classes in geography, European history, American history, and civics; while in grades tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, students were to take classes in European history, American history, and Problems of Democracy. The Problems of Democracy class featured topics that were social, economical, and political in nature. Schools still would not offer an economic course because many still thought the topic was too complex for senior high students. Within the report, Philadelphia was identified for their good work in creating vocational classes. The call for differentiation of courses was an interesting aspect of the report because it showed for the first time of curriculum developers beginning to think of innovative ways to teach social studies.

The report proudly boasted this course of study served as an outline and advocated for flexibility and differentiation based on the needs of the students. Calls for differentiation were limited; the Committee stated that children of native-born and immigrant parents needed classes in civics but suburban and urban children did not. Upon reading the report, the call for differentiation from the Committee Report, one would have never have imagined the top-down approach to education that is currently in place with the federal government issues so many mandates to the states. Civics was to be taught in eighth and ninth grades with the purpose of helping all students see the value
in education, which seemed to contradict some critics of the Committee’s work claiming that it encouraged educational inequality because school attendance began to drop drastically before eight graded (Mirel, 2006).

In the eighth grade, civics was to be taught in tandem with American history; in ninth grade, civics’ main purpose was to help prepare students for civic life. The difference in focus of this Committee from that of the Madison Conference was clear: the Madison Conference wanted to prepare students for college while the 1916 Committee wanted to prepare socially aware, productive citizens. It was integration of civics, along with geography, that truly began social studies. Geography was encouraged in the sixth and seventh grade but not as a stand-alone class but integrated with history. This integration of geography and civics into history showed students that history was not just mere political and military facts but an interwoven tapestry of people, places, events, and movements (Ross et al., 2014).

Emphasis on civics had the goal of students learning about their community and how to identify and solve problems instead of focusing on the “machinery of government” (Saxe, 1991, p. 217). Embedded in the curriculum framework, the purpose of civics was to help students develop their “responsibility for the national welfare” (Saxe, 1991, p. 218). Echoes of John Kennedy’s words of “ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” are heard within the pages. Once the Bolsheviks took Russia, it was understandable why teachers would be fearful of teaching this new curriculum. The American nationalism that came from the Great War coupled with the fear of socialism caused many teachers to fear teaching students about any national duty owed by students to the state (Saxe, 1991). The Committee recognized
this fear and discussed how many abused the words patriot and patriotism but these words should be taught to and learned by students. After the thorough discussion of civics, the Committee turned to the topic of history.

History was suggested for tenth and eleventh graders, which would be followed by a class titled *Problems of American Democracy*. Within the traditional social studies classes, history was central and paramount within the traditional social studies classes. By placing history in tenth and eleventh grades, it was removed as the center of social studies since most students dropped out of high school after the ninth grade (Fallace, 2011). This arrangement identified the genesis of the devaluation of history that led to the devaluation of the entire subject.

The 1916 Report identified that smaller schools could not provide as broad an offering of classes as larger schools but at a basic minimum American and European history could be offered (Nelson, 1994). With most students quitting high school after the ninth grade, one can infer that these classes were offered more for college readiness not for the life skills that eighth grade civics offered. If schools could only offer a few history classes, the Committee Report put emphasis on ancient or American history. Within ancient history, a chronological view was recommended, which abandoned the constructivists suggestions of the Madison Conference. While taking courses in the American history, the suggested aim was to promote American nationalism and citizens’ responsibility for national effectiveness. Those aims were important components of an American history course but to have these as the principle aim further devalued history and social studies.
Presenting and teaching history purely chronologically causes students to view history as a one-time static event where nothing can be learned except rote facts. With a chronological view, history can appear as a series of predictable events where cause and effect is the rule instead of something to be studied and questioned. Critical thinking or questioning cannot be taught, learned, or practiced when students are not required to use those skills inside the classroom in context of a lesson. While advocating for a chronological view of history, the Committee Report did warn against a what-came-next mindset but by not properly calling for an integrated social studies curriculum, a chronological curriculum was all that could be developed. If the Committee created an integrated social studies curriculum where history, geography, civics, and economics were taught together, students would gain the critical thinking skills necessary to be good citizens. It was clear by the placement of history after civics demonstrated that history was meant to serve as a college preparation class not as a class for all students, which further devalued the subject because it became only a course for those going to college not for everyone. The attempt to add value was made with the creation of the Problems of American Democracy course.

The purpose of Problems of American Democracy was to serve as the capstone social studies course for high school students, which was to provide students with the opportunity to learn the deeper causes of societal problems and how to solve them. Mirroring the curriculum, eighth grade was not deemed adequate for the final year of high school. Many within the Committee could not agree on what was needed for that final year of high school: government, economics, or sociology. Combining all subjects together would have given students the opportunity to study problems and issues that
existed within their community. History has long been viewed as the crown jewel of the social studies; not fully embracing the concept of social studies, the work of the Committee of Seven had enabled the devaluation of the content. The Report did mention the impracticality of high schools being able to offer classes that embraced all the social studies into one class but the Committee should have recommended an inclusive class as a goal for all schools (Nelson, 1994). With the Committee Report completed, the idea of social studies was changed and a new curriculum framework had to be implemented.

For a successful new curriculum framework to be successful, the Committee understood a proper implementation was needed to ensure the success of their work, so they included a section for teachers. In the beginning of the section, the topic of measuring the effects of teaching civics was addressed. The Committee Report identified that many people questioned the teaching of civics because its effectiveness cannot be measured until students were adults and full members of society. Their readers were reminded that students at all ages were full, participating members of society; this thought was threaded throughout the entire Report and one that is currently lacking from today’s views regarding students because of the lack of using and listening to student voice. The view of students as participating members of society was a product of the Progressive Movement and made its way into the Committee Report only to be later abandoned. When children are viewed as full, active participants in society, they will respond as full, active participants in the classroom. The goal of creating good, effective citizens is fulfilled when students are allowed to construct their own knowledge. Failure to produce active citizens without putting enough emphasis on content knowledge may be the greatest cause of the devaluation of social studies.
Implementation

With the introduction of the Report, many cities tried to implement their recommendations in earnest (Fallace, 2011). Denver School Board was one of the first, major districts to try and implement the Committee’s recommendations. Many of the topics were introduced and integrated into classes but the history content did not change. The full effect of the Progressive Movement’s push towards efficiency was seen when it came to testing students: essay questions were no longer asked and were substituted for true-false questions because they allowed for greater efficiency in grading. St. Louis schools also tried to implement the Committee’s recommendations. As changes were implemented, history was “presented a chronological historical overview in a slightly less-traditional manner” (Fallace, 2011, p. 574).

Integrated classes were created, world history and American history classes remained untouched, and traditional history classes had much higher enrollments compared to the new history classes; student school enrollment skyrocketed in the 1930s. As the county recovered from the Great Depression and found victory in Europe, people began to demand history classes that were “relevant” and “issued-based” (Fallace, 2011, p. 575). The attempt to make social studies relevant in 1916 appeared to have failed due the lack of concrete goals coupled with the Progressive goals of efficiency. The Progressive influence continued beyond the movement.

The Progressive influence was far reaching in public schools. Fallace (2011) identified another curriculum change that affected social studies: life adjustment education. This curriculum change was for high school students not going to college or benefiting from vocational training, which was encouraged after the passage of the
Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917 (Ravitch, 2000). Life adjustment education, which surfaced in 1945, was to prepare students to enter life after high school with the goal of giving attention to non-academic areas: “hygiene, family living, drivers education, and social relations with peers” (Fallace, 2011, p. 575). This major shift of viewing classes as academic to life preparation education was encouraged when it was reported that in New Jersey only 2.8 percent of jobs required a college degree and most skill based jobs had adequate on the job training (Ravitch, 2000). The life adjusted education curriculum design fulfilled the Progressive role of a government more mindful of the needs of the citizens versus business and commerce. Ravitch (2000) identified that many Progressive reformers felt that academic classes served little to no purpose to students because these classes did not aid students in job preparation.

Additionally during the 1950s, the call for schools to create more socially aware citizens, which devalued social studies, desired only classes with a perceived value to be taught (Ravitch, 2000). Social studies did not have any perceived value because it still mainly taught as history. When deciding value, college professors felt they were the qualified voices. Fallace (2011) identified that within social studies, in particular history classes, instructional time was taken to teach the life adjustment classes; within these new classes, social studies teachers became more like “guidance counselors” instead of content teachers (p. 580). Teachers were not given standards or objectives to teach only nebulous goals (Ravitch, 2000). These vague goals left discretion to local schools, or many cases, the individual teacher to determine importance, which often would leave to little instructional time thus further devaluing history and social studies. As the life adjustment movement increased, calls were made to change the status of core content
subjects to electives with the aim of using them to improve life not as an academic class (Ravitch, 2000).

Despite some criticisms of life adjustment education, there were some benefits of this curriculum framework: post World War II, more students stayed in high school longer and the nation did experience higher graduation rates (Ravitch, 2000). It was during this curriculum framework that students began to question the purpose and value of school; they began to value school for social skills they were learning not for the academic knowledge being imparted (Ravitch, 2000). Social studies, as a content area, had been the biggest victim of life adjustment education. As a whole, math always had value. Students may question geometry and calculus but they understood they would always need basic math. As technology increased, science has always had intrinsic value. Literacy and literature was appreciated but social studies were viewed as unimportant because it looked to the past. Even when critically analyzed, it still looked to past events. When the social studies focus was not looking to the past to navigate the future or learning the function of the government to affect change, social studies continued to lose value. The advent of the automobile allowed for the strengthening of the life-adjusted education that continued the devaluation of social studies.

No one can ignore the importance of the automobile, but few understand its impact on history and social studies. As schools focused their attention of social skills and life after high school, the automobile’s impact cannot be ignored. Ravitch (2000) shared that many advocated for drivers’ education to replace history class. The replacement was touted as a way for students to appreciate, experience, and learn the changing landscape of America based on the impact of the automobile, which would
allow students to “penetrate democratic living by gaining direct experience with an automobile” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 341). Once this change occurred, other social studies and English classes were combined with little academic content but to discuss social problems. By 1950, the combination of English and social studies was only tolerated for roughly two years before parents rose up and demanded their separation (Ravitch, 2000).

A New Era

October 4, 1957, was another unfortunate day for social studies. On that day, Americans heard news of a Soviet-launched space satellite: Sputnik. Totally caught off guard, many began to question how the Soviets could be so far advanced in space and many wondered what was their interest in space. The press reported the satellite launch as a grave American failure and a huge threat to national security (Ravitch, 2000). America had no current space projects, and was now catapulted into a space race with no clear goal or objective. This space race caused many Americans to question their ability to compete with the Soviet Union, but many within the Eisenhower Administration were surprised by the American reaction (Newton, 2011). However, this launch exposed weaknesses within American schools and forced President Eisenhower to bow to political pressure and call for some federal attention to public schools (Ravitch, 2000). The fear of communism and falling further behind the communists became the “dominant theme of the era” (Evans, 2004, p. 96).

In response, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958 that provided loans for students to study math, science, and foreign languages in college, which instantly called for rigorous academic standards and great focus within those areas. While anticommunism thought became dominant in textbooks and professional literature,
all the time spent teaching social skills and life lessons became irrelevant (Evans, 2004). Admiral Hyman Rickover, father of the nuclear navy, also called for changes to high school: rigorous academic standards in math and science, greater public funding of high school, and more academic standards not the teaching of social and life skills (Ravitch, 2000). Rickover would not be the only reformer to call for change; many would claim that lack of standards lead to the anti-intellectual environment that lead to the rise of communism (Evans, 2004). Among these common calls for reform, another change brought about by Sputnik was the transition to the comprehensive high school.

In 1957, past Harvard President James B. Conant was invited to be an ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany for the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Ravitch (2000) shared how he saw the benefits of the larger high schools in Germany during that time. Conant’s rationale was that the comprehensive high school could offer far more academic selections and greater vocational training than smaller high schools. In addition to comprehensive high schools, Conant advocated for guidance counselors, which would remove that job from teachers. He also wanted all students to take “four years of English, three or four years of social studies, one year of science, and one year of math” (p. 363). This concept proved beneficial because all students were offered a variety of classes and electives with multiple tracks for graduation. Schools began to return to the idea of multiple pathways to graduation. With the creation of comprehensive high schools, students began to devalue all education (Ravitch, 2000).

In the 1950s, the life adjustment education movement coupled with the concept of being a teenager generally devalued all education. Ravitch (2000) told how the life adjustment removed plenty of academic content from the classroom. While Bennett
(2007), Ravitch (2000), and Schweikart and Allen (2004) described with the emphasis placed on social skills, students placing higher value on acceptance, athletics, and popularity led to the over all devaluation of education. With the fear of communism, Americans longed for a sense of normalcy, which caused people to want to look, act, and be seen just like everyone else. After the Great Depression and World War II, the Greatest Generation strove to provide their children with a life and future they were not allowed to have. The Baby Boom Generation experienced a childhood never dreamed of by their parents or grandparents. Learning how to enjoy the new childhood coupled with academic rigor removed from the classroom devalued education as a whole. After Sputnik, schools quickly shifted their stance and demanded a dramatic increase in academic rigor. Soon, cries for equal rights and desegregation would replace these demands for increased rigor.

These calls for equal rights and desegregation led to the multicultural movement. Multiculturalism education reached its peak in the 1980s (Ellington & Eaton, 2003; Ravitch, 2000). The Civil Rights Movement provided many points of view that social studies omitted: women, African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. It also created classes that, once again, became tools for social change and not content learning. Within history curriculum, Ravitch (2000) identified that in this time military leaders were replaced with social reformers. History and social studies were made more complete by addition of social reforms but were harmed when military leaders were replaced because the history was becoming bias not more complete. When replacements were made, the story became rewritten, not more inclusive. Many states began to rewrite social studies
curricula that were more inclusive, which could take on two forms: cultural pluralism and critical separatism.

Multicultural Education

Ellington and Eaton (2003) described the two forms of multicultural education that become popular by the 1980s: cultural pluralism and critical separatism. While cultural pluralism focused on the success of America, critical separatism focused on America’s failures. A proper version of multicultural education makes social studies more relevant and impactful to female and minority students (Russell & Pellegrino, 2008). These views are two drastically different concepts. Ellington and Eaton (2003) discussed and expanded on the work of Leming (1989) that found that leading social studies theorists were political left while social studies teachers were political right. This political difference explained the differences in these multicultural education concepts. Theorists were ready to view the unfinished work as unbalanced power in need of radical transformation (Leming, 1998). While most social studies teachers were willing to advocate for the inclusion of multiple points of view, they wanted the inclusion to present a fuller picture of social studies, not to enact social change (Ellington & Eaton, 2003). When social studies classes became agents for social change and not an inclusive story, students lost interest in social studies.

Ellington and Eaton (2003) provided numerous recommendations that, if implemented, would have provided an inclusive classroom and restored value to social studies. Teachers should create lessons that include all points of view and provide a true and accurate view of history and social studies, which Russell & Pellegrino (2008) validated in their research regarding the effectiveness of primary sources. Second,
Ellington and Eaton suggested the rejection of cultural equality. This notion, of course, would be the most hotly contested. However, this point divided the two multicultural theories: cultural pluralism and critical separatism. Those who align with cultural pluralism could implement that recommendation. Acknowledging America’s past sins and shortcomings, cultural pluralists could say America had made mistakes but that atonement had been made and criticisms of other countries and cultures can now be made. Citing examples of racism and lack of political power for women and other minorities, critical separatist would not identify problems within other cultures.

Social studies teachers should present both views within the classroom, for they each have a valid place in instruction. When teachers were asked to combine these views, they must remember it does not mean to “teach or preach blind nationalism, ethnocentrism, or jingoism” (Ellington & Eaton, 2003, p. 88). Melding both views into one is critical to restoring value of social studies. Ellington and Eaton’s final recommendation may be the most important: teachers must provide the most complete, content-based cultural picture, so students can construct their own interpretation of other cultures. Teachers must remember their goal should be to offer students an opportunity to construct their own learning through an objective, fair presentation of an entire content area (Bruner, 1966). *A Nation at Risk* would plant seeds of ruin for public school within the minds of all Americans, while the failed attempt of making social studies more inclusive laid the groundwork for the standards movements of the 1990s (Sleeter, 2004).

*A Nation at Risk*

Before the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, many called for major education reforms, and beginning in early 1980s, there were calls for national standards (Ravitch,
2000). Many questioned the effectiveness of the reforms made after the launch of Sputnik. Famously proclaiming that the poor state of public education was tantamount to an act of war, *A Nation at Risk* decried public education (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1992). The Report cited academic losses after the launch of Sputnik because the goal of education shifted toward socializing students rather than educating them.

Long lists were proffered to illustrate the nation at risk: international test school comparisons, percent of functionally illiterate adults, number of gifted students, falling scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), lack of higher order thinking skills, and number of college students enrolled in remedial math and science courses. While these indicators were acceptable factors in determining the effectiveness of public schools, *A Nation at Risk* did not delineate possible reasons to explain these international differences but only blamed lackluster public education. *A Nation at Risk* identified the many offerings of comprehensive high schools as part of the problem claiming that students got lost in which classes were important; however, important classes were never identified. Lack of rigorous tests, which would allow students to demonstrate learning, was absent before students graduated from high school. A longer school year with longer days was recommended. While laudable, these findings caused greater confusion as to the role and composition of social studies.

*A Nation at Risk* identified the differences among all students and recommended different curricula: one for extremely gifted students and one for educationally disadvantaged students. But this recommendation ran contrary to the Madison Conference that called for the same curriculum for all students. *A Nation at Risk* stated
the belief that all students can learn. When this belief is held, the calls for separate curricula began serious discussions about the nature and purpose of school.

Upon graduating high school the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 recommended a course study of “New Basics” four years of English; three years of social studies, math, and science; one-half year of computer science; and two years of a foreign language for students who plan to attend a college or university (p. 70). This change was groundbreaking for most school districts that required one year each for these content areas (Ravitch, 2000). Four years of history were always recommended and prescribed, but three years became standard after the publication of the Report.

The specific social studies classes students should take were not identified, but four goals of social studies were given: (a) empower students to culturally and socially learn their place within the world, (b) learn how ancient and modern people have used ideas to shape their world, (c) understand how the economy and political world functions, (d) “grasp the difference between free and repressive societies” (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1992, p. 71). Within these vague goals, geography, world history, American history, economics, and government are identified. The Progressive goals were totally eliminated in these recommendations, so were goals of good citizenship, critical thinking, and analyzing past decisions. These omissions made federal and state elected officials begin to question the federal government’s role in the education (Superfine, 2005). Emphasis on standardized tests, grades, and textbooks to measure student achievement also devalued social studies.
To rely on standardized test scores reduced social studies back to rote memorization and recitation of facts, which gave weight to the mindset of *what is tested is what is important*. The drastic change of the importance of the teacher and textbook to what is on test caused the pendulum to shift towards a standards-based system. Producing effective citizens was the hallmark for social studies for 100 years and it was forsaken with *A Nation at Risk*. That hallmark feat of producing effective citizens cannot be accomplished when high-standardized test scores become the goal and measure of teaching and learning. Textbooks should serve as a tool not as the teacher (Camicia, 2009). However, the report placed much importance on textbooks within the classroom. Calls were made for professors to rewrite and state legislatures to pour more funding into textbook adoptions while not paying any attention to role of technology or primary sources within the classroom. This report coupled with a mixed review of multicultural education and attacks on teachers gave birth to the standards movement (Evans, 2004).

**Standards Movement**

Goals 2000. After years of debate and discussion regarding the federal role in public school, President Bill Clinton signed into law Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994 (Superfine, 2005). Superfine identified the key components of this law: federal funds to states for creating standards tied to assessments and spending flexibility by accepting some accountability measures. This carrot-and-stick approach was rife with unintended consequences. The federal funds flowed so fast and were readily received by the states that by 2004 every state had an accountability system in place; these accountability systems were tied to a *high stakes* test (Superfine, 2005). High-stakes tests became popular throughout the decade and into the twenty-first century. Superfine
provided the accepted definition for high-stakes tests “that they condition students’
ability to graduate, be promoted from one grade to another, or be placed in a particular
track, on the results of a standardized test” (p. 12). In order to assess, teachers needed to
have standards.

With the passage of Goals 2000 in 1994, the seeds for curriculum standards and
standardized assessments were planted. Many tried to compile American history
standards. Ravitch (2000) illustrated how politics, not good teaching and learning, were
the biggest motivator in creating American history standards. Money was allocated for
the development of state standards and assessments but the political mood was not yet
ripe for a standards debate. The lack of political desire coupled with Republicans gaining
control of Congress in the midterm elections led to the defunding of the federal standards
certifying board. Instead of beginning the twentieth first century encouraging critical
thinking, utilizing technology, and making social studies more inclusive with primary
sources, the century began with turning to standardized tests to measure teaching and
learning.

No Child Left Behind 2001. In his first major piece of domestic legislation,
President George W. Bush signed No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This legislation
caused the greatest devaluation of social studies (Au, 2009; Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield,
2006; Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Chiodo & Byford, 2004; Pederson, 2007; Vogler,
2003, 2005; Winstead, 2011; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). NCLB required all 50 states to have
in place an assessment of elementary students’ knowledge in two content areas: reading,
and math (Bailey et al., 2006). Social studies were the glaring omission within the
required tested content areas. Some argue that the main purpose of social studies was to
create effective citizens, which can be hard to test. Since 1916, social studies had always been included in required classes for high school completion. With this omission, social studies now became an afterthought.

In the research, Peaderson (2007) found the lack of required testing within social studies caused teachers to decrease their instructional time, but states added science to the areas to be tested. The addition of science to the tested content areas was added within the first three years of the implementation of NCLB, and that the number of states that were testing social studies reduced from 27 to 19. Fear of not making adequate yearly progress caused teachers to focus on only the content areas tested. Not meeting adequate yearly progress multiple times could result in loss of federal funding. Some districts began to integrate social studies and the arts into the assessed content areas, but others eliminated the arts altogether from their course offerings. Curriculum integration and elimination of social studies planted the seeds in elementary school teachers that social studies was not important and did not warrant instructional time; only subjects that were tested were important, which elicits the question will this be on the test. Learning transitioned from what a student did at school to what a student did to prepare for the test. Once the test is taken, it was acceptable to forget what was learned because the test was over. This mindset created the false viewpoint for students in all grade levels that only the subjects tested were important (Kaplan, 2002). However, standardized assessments cannot be totally blamed for the devaluation of social studies.

Bailey et al. (2006) identified the practice of elementary pre-service teachers having to teach all subjects, while not specializing in any, caused them to focus only on the subjects tested. The authors cited numerous studies confirming that pre-service
teachers received more training in math and English than they did in science and social studies. Aiding in the devaluation of social studies, Bailey et al. (2006) cited curriculum integration. The purpose of this integration was combining curriculum to ensure instructional time was gained for each subject. In theory, this idea gave each subject more instructional time, but when testing requirements were considered, only those subjects tested were the subjects that were taught. In their study, they found that elementary teachers would go weeks without teaching social studies and when they did, instructional time varied drastically: 8 minutes to 16 minutes of daily instruction. There is very little students could learn about their community or characteristics of good citizenship in that little bit of instruction. In addition to lack of instructional time, teachers began to see little value in social studies. Burstein, Hutton, and Curtis (2006) echoed the work of Bailey et al. (2006). They studied schools in California and illustrated that state standardized tests equals an instructional priority. A nation-wide unintended consequence of NCLB had been the devaluation of social studies by equating a standardized test with instructional importance. Teachers were no longer concerned if students were becoming effective citizens, but measured their own effectiveness with a test score.

Volger (2003) explained the problems that came with test-based forms as seen by the passage of NCLB. Test-based reforms identified one indicator to measure student learning and teacher effectiveness. These reforms placed too much emphasis on this one indicator and caused three problems. First, one indicator can never accurately assess student learning or teacher effectiveness with certain validity or reliability because students’ socioeconomic status is often measured, which is not a true reflection of student
learning. Second, when one test is used as the indicator of student learning or teacher effectiveness, any curriculum change serves to garner higher test scores not increase student learning. Test-taking skills become taught over content knowledge. Third, the most absurd consequence of test-based reform is expecting every student to learn the same amount at the same pace as every other student, which “is a blatant violation of everything that is known about individual difference” (Volger, 2003, p. 208). Using test-based reforms harmed students and social studies by giving the false impression that a good score on a standardized test took precedence over learning. Test-based reforms reduced social studies to the rote memorization of facts, dates, and names and did nothing to create critically thinking students, which consistently plagued social studies throughout time.

Conclusion

Now social studies is facing further devaluation. Among content courses, teachers have not given social studies equal status among other subjects. In the age of accountability and testing, math, science, and English have positions of prominence within the school curriculum. Beginning with the end of World War II, school curriculum has included history. As all levels of government placed more emphasis on testing, social studies have diminished. Social studies have helped assimilate new citizens, prepare students for college and work through vocational training, and produce effective citizens.

Political overemphasis on math and science coupled with the unintended consequences of the exclusion of social studies in required testing has caused this devaluation. Through the standards and test-based reforms, math, science, and English
are now the most important subjects studied, learned, and assessed. This over-emphasis has resulted in elementary teachers giving more instructional time to those subjects, which caused students to place little value on social studies. When students matriculate to high school, they perceive social studies as a class that is taken but not learned, assigned but not tested, and memorized but not understood.

Teachers and those in public education must study students’ perception of social studies to determine if standards and test-based reforms coupled with loss of instructional time have had an impact on student perception of social studies. In addition to studying perception, teachers and policy-makers must look at new ways of teaching social studies. As the use of technology grows, teachers, professors, and policy-makers must begin conversations regarding what students should know and what they should be able to do after completion of a social studies class. During every age of reform, student voice has not been included in the decision-making. The time has come to give students an active seat at the curriculum table, and allow them to help create rich, meaningful social studies curriculum.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

History had always been included among the required classes students must complete upon graduating high school (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991; Symcox, 2002). However, elementary teachers have not given equal instructional time to social studies (Au, 2009; Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Chiodo & Byford, 2004; Pederson, 2007; Vogler, 2003, 2005; Winstead, 2011; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Since the current graduating classes experienced less social studies instructional time their perception of social studies must be understood. The transition from history to social studies has been well documented (Evans, 2004; Ravitch, 2000; Saxe, 1991; Symcox, 2002). An unintended consequence of this transition made social studies vulnerable to prevailing political winds (Ravitch, 2000; Symcox, 2002). As a content area, teachers and policy makers have used social studies to assimilate new citizens (Daniels, 2004) and prepare students for life after high school while bestowing no historical content knowledge (Ravitch, 2000). However, many still contest that the goal of social studies has been to produce knowledgeable, effective citizens (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991). There are quantitative studies that have shown that students held a low perception of social studies (Chiodo & Byford, 2004; Corbin, 1997; Fernandez et al., 1976; Fouts, 1987; Haladya et al., 1982). Parental involvement and view of the subject, teacher relationships, and instructional strategies have been cited as contributing factors to these low perceptions of social studies in students.
Corbin (1997) found that students’ attitude towards social studies decreased every year they were in high school. However, he observed a slight elevation in perception during the junior year, but that gain evaporated during the senior year. While he does not explain that evaporation, he does speculate that is based on the students’ view of social studies’ relevance combined with the perceived relevance of other subjects. While McTeer, Blanton, and Lee (1975) found highly educated, positive parents attributed to a favorable attitudes toward social studies. Fernandez et al. (1976) found students formed their attitudes towards school subjects based on their career choices. Parents must understand how powerful their words are and not instill their own fears of high school or subject perceptions onto their students (Soni & Kumari, 2017). If parents instill these fears and perceptions, they could ruin many opportunities for their children.

Teachers must understand the importance students place on their career choices and consistently make connections to the subject taught and relate the content to various careers. Founts (1987) determined that classroom environment helped form students’ perceptions towards subjects; teachers that created classrooms that were inviting and conducive to learning fostered a positive perception towards their subject. Haladyna et al. (1982) discovered ninth graders entered high school with more negative views towards social studies than other subjects but that good teaching with engaging instructional strategies helped form positive attitudes towards social studies. Within all these studies, students were never asked to verbally share their experiences. The researchers only gained insight into the student perception of social studies through survey data, which provides justification for using student voice in determining student perception of social studies.
Current research using student voice can help to fully understand the perception of social studies among high school seniors. Teachers and curriculum developers must understand the current perception of social studies and how the goal of creating effective citizens is fulfilled within social studies classrooms. Using student voice will allow teachers and curriculum developers to understand the effectiveness of current instructional practices and if teacher relationships are fulfilling the goal of creating effective citizens. The time has now come to invite students and give them a seat at the curriculum table to become full, active participants in their learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use social learning theory and student voice to conduct a phenomenology to examine how some high school seniors describe their experiences and perceptions of social studies and what factors form their perceptions. To understand these experiences and perceptions, the researcher used a survey and interviews of three high school seniors. Student voice has been well documented as an effective instrument in educational research (Kirby & Gardner, 2010). Bolmeier (2006) described how students began to act in a more democratic manner towards each other and their engagement in academic classes increased when student voice was heard. When students are validated, they take greater interest and ownership in their learning (Cook-Sather, 2009). Given these studies and the importance of creating effective citizens, researchers must conduct further studies using student voice that investigate why students’ perceptions are more negative towards social studies.

This study will investigate student perception of social studies using student voice and social learning theory with qualitative methods by interviewing high school seniors.
During the interviews, the current perception of social studies among certain high school seniors will be determined, what factors form these perceptions discovered, and how these perceptions can be changed. With the desire to hear students’ experiences and their perceptions within social studies, this study will use social learning theory to gain insight of the experiences and perceptions of high school seniors regarding social studies.

Social learning theory is best explained by the concept of reciprocal determinism. Within social learning theory, Bandura (1977) identified three factors that affect learning: behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors. Within this interconnectedness students shape and form their perceptions of social studies. Learning is affected by the student’s behavior and thoughts regarding a subject, their parents, and friends. Teacher relationships align with the personal factors, while classroom environments and instructional practices comprise the environmental factors.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the research questions listed below.

1. How do high school seniors describe their experience in taking high school social studies classes?
2. Does classroom environment, the presence of friends, teacher relationships, and interest in the subject impact the perception of social studies among high school seniors?
3. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by career choice?
4. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by parental attitude towards the subject?
Research Design

A phenomenological study was conducted to explore how high school seniors describe their experiences in social studies classes, discover their perceptions of social studies, and determine what factors form their perceptions of social studies. Moustakas (1994) provided numerous reasons a phenomenology suits this study. Phenomenology was chosen because it “is concerned with wholeness” of the students and their story, it strives to “seek meaning from appearances,” and it is “committed to description of experiences, not explanations or analyses” (p. 58). It is “the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (p. 26). This phenomenology asked high school seniors to share the experiences in social studies classes, their perceptions of social studies, and the factors that have formed those perceptions. To tell their story, seniors were surveyed and interviewed to understand and share their experiences. In order to create proper, meaningful open-ended interview questions, a survey was administered.

Survey Creation, Reliability, and Validity.

After a thorough review of the literature and current research, no student perception survey for social studies could be found. Not finding a student perception survey of social studies, I created one (Appendix E). By creating a survey, I was able to discover students perception of social studies in six areas: ranked as favorite class, helpfulness in career preparation, willingness to include social studies within their schedules, the role of social studies in their preparation for citizenry and market participation, how they saw themselves within the social studies curriculum, and common modes of content delivery.
Survey Creation

Since students were interviewed for deeper, richer answers, I chose to create the survey in a closed-ended format (Mertens, 2010). Understanding my audience of high school seniors, I created a survey that was easy to understand and quick to answer. I used Mertens (2010) as guidance in creating the survey: I used Google to engage students, began with non-threatening demographic questions, and organized questions in a logical sequence.

Students were also asked about their current career choice. Knowing their career choice would allow me to probe their perception of and the role social studies has in that career. Within the survey questions, students were asked if they would take social studies classes if those classes were not required for graduation, which allowed me to discover if students would voluntarily take social studies classes. The main purpose of social studies has always been to create effective citizens (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991; Symcox, 2002). Asking students if they feel prepared to be an active participant within the American democratic system would reveal if current social studies classes were fulfilling this time-honored goal for social studies.

Saxe (1991) described how, over a century ago, social studies curriculum developers argued if economics was too complex to teach to high school students. Listening to student voice will discover how high school seniors perceive economics and its difficulty for high school seniors to understand. Classroom instructional strategies must be an issue when asking students about their perception of social studies, for how social studies is presented to students is a factor that forms their perception (Camicia, 2009).
Survey Reliability

To ensure survey reliability, I followed Mertens (2010) recommendations. I piloted my survey on 111 high school seniors and after the administration of the survey held a focus group with these students. I asked them for their immediate reaction to the questions. All students responded that they found the questions straightforward and easy to understand. They offered no changes or suggestions to any of the questions and found it interesting that someone would be interested in their experiences and perceptions of social studies. The focus group ensured that there was “no language differences between the researcher and the respondent” (Mertens, 2010, p. 191).

To measure survey reliability Litwin (1995) suggests three methods: test-retest, alternate-form, and internal consistency. Test-retest reliability was used for this survey. One hundred eleven seniors completed the survey in October 2015 under IRB permission granted by the school and Mercer University. They answered it twice with four weeks in between each administration. Randomly, four advisement classes were chosen to participate in the pilot study. No compensation was given to teachers or students to participate in the pilot study.

Survey Validity

To achieve survey validity, Litwin (1995) recommended content experts review survey items to “ensure that it includes everything it should and does not include anything it shouldn’t” (p. 35). After I wrote the survey questions and created the scale options, I gave a copy of the survey to three veteran social studies teachers: a United States History teacher for 15 years, a government teacher for 15 years, and an economics teacher for 22 years. Upon review of the survey, the teachers could not identify any
serious problems with wording or scale choices. The economics teacher was
apprehensive by the phrase *market participation*; he was concerned that students would
not understand the phase but ultimately we could not decide on a better phrasing, so it
remained in the survey. The history and government teachers stated that the career
choice sections were an interesting way of measuring students’ perception of social
studies and they both appreciated the *Seeing Yourself in the Curriculum* section.

Survey Results

One hundred eleven seniors were surveyed, and their demographic information is
listed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Demographic Breakdown of Survey Participants*

<table>
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<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>Black or African American</td>
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<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Economic, Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
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<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>73</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Names of ethnic groups were taken from the school’s accountability report.
While taking the survey, students were asked to rank the four core content subjects according to their personal preference: language arts, science, social studies, and math. Social studies was ranked third. When asked if social studies would help prepare them for their career choice 30% of students said it may help, 16% said it would most likely help, and 10% said social studies would definitely help in their career choice. If students were given total freedom to create their own schedule 78% of students would include a social studies class.

Students taking the survey concluded the foundational goal of social studies is fulfilled with 85% of seniors identifying a fair, general, or strong understanding of the governmental system of the United States and 90% of seniors identifying a fair, general, or strong understanding of the economic system of the United States. When broken down 28% identified a fair understanding, 33% claimed a general understanding, while only 24% proclaimed a strong understanding our the American democratic system; within economics 25% identified a fair understanding, 35% claimed a general understanding, while 28% proclaimed a strong understanding of the American economic system. While these numbers appear high, during the interviews when students can fully voice their perception of social studies will the meaning truly indicate their perception. These survey results served as a base for the interviews conducted among the three high school seniors chosen for this study.

Within the survey, students were asked about when they saw their ethnic group and sex with World history and United States history. Within in World history, students responded, regarding their ethnic group, that 8% never saw it represented, 12% rarely saw, 31% sometimes saw, 17% often saw, and 33% frequently saw it within class
instruction. When students saw their ethnic group within World history 72% of the time it was honest and fair. Within United States history, students responded, regarding their ethnic group, that 8% never saw, 10% rarely saw, 31% sometimes saw, 15% often saw, and 36% frequently saw it within class instruction. When students saw their ethnic group within United States history class 73% of the time it was honest and fair.

Within the survey, students were asked about when they saw their sex in World History and United States history classes. Within in World history, students responded, regarding their sex, that 7% never saw it represented, 6% rarely saw, 29% sometimes saw, 25% often saw, and 33% frequently saw it within class instruction. When they saw their sex within World history class 75% of the time it was honest and fair. Within in United States history, students responded, regarding their sex, that 7% never saw it represented, 11% rarely saw, 29% sometimes saw, 19% often saw, and 35% frequently saw it within class instruction. When they saw their sex within United States history class 75% of the time it was honest and fair.

Students were also asked to identify how often they experienced lecture in World history, United States history, government and economics classes. Further, they were asked the frequency of primary sources in World history and United States history. Students responded that there lecture is dominant within all four classes. Students identified that lecture was sometimes, often, or frequently used 84% of class time while in World history; student identified that lecture was sometimes, often, or frequently used 93% of class time during United States history; students identified that lecture was sometimes, often, or frequently used 73% of class time of political systems; students identified that lecture was sometimes, often, or frequently used 89% of class time within
Primary sources had a stronghold within World and United States history classes. Students responded that within World History primary sources were sometimes, often, or frequently used during 91% of class time, and within United States history sometimes, often, or frequently 87% of class time. To bring some understanding to these surveys, interviews were conducted.

Interview Participants

Seniors interviewed were from a large, metro urban high school in the southeast United States. From the student body, seniors were selected that have taken the four required social studies courses: World History, United States History, Political Systems, and Economics. Students were purposefully selected that have taken all levels of social studies classes ranging from college prep to Advanced Placement classes and have attended this school for their entire high school career. One hundred eleven students were surveyed and three were interviewed. Three participants were sufficient because data saturation was achieved with sufficiency during interviews with consistency in answers among the students (Remenyi, 2014; Seidman, 2006).

While students were selected randomly for the survey, the interview selection process required more consideration in participant selection. During the interviews, the students needed to feel comfortable and able to speak freely without fear of repercussion. Students will only speak freely with an adult they know (Mertens, 2010). I serve as an assistant principal at this school, and, knowing students need a familiar adult to speak freely, three students were chosen that I knew: Student 1 I knew for two years and students 2 and 3 I knew for three years. By knowing these students, their responses would be honest and valid (Seidman, 2006). The researcher understands that a power
struggle will always exist between students and administration. To overcome this power struggle students were allowed to choose the location for interviews. All three identified my office as a comfortable location for interviews. To further put students at ease, we had few informal conversations in my office before our interviews. Topics during these information conversations covered their class schedules, weekend plans, and just quick reviews of current events. They were given complete freedom to share the experiences of social studies. Their teachers were only revealed by their choice.

The high school where research was conducted is a large urban high school with over 3,000 students. The most current demographics for this high school are listed in Table 2. There are many benefits for conducting research at this school. First, I had relationships with the students. Second, as a social studies teacher, I am familiar with teachers and their methods, so I share an understanding and common language with the students regarding their experiences. Third, I had multiple opportunities to validate interview responses, which ensured their experiences would be described accurately. Opportunities with Student 1 included our daily interactions as my office aide and Students 2 and 3 included after school activities that we all participated.
Table 2

Student Enrollment Data

<table>
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<th>2013-14</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
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</tr>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Attendance</td>
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<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how high school seniors describe their experiences in social studies classes, their perceptions of social studies, and what factors emerged to form their perceptions. Phenomenology was chosen because it is concerned with “wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives…” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). The concern of wholeness allowed students to describe their perception of social studies. I conducted and recorded these interviews at school. Since I currently serve as an assistant principal, I conducted interviews in my office after steps were taken to ensure students felt comfortable and able to speak freely and openly. Student assent and parent consent were collected before interviews were conducted (Appendices B). All students said they felt comfortable in my office so a possible power struggle was avoided (Moustakas, 1994). Students were
allowed to pick convenient times for their interviews, which were during lunch periods and after school. By choosing their interview times students felt comfortable and not rushed.

Interviews

Moustakas (1994) described that phenomenological interviews are open-ended and informal. I followed the three-interview series identified by Seidman (2006) but with slight modifications to accommodate interviewing high school students. The interviews consisted of three interviews ranging from 15-30 minutes where the interview topics examined “their focused life history,” “the details of the [social studies] experience,” and “reflection on the meaning [of social studies]” (Seidman, 2006, p. 17-18).

While predetermined questions were used for each interview, found in Appendix F, the conversations flowed naturally with some alteration or elimination of questions based on student answers that allowed some new questions to emerge during the course of the interviews, which is a benefit of open-ended interview questions (Remenyi, 2014).

Interviews were conducted according to the three stages proposed by Seidman (2006). The first interview focused on the students’ history with social studies within their elementary and middle school experiences. During the second interview, the high school seniors discussed and shared their experiences within high school, particularly times when the really enjoyed and disliked social studies. Within the last interview, the students reflected upon the meaning of social studies, their overall perception of the subject area, and the role it will take in their life after high school.

Even though predetermined questions were used during the interview, participants had the freedom to fully explain their experiences that formed their perceptions of social
studies. Interviews took place at times convenient for the students. All interviews took place in my office. No student expressed concern or fear of meeting in the office of an assistant principal. During each interview, conversations were recorded on my iPhone 5S and notes were taken to capture the mood and my immediate reactions to the students’ experiences. At the conclusion of all interviews, transcriptions were made. After interviews, the students reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy (Remenyi, 2014). Member checking the interviews increased validity because the students ensured that I understood the true meaning of their answers to the interview questions (Jamison, 2013). Participants reviewed the transcripts and the fact that they described their own understanding of their experiences grants validity to the interviews (Seidman, 2006).

Summary

A social learning theory phenomenology was conducted to explain the experience of high school seniors in social studies, their perceptions of social studies, and what factors formed their perceptions of social studies. Research was conducted at a large, urban metro high school in the southeast United States. A perception survey was used along with interviews that served as the main method of data collection. Interviews were transcribed and member checked by the students. Transcriptions were coded and charted to develop themes.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to use student voice to learn, explain, and share the experiences and perceptions of social studies among high school seniors. Students have been consistently excluded from curriculum and educational policy decisions. Due to the standards-based approach to education and standardized testing policies at the turn of the century, current high school students left elementary school exposed to less social studies instructional time (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Pederson, 2007; Vogler, 2003, 2005). Students and teachers equate testing and instructional time with importance (Pederson, 2007). The time has come to use and appreciate student voice, and use this voice to determine the perception of social studies among high school seniors.

Student voice is a power tool for curriculum development, which allows for curriculum that empowers students to full take ownership of their learning through total, participatory learning (Cook-Sather, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Friend & Caurthers, 2012; Kirby & Gardner, 2010; Sanacore, 2008; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). For the past 125 years social studies has served various and numerous purposes: to produce effective citizens (Evans, 2004; Ravitch, 2000; Saxe, 1991; Symcox, 2002), to assimilate new immigrants to the United States (Daniels, 2004), and to create students that could

To hear, understand, and use student voice, a phenomenology was conducted from the fall of 2015 to the spring of 2017 at a large suburban high school in the southeast United States. A phenomenology was chosen because the researcher wanted to share the experiences of the high school seniors in whole and wanted to “seek meaning from appearances,” and the researcher was “committed to description of experiences, not explanations or analyses” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). During that fall, 111 seniors were administered a perception surveyed (Appendix E). In that spring, three seniors were interviewed. Interview questions can be found in Appendix F.

Research Questions

This study investigated four research questions:

1. How do high school seniors describe their experience in taking high school social studies classes?

2. Does classroom environment, the presence of friends, teacher relationships, and interest in the subject impact the perception of social studies among high school seniors?

3. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by career choice?

4. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by parental attitude towards the subject?
Interviews

Three seniors were chosen for this study. Each senior attended this high school for four years, and successfully passed the four required social studies courses for graduation: World History, United States History, Economics, and Political Systems/Government. Interviews were conducted in my office at times convenient for the students. Interviews were conducted according to the three stages of Seidman (2006). The first interview focused on recollections of social studies during elementary and middle school. During the second interview, the students discussed their high school experiences of social studies. In the final interview, they reflected on their perception of social studies and what factors formed their perceptions.

Results

Jamison (2013) suggests four stages for researchers to develop themes and categories within semi-structured interviews. During the first stage, researchers should read and reflect on transcriptions so the full meaning of answers can be absorbed. Researchers should take notes so their first impressions are recorded. Then in stage two, researchers begin to develop and name themes that surface within the transcripts. While reviewing the transcripts, many themes describing student perception of social studies surfaced: students’ views of the subject, students’ view of the teacher as person, instructional strategies, role of parents in perception of social studies.

Within stage 3, structure was given to the themes. During this stage, themes were merged into categories: subject relevance, subject importance, teacher relatability, teacher impact, interactiveness of classroom lessons, instructional strategies, required memorization within classes, repetitiveness in course sequence, and parental
involvement. Finally, in stage 4 a summary table is created of the categories providing quotations and notations to the transcripts. Transcripts were coded by the researcher not using any coding software but by reviewing paper copies of the transcripts. Seidman (2006) suggests that once three thoughts within the transcripts are connected a theme can be coded. In Tables 3-6, I identified where each theme could be found within our interviews. I did not include the quotes or notations for these will be provided in the following chapter.
Table 3

*Students Views on the Subject Within Interview Transcripts*

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Transcript Lines</th>
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Table 5

*Students Views on the Instructional Strategies Within Interview Transcripts*

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Table 6

*Students Views on Roles of Parents Within Interview Transcripts*

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These themes touched upon all the research questions proposed for this study. During the interviews, research questions 3 and 4 were hardly addressed by the students, but research questions 1 and 2 were addressed in abundance. An exploration of the themes that emerged as high school students described their perception of social studies was thoroughly conducted.

**Students’ View of the Subject**

While reviewing the transcripts, it became apparent the students saw a distinction between the relevance and importance of social studies. They viewed the subject as relevant and important but struggled to find relevance in the particular class they were taking. Student 3 did not take geography during the ninth grade because he did not like maps; neither he nor his parents saw a connection between learning geography and the required history classes he would take. During an interview, he was excited when he recalled not having to take a social studies class during his freshman year.

Researcher: Why did you not take geography your freshman year?

Student 3: Because taking a geography class did not sound pleasant at all to me and I knew that I had the option to take it or not. And I knew
that AP Human Geography class didn't interest me much and that I didn't have to take it, so I took musical theater instead.

Researcher: So what about geography did not sound interesting?

Student 3: I had always been bad at geography. I was really bad with maps and where things went and where specific places were. So not having to take social studies credit was really exciting my freshman year [emphasis added], so I didn't take it.

Students are given little freedom within their schedule to pick their own classes; normally they can choose one or two classes a year. Within this exchange, we learned that when he had the freedom to create his own schedule he did not schedule a social studies class. During this interview, upon entering high school and given the choice, he chose not take a social studies class because he was “bad at maps.” He did not enter high school with any perceived value in taking World Geography nor understood how helpful it would when taking World History in tenth grade. Entering ninth grade provides freedom to students within social studies; World Geography is a non-required elective, which he opted not to take. His decision was based partly on a negative perception of social studies based on his middle school experience. Reflecting upon his middle school experience, he never mentioned or remembered any innovative lessons, nor did he perceive any relevance or importance of social studies.

During an interview, Student 2 revealed that upon entering high school she was encouraged to take an extra math class at the expense of World Geography. Sadly, when the student was given the freedom to create her own schedule or when social studies were an option, a teacher discouraged her from taking a social studies class. Student 2
admitted that this extra math class did not help her understanding of math or set her up to take higher-level math classes while in high school. It should be assumed that this teacher was offering a recommendation that she felt was in the best interest of the student, but when a recommendation of one subject over another is offered by a teacher it comes with a subtle undertone that one subject is more important than another.

Researcher: No. All right. Let me see if there was anything that I made note, that I wanted to follow up on. Okay. In high school, what social studies have you taken?

Student 2: I have taken World History, US History, I'm taking Economics right now, and I have taken Political Systems.

Researcher: You did not take Geography?

Student 2: Mm-hmm (negative).

Researcher: Okay. Why didn't you take Geography?

Student 2: My eighth-grade teacher wanted me to be in strategies [a remedial class that would offer additional support above her regular math class]. I didn’t have time for the other class.

Researcher: What teacher was this? What eighth grade teacher?

Student 2: [student provided teacher name]

Researcher: What subject?

Student 2: Math.

Researcher: Math. Okay. Math wanted you to take a strategies class?

Student 2: Yeah.

Researcher: What was the purpose of that class?
Student 2: It was just to help me get a better understanding on the math that I was on. I was two math classes a day that I had to do freshman year.

Researcher: Okay. Do you feel like you needed both those math classes?

Student 2: No.

Researcher: Did it help you long term?

Student 2: No.

Upon entering high school, Student 2 was encouraged to take an additional math class at the expense of social studies. The purpose of the math class was to better prepare her for high school math. She admitted that this math class did not help her become any better at math, and she was not exposed World Geography, which she stated would have helped prepare her for World History.

While enrolled at high school where the study took place, students can enroll in classes that provide different levels of rigor: college prep, honors, or Advanced Placement (AP). AP classes culminate with national exams that are scored on a 1-5 scale with five being the highest. Some colleges will grant course credit for students that score of three or higher. At the end of each semester, the district where the study took place awards students in AP class with additional 10 points to their final average. With the increased rigor of AP classes it seems that students that really enjoy the subject would hope, expect, and demand to learn the content at a high, rigorous level. That was not case with Student 1; she took AP United States History to learn study skills, and her expectation of AP classes providing rigorous coursework was evident by the fact she chose not to take an AP class her senior year. Sadly, Student 1 did not express an
expectation to learn United States History at a rigorous level but expected to learn study skills.

Researcher: So, why didn't you take an AP class your senior year?

Student 1: I wanted my senior year to be very easy.

Researcher: Okay.

Student 1: My parents told me to take ... The reason why I took AP World was 'cause my parents wanted me to learn how to study, because before that I would just go by without studying and make As on everything.

Researcher: Okay, so do you think that AP class taught you how to study?

Student 1: Oh yeah, it taught me how to study take notes, taught me how to stay awake during a lecture.

Researcher: Okay, and who was your teacher?

Student 1: [student provided teacher name]

Researcher: Okay. Oh! Okay, who was your APUSH (AP United States History) teacher?

Student 1: [student provided teacher name].

Researcher: Okay. Did APUSH teach you those same things?

Student 1: Yeah, it taught me, 'cause all [teacher name] did was lecture. It taught me how to take notes faster and what key points to listen to and to remember.
In previous interviews, Student 1 expressed enjoyment when studying history. Her father is a high school history teacher, and she fondly recalled trips they would take and discussions they had. Students take AP classes with the expectation of receiving and completing college level work, but Student 1 had entered her AP social studies class with the hope of learning good study skills for college. Her expectation was based on the stories of friends and former students of this particular teacher. As stated in her interview, her teacher relied heavily on lecture-based, direct instruction that she found tough but not rigorous. Tough meaning she had to remember many dates, people, and events. Not rigorous meaning she was not required to critically think and analyze the content.

Additionally, Student 3 took multiple AP social studies courses and did not see much purpose in taking these classes. He found some value in AP United States History because it could be told as a story, which identified the importance of that instructional strategy used by teachers. During the course of the interviews, Student 3 equated interesting with finding purpose in a course.

It's just very boring. It's just, the information is very mundane and it's not interesting to me at all. It's just a lot of facts and that's it. There's not really any logic to it. The majority of that class is to me, memorization. There's usually talking about knowing it, but to me most of it's memorizing facts. There's not like a ... At least in AP U.S. History, even though I didn't like that course much, it's like a story, so you can go with the flow, like this happens and this happens, where in AP Gov it's a whole bunch of different information. It's a whole bunch
of different sections, a bunch of definitions that you have to learn. So I don't find it that interesting.

Later in that same interview, he claimed he would only take economics if he were given total freedom in deciding what classes he would take in high school. He expressed liking AP World History but would not take it if he had total freedom to design his schedule.

Most likely not. I mean, I would probably include the econ classes. Well, not even really econ. For me personally, if I was organizing it for me personally, just saying what I want to do with my schedule, no. I would not have taken ... Looking back at it, I would not have taken AP U.S. History. I wouldn't have taken AP Gov. I probably wouldn't have taken AP World, just because of all the reading that we had to do, but I enjoyed being in the class. And AP Macro wasn't bad, so I'd probably take that.

He mentioned not wanting to take AP US History or AP American government. His decision was based on his experience that found those classes were taught with the most teacher bias, because he often found history classes with an emphasis on a European point of view. He also did not recall times when social studies or current events were discussed at home. His decision not to take AP US History was surprising because he expressed interest in that class.

Historically, the main goal and purpose of social studies has been to help produce effective citizens (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991; Symcox, 2002). During the course of the interviews, students expressed split views on how social studies prepared them for life after high school. These views were tied directly to the course curriculum and instructional strategies of their teachers. Student 1 did not find economics helpful
because she did not learn the basics regarding applying for loans, paying taxes, or balancing a checkbook.

Like, right now, all we're ... I feel like Econ, what we're taught, doesn't really prepare us for when we have to do taxes, or when we have to pay a mortgage, like, it doesn't teach us stuff like that and like checks and balances, it doesn't teach us that.

This same student found the political systems class too fact-based with no application of how the American political process works or her role within it.

I do, I don't think I need to know, like how many, how many congressmen there are in like the House or the Senate. What they do is probably a better thing, and like, what goes through each house, or each section, I should say. Or what I can do when I disagree with them.

Additionally, Student 1 continued this thought in a different interview where she did not feel prepared for life after high school in a political sense but did in an economic sense. I asked the student about this apparent contradiction, she stated after some reflection between interviews that she felt better prepared in economics than she did in political systems. Allowing time between interviews provides for a deep reflection by the students (Seidman, 2006).

Student 1: I don't know, because the only way that ... When I think of a good citizen, I think of someone that pays their taxes, and votes, and does the whole deals with the government correctly, and doesn't try to go out of it, if that makes sense, like find loopholes. I don't think that US and world and geography ... Those don't help that, make
you be a good citizen, but Econ and political systems, those do, because you learn how to manage taxes. You're supposed to learn how to manage taxes, and what the different taxes and stuff like that.

Researcher: Did you learn that in economics?

Student 1: I learned what the different taxes were.

Researcher: Okay.

Student 1: I how to file taxes, or how to know how much is pulled out of your paycheck for social security and federal funds, and stuff like that.

Researcher: Now how about in government? When you took government, how well do you feel like that prepared you to be a knowledgeable citizen?

Student 1: To a degree, yeah.

Researcher: Okay.

Student 1: I learned how many senators were in the Senate, and how many were in the House, but that's about it. I wasn't really taught.

Student 1 identified herself as a knowledgeable, prepared citizen after taking economics. However, she did not feel prepared for citizenship after taking government despite knowing common congressional facts. After reflecting on her interview, I followed up on the point of not feeling prepared for citizenship after high school. While in government class, she felt that there were little new things required of her to learn. She identified a few common points between the United States history and government curricula: the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, the Constitution,
Bill of Rights, three branches, checks and balances, separation of powers. Because of this overlapping of curriculum, she felt that she was never taught anything new or ever asked to critically think on the American democratic system or her role within it.

Student 2 identified many important aspects of taking economics and political systems. She viewed political systems as having a role in her becoming an effective citizen even though she strongly disliked her political systems teacher.

Student 2: You stated that Government is a pretty important class? Describe why you feel that way.

Researcher: Yeah, I would say Government is pretty important, because it's always important to know how everything works when you get to voting and things like that, because if you don't take the class how are you going to know once you graduate and go into the real world and then have to vote for yourself one day.

In a different interview, she reinforced her belief that if given the freedom to create her schedule she would include government and economics because she sees intrinsic value in those classes.

Researcher: Okay. Out of the four traditional social studies classes of Geography, World History, US History, Government, and Economics, I guess that's five classes, which classes do you feel should be taken in high school?

Student 2: Honestly, I think Political Systems, Government.

Researcher: That you should or should not take it?

Student 2: Should.
Researcher: Okay.

Student 2: I think it's really important, in my opinion, to know how everything works in the government.

Researcher: Okay. Any other class that should be taken in high school?

Student 2: I think Economics. I think those are two really important.

Researcher: Okay. Why Economics?

Student 2: I learned what the different taxes were.

Researcher: Okay.

Student 2: I learned how to file taxes, or how to know how much is pulled out of your paycheck for social security and federal funds, and stuff like that.

Researcher: Now how about in government? When you took government, how well do you feel like that prepared you to be a knowledgeable citizen?

Student 2: No very, because we learned who our elected representatives were and what they do but nothing concerning what I can do or should do as a citizen.

Even though Student 2 did not like her government teacher, she still saw intrinsic value and had a positive perception of political systems. She understood the role voting and actively engaging in the political process would play in her life. She was very interested in voting for the first time and really wanted to know everything about the candidates and what they stood for. For her, the ability to find reliable, unbiased sources for important
issues ranked high, which is important for being an effective citizen. Another trait of an effective citizen is to understand the American market economy.

Americans have always held an entrepreneurial spirit (Howe, 2009). One way to foster an entrepreneurial spirit is for citizens to have a fundamental understanding of the American free market system. Understanding the free market system helps citizens to become effective citizens. Owning a small business has always served as a symbol of pride that helps achieving the American Dream defined by Adams (2017) as a “dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement supply and demand, taxes, and diminishing marginal utility” (p. xvi). The topics and concepts for achieving the American Dream are taught in high school economics classes, and a student in the study did understand that these principles are found in social studies.

**Student 2:** Well, I like designing things and just creating different things to make a room pop. Or I love, this is going to sound funny, but I like watching HGTV all the time and just doing that would be a lot of fun. I see them doing it and I don't know, I just feel like it will be different and something to look forward to, because some people go to work every day and it's the same thing. With either designing or showing different houses, it's always going to be different, it's not always going to be the same.

**Researcher:** Okay.
So we talked about your career. Now, when you think back on your career, has social studies helped you at all prepare for that career?

Student 2: Not really social studies. It'd be probably more math and stuff like that, because of measuring different things or ... I don't really think social studies would influence or benefit with anything.

Student 2 was interested in owning an interior designing company and saw math as a more useful subject. The connection between social studies and owning her own business was never made: understanding governmental permits, supply and demand, or basic information on taxes would be beneficial in owning her own business. The lack of these economic and governmental connections demonstrated a fundamental failure of current social studies curriculum. Students should understand how the social studies are interwoven with their lives during and after high school by being active citizens politically and economically. Within economics, students in this study consistently admitted that too much emphasis was placed on theory and not enough on real-world applications, but when they experienced real-world applications, they found it helpful and beneficial. Because of these disconnections, students sometimes found it hard to find relevance in studying government and economics. The struggles of finding relevance also give rise to finding relevance for studying world and United States history.

The transcripts and insights provided illustrated that these high school seniors found it difficult to understand the relevance of world and United States history while their opinion of economics and government varied. They found economics helpful and useful when it prepared them for life after high school; students found learning about
paying taxes and financial literacy as most important. Unfortunately, the curriculum did not place emphasis on entrepreneurship or creating connections to real-world applications, for these students truly wanted to understand and learn how to be knowledgeable consumers while in high school and after graduation. Students struggled to find relevance in some social studies classes. Additionally, they struggled to find relevance in why social studies should be offered. They all understood social studies would have a role in their lives after high school but they did not experience that importance while taking social studies classes in high school.

One of Student 3’s biggest critiques of social studies was within AP US History. He found the class to be too centered on the point of view of White Americans. Not including voices of all Americans gave him the impression that only White American voices mattered. It is also important to note in his answer he equated White with being an American.

That was something that I liked about AP World History, is you learn about different people all over the world, and it felt like you were getting more of a equal perspective because you were getting history in China, history here, history there, whereas AP U.S. History, it's all America and Thomas Jefferson and so on. And so I feel like that minorities in general, we only see ... Because we're American, we're only going to learn the American perspective of social studies and history. But history is more inconclusive than ... inclusive than just America, because we all intertwine with each other. That's what I would say about it.

His point illustrates the need for curriculum developers and for teachers to ensure that all voices are used within social studies instruction. When students do not see themselves in
the curriculum, they will lose interest in the topic being studied (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005).

Within United States history, the idea of *us versus them* is a common thread (Daniels, 2004). The notion of *us versus them* has caused the politicization of social studies (Symcox, 2002). Student 3 experienced politicization of social studies, which lead to a harsh view of social studies.

While in middle school there wasn't anything particularly that I liked about it. I mean, I considered it necessary because I think knowing the past is important, but I also think social studies is one of the heavily manipulated subjects because it's based off of records from people and people are fallible, so all of the time I feel like I'm getting one perspective or another perspective that this textbook wants me to see, but I'm not exactly seeing the whole picture, but still it's important to know to try to not repeat the past, but in the end, we still do it sometimes. So it's like important to know key events about your history just because it makes you more appreciative of your present and can help you prepare for the future. But at the same time, I still didn't really like Social Studies.

His experience should serve as a challenge to all social studies teachers suggesting they strive to present a full, complete picture while teaching any history class. When students feel they are not included in the story, they lose interest (Camicia, 2009; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). When any of the students in this study lost interest during social studies classes it led to a negative perception of social studies.

Teachers must be careful in disclosing their political opinions in class, and should only use their opinion as a “pedagogical tool that should be used intentionally and with
good judgment” (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 182). Additionally, Hess and McAvoy also suggested that teachers should not avoid a political classroom just one that is politicalized, which only presents one-sided opinions or one opinion as being correct. A strategy that teachers can use to avoid a politicalized classroom is the strategic use of primary sources (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). Primary sources can introduce students to thoughts and topics that they have never considered, or they can tell the story of someone never heard of. Teachers that effectively use primary sources create students that are critical thinkers and learners. Creating critical thinkers can develop students that demand high level assignments and interactions within their classes. While in high school, the seniors in the study wanted depth in their social studies classes, and they were not given it.

I think science is just really interesting to me and looking at a deeper perspective is, I guess, that's where I think about knowledge and, I used to watch ... What's it called? Jimmy Neutron and stuff. So when I think of science I'm like, oh my gosh, science is all the knowledge you need [emphasis added].

Here, Student 2 only viewed science with a deeper perspective. I followed up later asking if she ever remembered looking at history with a deeper perspective and she had not because she never felt the need nor ever asked to view history with a deeper perspective. Within the realm of world history and United States history, it is unfortunate that she never experienced or asked to view history with a deeper perspective because being asked to view science with a deeper perspective caused a positive perception of science. She was asked to consider the possibility of the Big Bang Theory or how evolution by natural selection led her to sitting in a class reflecting on those topics.
Student 3 echoed similar views of social studies when asked if he was ever required to reflect or view history with a deeper perspective.

Just because a lot of the things that social studies has not taught me, or have helped me prepare for anything in particular. It's kind of like background knowledge, and understanding our history, America's history, how things have happened and where things come from that we have today. But other than that, there's not much that I can think of off the top of my head that social studies has really specifically helped me learn.

The last sentence illustrates that the students involved in this study did not see social studies classes as places where they think and question but a place where just facts were to be learned and recited back on the next test. All three students consistently expressed a desire to want to think and question within a social studies class. However, they did not encounter many opportunities where they felt they were required to think or question; just opportunities to recite back facts.

Surprisingly, Student 3 expressed interested in a social studies related job in spite of being the most critical of social studies. He expressed interest in studying psychology and religion, while not seeing the connection to social studies. Within his interviews, he claimed that social studies has not prepared him for anything and, like the other students, equated social studies to history.

Researcher: So what are your plans for life after high school?

Student 3: I plan to go to UGA, and I think I'm going to end up doing a double major in special education and psychology, and possibly minoring in religion [emphasis added], just to kind of figure out
what are different people's belief systems, what are different philosophies that people have. That'll be something that's really interesting for me.

Researcher: Okay. That's kind of what you'd like to study in UGA. Then, ultimately, do you want to be a special ed teacher?

Student 3: I'm not sure if I want to become a psychiatrist or a special education teacher, but somewhere along the lines, I'll figure that out, which way I'm going to go.

Researcher: Okay. So do you feel social studies has helped to prepare you for that career?

Student 3: No.

Researcher: Why not?

Student 3: Just because there are a lot of the things social studies has not really taught me or have helped me prepare for anything in particular. It's kind of like background knowledge, and understanding our history, America's history, how things have happened and where things come from that we have today. But other than that, there's not much that I can think of off the top of my head that social studies has really specifically helped me learn.

Not understanding psychology’s place within social studies offered an example of the failure of social studies curriculum developers of not offering students a true social studies curriculum were all content areas are in unison with each other. The lack of unison allowed for students not to fully understand what social studies are. They did not
view social studies as a collection of subjects just a nebula term for the collection of subjects not one of interwoven subjects.

During all three of his interviews, Student 3 was very critical of social studies; he viewed social studies as a pointless subject where students did not really learn anything important or needful.

Researcher: Okay. So historically, the main goal of social studies has been to produce good citizens. Do you feel, after taking 13 years of social studies, that you're leaving high school prepared to be a good citizen?

Student 3: No. Not at all.

Researcher: Okay, why not?

Student 3: There's plenty of things that I don't know that contribute to being a good citizen. Like how to vote, how that process works, what I need to do. That's not really taught in social studies curriculum. Especially since, I'm 17 and I'm not old enough to vote yet. I don't meet the 17 and a half age. We don't particularly learn that much about politics or discuss that much about politics or who's who. I'm not really sure that there's much specifically that it's taught me on how to be a good citizen. I know some of the laws, and something why we have some of them, so I guess that part could be being a good citizen. But other than that, I'm not really sure how social studies would help me be a good citizen.
Researcher: Okay. How about economics? Do you feel economics has prepared you to be a knowledgeable consumer?

Student 3: No, because you don't get to do a lot of personal finances in economics. I mean, it's more just generalizations of understanding, okay, this happens and this happens. But it definitely isn't in a personable course that you can take away and say, "Okay, how am I gonna apply this to my life?" I mean you learn about aggregate supply and aggregate demand, but it's not about like, "Okay, I want to be financially stable, so I know that I have this much money, so that means I can spend this much," or I know that I need to, I'm gonna get taxed this much, or how to do a tax return. Those kind of things seem more practical and more useful to becoming a good citizen in everyday life.

Researcher: Okay. So then sitting here, you've gone through half of senior year. We talked a little bit on history. Sitting here, what is your overall perception of social studies?

Student 3: To me, if I had a perception of it, probably like a dead subject. Something that you're required to take in high school, that it's cool in elementary that you don't really necessarily take much away from [emphasis added].

Once again, Student 3 held nothing back by declaring social studies to be a dead subject. He saw no value in social studies as a whole. He acknowledged that social studies could be “cool” in elementary school where he fondly recalled creating a pirate
book. In economics, he found helpful learning about taxes, but only experienced rote memorization in government class.

Importance of Quality Instructional Strategies

The thought that social studies was a dead subject was a similar unspoken thought between Students 1 and 2 but strongly articulated by Student 3. While all of them found some noteworthy points of studying social studies, history was found the most relevant with Students 1 and 2. Student 1 found studying history helpful for answering and solving current political questions. But at times, she expressed a negative perception of political systems and found it held little importance. She insisted that these classes were too fact-based with little application to life after high school. The foundational goal of social studies of preparing effective citizens was not met for her. How she could not see any relevance in political systems in her life after school is a total failure of curriculum and teacher. Student 2 liked studying world history because it gave her the opportunity of studying her Greek heritage, but expressed a negative perception of political systems. Student 3 described his time in social studies as pointless. He did not understand why he had to take those classes and insisted that he learned nothing while taking them. He was concerned with the politicization of social studies and his perceived over-emphasis on American and European presence within the curriculum.

Students 1 and 2 both had the same political systems teacher, and both shared, overwhelmingly, that instructional strategies were the main reason for the negative perception of political systems, but both still found some importance in the class. Student 3 also found his social studies classes lacking depth, creativity, and relevance. Collectively, all three students mentioned that they felt the current high school social
studies curricula are redundant and repetitive but they all cited that teacher instructional strategies could overcome the deficits of poor curriculum, which echoed the research of Sanacore (2008), and they all begged for good, engaging instructional strategies, which will now be explored.

Teacher Instructional Strategies

The push for standardized testing and national standards has devalued social studies (Au, 2009; Bailey et al., 2006; Evans, 2004; Symcox, 2002; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Within *No Child Left Behind*, students were only tested in reading and math while in grades 3-8. However, with a heavy push from individual states for science education, elementary students were offered science instructional time similar to the amount of reading and math (Bailey et al., 2006). The growth of standardized assessments coupled with the omission of social studies from tested topics caused elementary teachers to equate testing with subject value, which led to decreased instructional time for social studies (Bailey et al., 2006; Vogler, 2003). By assigning value based on testing, the teaching of social studies was reduced to rote memorization and direct lecture with minimal engaging, hands on learning opportunities for students. The three students in this study continually recommended engaging, hands on learning and abandoning direct instruction with textbook assignments that lead to rote memorization.

Hands On Learning

Student 2’s first memory of social studies was very positive. She recalled her first project as creating a book on Paul Revere, which led to a family trip to his grave. These activities laid a positive foundation for social studies for her, which later turned negative because of subsequently ineffective teacher instructional strategies.
I remember in elementary school, we did a lot of projects and things like that and I really enjoyed doing projects. We made a book about different wars and things and we colored it, and I remember learning about Paul Revere, and then that summer after we learned about it I went to visit his grave and things like that, so I remember doing that, so I think that was one of my first memories.

Not only were social studies in elementary school a positive memory, it was a fond memory. During a post interview discussion, her face lit up as she described her book and how proud she was of that project. Additionally, the memory of the family trip to Paul Revere’s grave further cemented this positive lifelong experience. She recalled conversations with her dad about American history and how her mom found the sites and sounds of Boston energetic and exciting.

Her memory also reinforces the research of Corbin (1997) who found that students performed better academically in classes where there was a “perceived parental importance” (p. 16). Taking her on a summer field trip offered perceived parental importance, which she reflected later when she was asked if she had the freedom to design her schedule. She would include social studies because she would not want to upset her mother, which demonstrated the power of positive parental perception. The connection between school learning and a personal visit brought history alive for her and cemented what she had learned and led to, while in elementary school, a positive perception of social studies.

Researcher: Okay. I'm a little confused because at the beginning you said you wouldn't include social studies and then you said you definitely would include social studies.
Student 2: Yeah, because now I think about my mom, she would want me to take social studies because she has always talked about it.

Parents should always remember the power of their thoughts, words, and deeds when speaking with their children about their schoolwork and subjects. During a post interview discussion, Student 1 revealed that her mother has always viewed voting as an important topic and constantly stressed to her how women were the last group of Americans to gain suffrage and how important it is to vote at every opportunity, which requires people to be current with events and knowledge of their elected representatives.

Student 1 also fondly remembered projects she created in elementary and middle school. She described making a book of President John Quincy Adams. She did not know how or why she picked him but she did like the assignment and saw value in learning about him. When she was in high school, her interest in United States history piqued when John Quincy Adams surfaced. When she remembered this book, she was quickly able to recite facts regarding John Quincy Adams. While this was just reciting facts given the time between creating the book and high school, she truly learned some information about John Quincy Adams.

Now that I think of it, I had to do a project on a president in fifth grade. We had to pick a historical person, and it had to be a president or the First Lady. Somehow, I got John Quincy Adams, and I don't remember anything that I learned but I told the class about John Quincy Adams. I just know I had John Quincy Adams and that I really enjoyed that project and it seemed to make history come alive.
Her being able to quickly recall information on John Quincy Adams demonstrates the effectiveness of Bruner’s (1977) act of learning: acquisition, transformation, and evaluation. During the process of making the book, any new information regarding the topic was acquired and replaced any existing knowledge of John Quincy Adams. In the transformation step, she had to take what she had learned and presented it in an entirely new way: as a book. Once the project was graded and feedback provided, she evaluated her learning of John Quincy Adams.

She also warmly recalled how her eighth-grade teacher showed great passion when providing classroom instruction. In addition to speaking with great passion, the teacher had great enthusiasm for the content area. While the student did not recall any hands on instructional strategies, the passion demonstrated by the teacher fostered a positive perception of social studies. Her teacher clearly understood that passion and enthusiasm could be transferred to her students leading to a positive perception of social studies.

Researcher: Can you recall and describe a time in middle school when you really enjoyed social studies?

Student 1: I'm trying to think of what we talked ... Oh, eighth grade. I remember ... She was my favorite teacher. [Teacher name], she was my all-time favorite teacher. The way she taught Georgia history made it stick more in your mind. And she was never sitting down. She was always walking around and had a very loud, enthusiastic voice, and that made you ... Like, when I had to take a quiz on something, I could go back to that time that we were
talking about it and remember exactly where she was, what she was doing, and how she was speaking. It was almost kind of weird. Like, I don't know how she did it.

Somewhere along her high school journey, social studies became a class to build better study skills rather than to critically think or question. While in high school, Student 1 stated that videos could serve as good instructional practice. Currently, teachers of all content areas are being strongly encouraged to integrate technology into their classroom instruction (Herold, 2017). Although the integration of technology can transform instruction, there have been some identifiable problems. Herold (2017) identified some areas of concern with the integration of technology in the classroom: lack of meaning with the technology integration, teachers can be reduced to facilitators, there is not much research confirming the value of technology integration, and lack of teacher training.

In more and more schools, teachers are encouraged to use videos within their classroom instruction (Davis, 2015). Specifically, social studies teachers consistently have and continue to rely on videos to bring history to life or used to explain concepts in student friendly terms. The students commented how videos could be used successfully in class, and they had a strong desire for teachers to make personal connections with them and teach them where they are and within context.

Additionally, Student 2 stressed the importance of projects and videos. She also stressed how the use of primary sources helped her learn, which confirmed the importance of using high quality primary sources (Camicia, 2009; Cooper & Dilek, 2007; Fragnoli, 2006; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). Watching good videos and engaging
students in high quality instructional strategies contributed to greater interest in class that resulted in a positive perception of social studies.

I didn't enjoy learning from a textbook the whole time. Like I said earlier, we did the project with the book and we made our own book and we colored it and I guess doing ... coloring it and learning from different pictures was exciting, just not the reading portion of it. I feel like watching good videos and doing different things like that makes it more interesting.

The students all stated that an over-reliance on textbooks led to a negative perception of social studies particularly in history classes. Their dislike of the textbooks stemmed from their experiences of the books being boring, dull, and broad in scope. They all identified that the content was told as one-sided and incomplete, often excluding entire groups of people. They did not feel the exclusion of others within classroom instruction or with the curriculum but only within the textbooks. These feelings echo the work of King (2014) who warned that when textbooks are only written from one point of view, the dignity of those not included are threatened. Knowing that these students had a negative reaction and perception to social studies when a heavy reliance on the textbooks took place, teachers should take the advice of Wineburg (2001) and use the textbook along with primary sources so students can critically learn the story of the people and period they are studying.

Later, Student 2 also recalled how videos in economics helped her understand and master the concepts being taught.
Researcher: In high school, can you tell me of a time when you remember using primary sources or primary documents or pictures to help them teach?

Student 2: The one I have now, he shows a lot of videos and different things like that. He does these things-

Researcher: This is for economics?

Student 2: Yes.

He does like econ movies and he shows us after we've learned what we needed to learn for the day, and those are pretty cool. There is one that had cars in it. It showed the supply and demand of different things in the movie and just watching those, I was able to kind of stick with these kind of things. I was able to understand the concept better.

But I don't think, last semester my teacher didn't use that very often. We had a lot of projects but at the same time, I had to Google what I was supposed to be doing because I didn't know. Last year, I definitely didn't learn about pictures or anything like that. 10th grade, not so much. But right now it is pretty good, because we're learning with both pictures and videos and different and this is helping with the tough concepts in class.

Her experiences were interesting in that pictures and videos were used in economics, a subject that does not necessarily tend to rely on pictures and videos. She does not recall using videos or pictures in either world or United States history classes; two subjects that
lend themselves to heavy image and video usage (Fragnoli, 2006). Students 1 and 2 claimed that economics, could at times, be a difficult subject to understand, which confirmed the early nineteenth century scholars’ belief that economics could be a hard subject to teach to high school students due to high level of economic theory taught in that class (Saxe, 1991).

During the second interview, Student 2 visited the topic of videos in her economics class. The teacher’s use of videos stood out to her as a successful teaching strategy because it removed the fear she had at the beginning of the semester, which led to a positive perception of social studies. Her fear was rooted in her worry that the class would be overly based on economic theory that she would not understand, but the teacher used successful instructional strategies that fostered an appreciation for the subject: videos, pictures, interactive notes, gamification, and having a good sense of humor. The use of successful strategies proved to help create a positive perception of social studies with economics.

Student 2: I just like how when one thing happens, it's a domino effect. One thing happens, this happens and then this happens. I like how my teacher explains it because he uses a lot of videos to explain it, and then he uses games. Yesterday, he introduced with a video of an old show called Pyramid and then we played Pyramid. We had to explain different vocabulary words and different things like that. They had to guess what we were trying to say with how we defined it, if that makes sense. It was fun, and he likes to do a lot of fun activities and stuff, so we actually learn it instead of just sitting down all day doing worksheets.
Here she makes another reference to just sitting and completing worksheets. Completing worksheets was a common occurrence for her in other social studies classes but the experiences in economics class reminded her of times in elementary school when she enjoyed social studies. She spoke highly of her economics teacher. She enjoyed his personality and the different instructional strategies he employed during the semester. Because of his personality and strategies, she was immediately put at ease and had a sense confidence in her ability to successfully complete the semester.

While the students had a positive perception of social studies when the teachers used engaging instructional strategies, Student 2 expressed a strong desire for high-level, developmentally appropriate instruction. She shared times when teachers strove to offer their students the best possible instruction while many teachers wanted to prepare their students for college-level instruction. Additionally, she shared when she was offered college-level instruction, she wanted teachers to understand and realize that she was still a high school student.

Researcher: What are your ideas or thoughts on social studies?

Student 2: I just think that, like I said earlier, it should be more hands on and interactive and instead of having kids sit down for an hour and take notes and listen to lectures. I know that's how it will be in college and things like that, there's really nothing you can do about that, but at this age in high school, I think that there's a lot of kids who are just very ... they're not as mature, so they don't want to sit down and do it. They want to go against their teachers and I think it's important to have good teachers and good lesson plans and
different teaching styles so they can accommodate to everybody's needs. So I think that's important to be able to teach social studies that way, because I'll be honest, social studies does get boring, but if you're teaching it in a way that makes it exciting for students, then they're going to learn and they're also going to want to learn more and they're going to take it serious and they're going to want to do well in the class.

Her experiences should serve as warning to teachers. While it is laudable that teachers want to prepare students for life after high school but they cannot do so at the expense of their learning. Teachers must provide students with instruction that is developmentally appropriate, that is at the student’s level of understanding, and within the student’s capabilities. When students in this study were taught at their level of understanding and within their capabilities, they expressed a positive perception of social studies. The students in the study expressed their desire for good, interactive instructional practices: hands-on learning, good videos, and engaging lectures. However, they also desired classes to be entertaining. Entertaining did not mean they wanted to laugh for 50 minutes; they wanted a teacher that enjoyed their time together, enjoyed the content, and enjoyed teaching. Collectively, they wanted teachers that were engaging. Every teacher should meet these expectations every day while striving for total engagement. When these students encountered those teachers, they had an extremely positive perception of social studies.

While all three students identified repetitive curriculum as a reason for a negative perception of social studies, they all identified a boring class with weak instructional
strategies as a stronger determining factor in their perception of social studies. A common suggestion from all three students was that they wanted interactive, engaging lessons, a fun and interesting class, and they wanted work that did not require rote memorization. During one interview, Student 2 clearly remembered a project from fourth grade but admitted she could not remember anything she learned from tenth grade because world history relied heavily on rote memorization without interactiveness.

Researcher: What would have changed your perception of social studies? Do you think if having a different curriculum or if teachers would have taught it differently? What could have made you more excited about social studies?

Student 2: If they taught it differently.

Researcher: Okay. And how could they have taught it differently to give you a better perception of it?

Student 2: I think they should have taught it more interactively [emphasis added], and if there was a way to do a hands on activity that would have been better. It's just I felt like a lot of my years in school, it was just notes all the time and PowerPoint and stuff like that. I mean, yeah, it worked, but at the same time, I'd have to go home and memorize all my notes. I don't really feel like I was learning. Like I said a couple of interviews back, we did a book with all that stuff in fourth grade and I remember that because it just stuck in my mind. But these notes and stuff, I probably can't tell you a lot of things that I learned in 10th grade.
Researcher: Just because it was more notes based?

Student 2: **It wasn't interactive** [emphasis added].

All the students in the study desired more interactive and engaging instruction and classwork. All lamented that they experienced social studies classes heavy in rote memorization with direct, lecture-based instruction. All identified teacher instructional practices and not curriculum as the genesis for their negative perceptions of social studies. Their desire for engaging instruction was from their desire to make a connection to the curriculum.

Researcher: Let’s talk about US History?

Student 2: US history. That was last year. I had [student provided teacher name].

Researcher: Okay.

So, describe for how he taught and how you learned.

Student 2: It was a lot of lectures that I'd take notes on, and then a lot of book reading I'd have to take notes on, because he'd assign every night chapters to read and I'd take notes on the chapters and I'd write everything he said down. I made a good grade in the class, but a lot of the other students didn't understand that that's what you had to do to pass the class. **That's not learning. That's memorizing** [emphasis added] and I feel like that's important to have the videos helping me learn, like [teacher name] shows the video, [teacher name] makes us memorize, kind of thing.
Anytime the students were asked to perform mere rote memorization, they felt the test was more important than their learning. They understood and felt the mood and stress of teachers caused by current standardized testing environment coupled with the constant pressure to keep moving forward even when students failed to understand the content, all for the sake of being ready for the test. Checking items off a list was a common feeling expressed by the students. There were few lasting memories associated with their learning or experiences within a class. However, all the students did have one common memory from middle school social studies: Indian Removal.

Indian Removal was a common memory for all three students. However, memorization of basic facts was all that was required for learning. All shared how they had a desire to learn the reasons for removal and the lasting impact on the Native Americans but were not given those opportunities. In high school, they learned more of the reasons for removal but they all expressed a desire to learn of the lasting impact of removal of the Native Americans. Student 1 remembered Indian Removal most vividly. This became a lasting memory because of the emotional connection.

Student 1: And we just read out of the textbook. We would spot-read. We just read out of the textbook. That's all we did. And I remember learning about Andrew Jackson, and that was it.

Interviewer: Why do you think Andrew Jackson stands out in your memory?

Student 1: I think because of Indian Removal. I remember how terrible that was for them and thinking “why did this happen.”

Teachers could learn from this interview exchange and strive to make emotional connections between their students and the content, which increased the subject’s
relevance to their students. Among all three students, experiences with an emotional connection to the content resulted in a positive perception to social studies. The topic of Indian Removal is a controversial topic, which is one of many within various social studies classes. However, teachers should embrace controversial topics within a history class and give students time for discussion.

Nelson and Pang (2014) reminded teachers of the importance of social studies as the avenue where students can discuss, question, and reflect on the “contemporary issues of prejudice” (p. 203). And when teachers allowed students to discuss and provide possible solutions for prejudice, they are helped in fulfilling the goal of social studies of producing effective citizens. In addition to making emotional connections, teachers must allow students to critically think and question while in a social studies class. All three students stressed that learning was authentic when they made emotional connections to the curriculum. Authentic learning caused the students to want to learn more and become active participants within the class. During authentic learning opportunities, depth of knowledge was increased. Most importantly, when authentic learning led to deep depth of knowledge social studies were perceived as a valuable subject.

All three students displayed a positive perception of social studies when they were allowed to critically think and question the subject at hand. They all felt valued when they were asked their opinion. Because of their positive response to critical thinking, teachers should strive to find opportunities for student to critically think and question often within class. Teachers are not entirely to blame for lack of critically thinking within classroom rooms. Westheimer (2014) chronicles the attempts to remove critically thinking from history classes in Texas and Florida.
Craig (2006) cited a Florida bill (H.B. 7087e3) that called for a United States history curriculum that allowed for little critical thinking.

American history shall be viewed as factual, not constructed, shall be viewed as knowable, teachable, and testable [emphasis added], and shall be defined as the creation of a new nation based largely on the universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence. (para. 2)

By reducing history to a knowable, teachable, and testable subject removes all aspects of critical thinking. The students in this study warned that a subject reduced to one that is knowable, teachable, and testable leads to negative perception of social studies. The students desired teachers to challenge, question, and push them to question what they learned and what they already know about history. While in government and economic classes, the students wanted to know and understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens and consumers.

Within government classes, they could all recite how many senators each state had but could not describe the role of legislative branch or its constitutional powers. They also expressed frustration over never discussing current political problems, or offering solutions to these problems. They knew the term Bill of Rights but struggled to identify the rights protected other than the freedom of speech, press, and religion. Student 3 could not recall much of what he learned after completing a social studies class. After completing political systems, he could only recall the names of the three branches. He said his lack of recall was mainly because he felt little significance between him and the content. The lack of relevance of the content caused this negative perception.
I don't think that social studies has any significance for someone to learn in high school unless that's something they're interested in or planning to major in because the matter of fact is that I ... The four years I spent learning social studies in high school, next year I will remember probably 5 to 10% of everything that I learned. All of it was straight up memorization, go on a test, and that's it, because it has little to no significance to me [emphasis added]. In government class, I can’t tell you much other than there being three branches of government.

After fours years of high school social studies, he claimed to remember only 5 to 10% of what he was taught. He cited lack of significance within the curriculum as to lack of remembering what was taught. He found his classes to be preparation for a test and not opportunities for learning.

Student 2 found economics helpful and useful. There she learned about taxes, their uses and purposes. She found the teacher insightful and relatable while routinely using games to explain a concept. Student 1 did not find economics helpful. She found it to mostly consist of rote memorization with no requirements to critically think or to fundamentally understand the basis of the American capitalistic system. During post-interview discussions, she would visit me with questions regarding certain tax policies, or with questions on how she viewed the wealth distribution within the United States. I asked her why she did not ask these questions during economics class, and she responded that they do not talk about that stuff in class because it is not on the test. She was thinking of issues that would affect her in life after high school and that would form her electoral decisions, but, unfortunately, she was not encouraged to ask these questions within class. Within economics class, the students in the study felt they were too focused
on facts just to pass the test but not focused on learning and understanding, which could lead to lifelong learning.

Because to me, the curriculum for economics, it's just information. I feel like **school now is just you're just learning things to remember things** [emphasis added], and that's it, for that test, and then you're done. Once you get past that test, it's like, "Okay, move on to the next thing." Especially with science and social studies and math.

When students had a different teacher it led to the difference in their perception of economics. Student 1 identified the current trend of learning just for the test was experienced within all content areas not just within economics or social studies.

Student 3 found AP Macroeconomics rigorous. He felt challenged by the problem solving applications of the AP curriculum. Using problem solving strategies within social studies was a new conception for him. He stated that it did not feel like he was in a social studies class because he was not studying history.

AP Macro was just very logical to me. It made sense. It didn't really feel like social studies to me because it wasn't studying the history or stuff like that. Most of that was learning concepts and how to apply them rather than learning history. And it was kind of like ... It is problem solving, so maybe that's why I like it, because Macro was a lot of problem solving.

His comment illustrated a common thread among all three students that identified social studies as the studying of history not a collection of geography, history, government and economics, which meant rote memorization and reciting back facts that involved no critical thinking or questioning. Student 3 found challenges while in AP classes but few
challenges in non-AP classes. However, he did fondly recall times when he was allowed to participate and listen to debates.

We have done where we present a topic or we would have some sort of debates, so I guess that was trying to make it interesting. Debates would make class more interesting. I always found political debates more interesting and made class more interesting.

His desire for debates and active participation echoes the work of Allen (2004) that when students form *political friendships* they can learn how to address current political problems together to achieve solutions that benefit everyone as equal citizens.

**Summary**

The true power of social studies comes from providing students with opportunities to form political friendships. A social studies classroom should provide a space for students to critically think, question, and reflect on history, politics, and economics. While in high school, students can do this thinking, questioning, and reflecting within any social studies classroom. In fact, the students in this study were demanding it. No other subject in school can offer students the opportunities that social studies can offer. They wanted teachers to challenge and push them into questioning past and current decisions while reflecting on possible future outcomes.

Social studies teachers must provide their students with these thinking, questioning, and reflective opportunities. When these authentic learning opportunities were provided to students, they saw relevance in the subject area. Relevance allowed them to become active members in those classes, which encouraged them to become active citizens after high school. When relevance was discovered, students took full
ownership of their learning; they questioned, discussed, and learned. Memorization was not longer an option because they were engaged and wanted to learn about the subject. When students wanted to learn about the subject, social studies become a part of life and not just a class they enjoyed. As students are offered these opportunities, they had a clear, positive perception of social studies.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to use social learning theory and student voice to conduct a phenomenology to examine how high school seniors describe their experiences and perceptions of social studies and what factors form their perceptions. After a thorough review of social studies research and reforms, the time has come to include students in curriculum development. The students in this study expressed a strong desire to be challenged within social studies classes rather than simply memorize information to perform well on classroom and standardized tests. This study attempted to answer the research questions listed below.

1. How do high school seniors describe their experience in taking high school social studies classes?

2. Does classroom environment, the presence of friends, teacher relationships, and interest in the subject impact the perception of social studies among high school seniors?

3. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by career choice?

4. Is the perception of social studies among high school seniors impacted by parental attitude towards the subject?
Answer To Research Questions

The overarching research question was how do these high school seniors describe their social studies experience and what factors formed their perceptions of social studies. The three students in this study were very open and honest in describing their experiences in high school social studies. They all described few, positive, and lasting elementary school social studies memories, which were fun and informative. They fondly recalled projects and presentations along with family trips that these projects inspired. However, their memories of other subjects were more impactful: science was important because it was taught more frequently and fun, while they found a fundamental importance in math due to the subject matter alone. As Student 3 said “it is math after all, and everybody needs to know it.”

In the proceeding sections, I will summarize and collectively share each student’s perception of social studies while answering all the research questions. Attempts to answer the questions individually cannot accurately present and share each student’s experience. The interviews revealed that collectively all the questions describe their experiences but attempts to answer the questions individually could not tell their story or share their perception with justice.

Student 1

Student 1 held social studies as an important subject. Her father teaches high school history that was a dominant factor in her forming a positive perception of social studies. During our interviews, she recalled many trips, conversations, and discussions she would have with her dad. She shared that while traveling, her dad would always stop at every historical marker and they would read it together. His love for history
transferred to her and she found history fascinating, which confirmed the work of Corbin (1997) in that parental perception of social studies reflected positivity in his daughter’s perception of social studies. She consistently expressed a desire to use history to form opinions and shape decisions to avoid repeating any past mistakes. During her interviews, she never mentioned the importance of having friends in class. Her dream was to become a veterinarian. While she admitted social studies has not necessarily helped prepare her for this career, she had a positive perception of social studies because she viewed social studies as a way to help make political and policy decision, which would help her as she entered voting age.

While in high school, numerous things affected her perception of social studies but ultimately she held a positive perception of social studies. She enjoyed her time in social studies and found value in all the classes she took. She did find some bias and politicization within World History, but this came from disagreements with how she and her teacher viewed past events. These disagreements did not change her perception of social studies but stood out and made a lasting impression on her. She left World History questioning what she was taught at school and tried to align it with her existing beliefs. After World History, she became critical thinker. She took AP United States History her junior year, and being a critical thinker did not follow her to United States history. While her perception of social studies did not change, her expectations did.

When her perception of social studies was negative, it was due to teacher relatability. She expressed her hope in taking AP United States History was to learn how to take proper notes and prepare for college. Rigor or learning rich, deep content was not her desire in taking that class. Her view of taking an AP level class merely for learning
study skills for college is disheartening. Her AP United States History teacher was known for and taught using traditional lecture based methods. While she did find the teacher extremely knowledgeable, she did not find his style or class particularly interesting. She also felt that the class required little critical thinking. She did not mentioned within the interviews of any projects or primary sources: just lecture. In addition to the lecture-based methods, she also found some of his sayings hard to understand. She found him to be a very competent and nice but repeatedly referred to his teaching style as old-fashioned and not fun. When she said fun, she did not mean a class that was particularly entertaining but a class that was engaging. Additionally, she expressed the similar stories of her political systems teacher.

While she continually expressed the importance of understanding of how the government worked, she did not care for her teacher. She found her teacher not relatable and out of touch with the students. The teacher had a hard time keeping up with the demands and needs of the students. While she saw a need for taking a government class, she identified areas of curriculum overlap between her AP United States History class and the political systems class. She was excited about taking a political systems class but she found the curriculum overlap to be very frustrating and found very little relevance in that class. While taking the class, she was hoping to investigate the politics behind policy decisions but found she studied the same content as within United States history: the Constitutional Convention, parts of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and number of Congressional representatives. As stated earlier, she mentioned this repetition but did not know the Bill of Rights as well as she thought she did. While she did have a positive perception of social studies, her expectations changed based on her teachers. Once she
discovered who her political systems teacher would be she did not expect to learn much during that semester.

Overall, she had a positive perception of social studies due to family trips and discussions with her father, positive teaching strategies in elementary school and in high school. She did not expect to learn United States history at a rigorous pace but was looking forward to the class to prepare her to be a better note taker in college. Her positive perception was not related to her career choice. Out of all the social studies areas, she gave history the most importance. For her, history should serve as a guide for political decision-making, so knowledge of the past was of vital importance.

Student 2

Student 2 perceived social studies with importance but had difficulty in understanding its relevance and finding excitement when taking a social studies class. She also had fond memories of social studies in elementary school but had a hard time recalling fond times while in high school. As she prepared to enter high school, her middle school math teacher convinced her to forgo the prescribed social studies ninth grade elective: World Geography. She chose to take an additional math class, which she admitted did not help her better understand math while in high school. The decision of forgoing social studies did not change her perception of social studies and that middle school teacher did not install a negative perception of social studies. World History allowed her to grow closer to her Greek heritage and her family’s history. She was allowed to witness the importance of her Greek heritage, and she found that to factor into a positive perception of social studies.
She found the current traditional lecture-based teaching method in her United States history class ineffective. Many times, she felt she was teaching the content to herself and other classmates. However, these ineffective teaching methods did not foster a negative perception of social studies. She enjoyed teaching herself the story of America and sharing that story with fellow classmates. While having a positive perception of the subject, she had a negative perception of her teacher. She found him not relatable to her or other classmates. She did not enjoy taking United States history because of the teacher. Her teacher did not foster a negative perception of social studies, but she had a negative perception of his ineffective teaching methods. She wanted to be challenged and forced to ask critical questions regarding political decisions that had been made in the past, but was not afforded these opportunities during class. While economics helped her prepare for life after high school political systems did not.

While she found political systems important and had a positive perception of it, she did not like her teacher and found her instructional strategies not effective for teaching high school students. She wanted to understand her role within the political process but was only required to recite and recall memorized facts.

Economics proved very helpful to her. She had a positive perception of social studies while taking economics. Her positive perception was due to her teacher and his teaching style. In class, he had students play games that reinforced concepts taught. He also successfully and effectively used videos that strengthened classroom lessons. During class, she learned about taxes and mortgages. These lessons empowered her to be a knowledgeable consumer during and after high school. Economics was one of her favorite classes, which surprised her because she was nervous before taking economics.
Her positive perception of economics directly related to the teacher. His teaching style and methods made economics fun while being relatable and understandable. His class was one that she found interesting and informative. After completing economics, she felt like a knowledgeable consumer for life during and after high school. However, she viewed political systems as a subject very positively but did not enjoy the teacher or her instructional strategies. These perceived ineffective instructional strategies made the student disengaged in the learning process, and struggle to find relevance within that class. When presented with those instructional strategies and lack of relevance, a negative perception of social studies followed.

She perceived political systems very positively. She wanted to be a knowledgeable, effective citizen as she entered adult life. Numerous situations were identified where she found her teacher not relatable to her or other classmates. During our interviews, she identified that while she wanted to be a knowledgeable, effective citizen, she did not become one after taking her political systems class. Additionally, she found the curriculum overlap between United States history and political systems coupled with the teacher’s inability to make class relevant extremely frustrating. This negative litany of learning continued as she described the overlap of curriculum about the war of independence, the Constitutional Convention, the parts of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. She wanted to discuss and debate current topics, legislation, and Supreme Court decisions, but these topics never came up in classroom discussion because they were not on the test. Multiple times, teaching to the test was cited a factor of a negative perception of social studies. The students were frustrated with having information, facts, and figures presented to them lacking any relevance other than needing to be recited back on a test.
Teacher relatability led to a negative experience within class. Within the class, she experienced traditional lecture-based teaching methods, which she found boring and ineffective. These experiences of ineffective methods and lack of relatability with the teacher led her to have a negative perception of the class but not the subject. Her negative experiences failed to foster a totally negative perception of social studies. While she viewed the subjects as important, she failed to see much relevance while sitting in this class. Along with Student 1, she identified a parent as a reason for her positive perceptions of social studies.

Her mother is an elementary school teacher. During our second interview, I asked her if given the freedom to design her schedule would she take a social studies class. This question initiated much internal debate. She debated whether she would take a social studies class, but ultimately said yes because her mother would be mad at her if she did not take one. At home, her mother would discuss current events and saw value in social studies. Having friends in class was never mentioned as a factor in forming her perceptions of social studies.

Overall, Student 2 had positive perceptions of social studies. The factors behind her perceptions were her mother’s influence and her desire to be a knowledgeable, effective citizen after high school. Despite encountering ineffective teaching practices, she still had a positive perception of social studies. Her desire to become a knowledgeable, effective citizen was hampered by the social studies curriculum and ineffective instructional strategies. Connections were not made between her career choice and the role social studies would pay. She wants to own a design company, but
she did not see how knowledge of loans or impact of governmental permits would affect her own business. Friends were not a factor in her perception of social studies.

Student 3

By far, Student 3 had the most negative perception of social studies. He had a few fond memories of social studies in elementary school. Upon entering high school, he was given the freedom to take World Geography and he chose not to take it because he was “never good at maps.” He found Advanced Placement World History interesting because of the worldly focus, but the AP United States History curriculum was bias and too focused towards the point of view of White Americans. However, he was complementary of AP United States History in that he liked the chronological manner in which the class could be taught. His like for the class was due to the curriculum, which identifies some curriculum differences between Advanced Placement and non-Advancement classes. Even with his like for AP World History, he would not take the class if given to the freedom to create his own schedule, for he found the class too mundane, without any relevance. Additionally, he could not recall many ways his political systems class prepared him to be a productive citizen because that class lacked relevance for him.

While taking his political systems class, he could not recall any lively debate or discussion of current events or current political topics. He wanted these debates and discussions. He wanted to hear the voices of other students and share his in return. Throughout his life, he remembered hearing comment said under his classmates’ breath and wanting to discuss these beliefs but was never given the opportunities in class. The Constitution or Bill of Rights was not even recalled as a point to help make him an
effective citizen. He was also very critical of the instructional strategies within his social studies classes.

In elementary school, he recalled some fond memories of making projects but those positive memories ended once he entered high school. Within high school social studies classes, he commonly encountered traditional lecture-based teaching methods. These methods left him bored and anxious for class to end; coupled with his experiences of the perceived inclusiveness of United States history, he often felt left out of classroom conversation. Even with AP Economics, a class he was complementary of, he struggled to find positive things to say. While he found the rigor to his liking, he found himself wanting more consumer finance. It was within the few financial literacy lessons that he had a positive perception of economics. He also expressed some interest in social studies related careers but did not know they were related to social studies. After three years of high school and four social studies classes, he failed to truly understand the meaning of social studies. During his interviews, he equated it to history not the interconnectedness of geography, history, government, economics, and the behavioral sciences. His failure to make this connection is particularly concerning because he expressed interest in a social studies related job: psychology.

Not only did he fail to make this connection between career choice and social studies, he failed to find any relevance in taking AP Psychology. AP classes are considered college-level classes with instruction, assignments, and assessment meeting that expectation. Taking AP Psychology would have offered him an experience at participating college level, but he did not perceive the AP class as providing him with
college level experience. He did not perceive any relevance in this course due to his experience with other AP classes taken while in high school.

In college, he hopes to study psychology with a minor in religion or special education. He has a passion for psychology but did not take that class while in high school. When asked why he did not take it, he felt it would be different in college and a high school class would not prepare him for the class he would take in college. But he did not realize that psychology was a social studies class, nor did he ever attempt to view history through a psychological lens. A psychological point of view was never used because he was not introduced to primary sources in high school and never asked to critically think or reflect while in class. He did not mention during his interviews talking about social studies or current events at home but fondly recalled viewing the inauguration of President Obama because his teacher let them discuss their thoughts while watching that historic inauguration. Neither did he mention the importance of friends in any of his social studies class.

Overall, Student 3 had the most negative perception of social studies even though he had fond memories of social studies in elementary school. Unfortunately, he found high school social studies classes biased and lecture-based with no opportunities for conversations or debate. Within the perceived curriculum and classroom biases, Student 3 found it hard to enjoy studying history. He failed to see relevance for studying history. Within his political systems class, he failed to find any relevance by not being able to recall a single thing he learned that would help be an effective citizen for life after high school. While taking economics, he had a positive perception when he was learning consumer finance but found economic theory more common within the curriculum. He
illustrated a common point among all three students: they want to be taught in context and not with abstract facts. They all wanted to be taught and introduced to concepts in terms and examples that they understood. Ultimately, he summarized his perception of social studies succinctly as “probably like a dead subject. Something that you're required to take in high school, that it's cool in elementary that you don't really necessarily take much away from.”

Student Summaries

The purpose of the study was to use social learning theory and student voice to hear, describe, and share the current perception of social studies among high school seniors and discover what factors form these perceptions. Social learning theory explains how students learn by their environment, social interactions, and familial influences. Hearing and describing student voice regarding perception of social studies is imperative because of the devaluation of social studies since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Au, 2009; Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Chiodo & Byford, 2004; Pederson, 2007; Vogler, 2003, 2005; Winstead, 2011; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Even though NCLB has been replaced, the seniors in this study had their entire public school experience under the influence of NCLB, so researchers and educators must study the effects and affects this legislation has on student perception of social studies. Students’ voices were used to hear the current perception of social studies and the factors that determined these perceptions among the students in this study.

Students 1 and 2 had an overall positive perception of social studies. The students identified factors that lead to a negative perception within social studies: curriculum overlap, relatability between them and their teachers, individual teaching methods and
instructional strategies used within a class. These factors aligned with the survey data that suggested the lecture was the overly used within all social studies content areas. They repeatedly stressed their frustration with the curriculum overlap between the United States history and political systems curriculum. Curriculum overlap leading to a negative perception to social studies was not discovered within any of the related literature for this study. Curriculum overlap caused the students to struggle with finding relevance within social studies classes. The students in the study also identified that curriculum overlap and the demands of standardized testing cause surface level learning. They were not required to display or acquire any depth of knowledge within their social studies classes. Both students expressed frustration with not being asked to learn social studies at a deep level. This surface level learning caused them to struggle to find relevance within social studies classes that led to negative perceptions of those classes, but they both maintained a positive perception of social studies as a subject.

Teacher relationships as factors for forming positive perception of social studies was found within the literature and verified within this study. Founts (1987) identified five teacher traits that led to an increased attitude of students in social studies: diversity of teaching strategies, avoiding repetition, an “abundance of cooperative learning activities”, requiring “student participation,” and engaging in positive and supportive communication with students (p. 113). The demands for these teacher traits were echoed within all the student interviews.

As for careers, Students 1 and 2 identified choices outside the field of social studies: veterinarian and interior designer. Student 1 had a positive perception of social studies even with her career choice outside of social studies. While Fernandez, Massey,
and Dornbush (1976) found that students placed less value on social studies because of their career choice, Students 1 and 2 had a positive perception and placed as much value on social studies in spite of their career choice not being related to social studies.

Student 1’s positive perception of social studies was rooted in her father’s career as a history teacher. She fondly recalled trips and conversations with her father that provided for her positive perception. Student 2’s positive perception also stemmed from her mother and family. She enjoyed learning about Greek contributions to world history, and she said she would take social studies classes even if she did not need too because her “mother would get mad.” Their parents’ positive perception of social studies overrode the students’ career choice. Corbin (1997) found that students that had parents with higher levels of education held a more positive perception of social studies, which was confirmed by these two students. Student 3 hoped for a social studies related job but had a negative perception of social studies. His negative perception stemmed from perceived teacher bias with various social studies classes.

By far, Student 3 had the most negative perception of social studies, and found social studies the most biased subject he took while in high school, which was concentrated within world and United States history. He purposefully chose not to take the social studies elective of World Geography in ninth grade because he “was bad at maps.” He perceived no relevance in learning geography and failed to see its importance for when he would learn World History. While he liked the timeline of AP United States History and its ability to be learning chronologically, he felt that many voices were left out and was critical of the dominance of the White American point of view. He repeatedly shared that he saw no relevance in learning social studies as a subject but
perceived some positive aspects in taking AP Economics. Learning personal finance was beneficial, but for him there was too little of it taught. Never was a fond memory recalled of discussing current events with family or visiting historical places. He entered high school with a negative perception that only increased with every passing year.

He did not cite any particular teacher as a factor of his negative perception of social studies. While he liked his AP United History teacher as a person, she did not influence his perception of social studies or of American history. His negative perception of American history stemmed from the lack of inclusion of voices used to tell the story of America. This lack of inclusion could be due to the AP American History curriculum or teacher choice; he could not identify the cause for the lack of inclusion. While he has hopes for a social studies related job, he failed to have a positive perception of social studies. The cause for this factor in leading to a negative perception was that he never had a teacher present him with a true social studies curriculum. He never experienced geography, history, government, and economics woven together to present a proper social studies view within any class. Never during our interviews did he express any family social studies experiences. He never recalled family trips or dinner table current events conversations.

The preceding chapters show that student voice is beginning to be heard and used to improve school curriculum (Cook-Sather, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Friend & Caurthers, 2012; Kirby & Gardner, 2010; Sanacore, 2008; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). Within social studies, Hess and McAvoy (2015) have illustrated that a democratic classroom, along with student voice, increases students’ interests in creating solutions to current political problems while valuing the thoughts and opinions of others. If high
school students can learn how to critically listen to political speak and understand political solutions, while constructively contributing to the democratic process by being effective citizens and knowledgeable consumers, the goal of social studies will be fulfilled.

Discrepancies Between Survey Data and Student Interviews

Within the survey, it appeared the seniors felt overwhelmingly prepared to participate within the American market-based economy but within the interviews the seniors expressed a deficit within their learning. This discrepancy was addressed with the seniors during the interviews. As they were taking the survey, the seniors equated taking and passing their economics class as being deemed prepared to participate in the American economic system. During the interviews, it was revealed that the students want more financial literacy taught to feel truly prepared to participate in the American economic system. The seniors also expressed feeling overwhelmingly prepared to participate in American democratic system. During the interviews, they did not clearly understand their role as citizens or expectations as voters. This discrepancy was due to the curriculum overlap they expressed experiencing within the government and United States history classes.

Recommendations

The students within the study found relevance within the content area of social studies but completed individual social studies classes feeling empty and unsure of the purpose for taking that class. They entered their social studies classes wanting to learn, discuss, grapple, and debate, but were only required to memorize, retain, and recite. They were not given opportunities to learn with any depth of knowledge, which reflected
in a negative perception of social studies. Therefore, strides must be taken to restore relevance within the area of social studies.

The long-standing goal of social studies has been to produce effective citizens. Based on these students’ interviews, this goal is only mildly achieved in school today. Students are struggling to find relevance, purpose, and importance within their social studies class. They struggled to find relevance because they do not know what they were required to learn, and, many times, they feel they are learning only to pass a test. They struggled to find relevance because teachers did not properly show how the subject related to their life. They struggled to find importance because they did not understand why they were learning the subject, or how it would help them in life after high school.

The students also expressed frustration with curriculum overlap between grades and social studies subjects. Because of curriculum overlap and ineffective teaching methods and instructional strategies, these students felt that they were not asked or required to critically think about historical events and the ramifications nor asked to proffer political solutions to current problems. One way of provided relevance would be to develop an applied social studies curriculum. An applied social studies class could serve a capstone to students’ social studies experience. Within this class, students could identify current problems and collectively create solutions to those problems. Creating an applied social studies class could allow students to become interested solving problems around them as suggested by Engestrom (1991).

How Teachers Can Help Students Build a Positive Perception of Social Studies

Within this study, the seniors repeatedly expressed how important effective instructional strategies and teacher relatability were as factors to their perception of social
studies. The students wanted social studies teachers that are fun and friendly while being serious about their subject. They wanted connections made between the content and their life but they wanted to be the ones that made these connections. These students wanted to dissect, analyze, and interpret the causes, effects, and outcomes of historical and current events. They wanted to review primary sources to fully hear, understand, and appreciate the struggle and story of others. They wanted to identify current problems and collectively create solutions. All these skills would help them become effective citizens. These skills they all wanted but were not learned within social studies classes. They understood these skills would serve them well into life after high school but felt that they would have to teach themselves these skills.

Teachers should never utter the phrase *because this on the test*, for no other phrase contributes more to a negative perception of social studies then that phrase. Upon hearing that phrase, students immediately lost interest in their learning, which factored into a negative perception of social studies. While understanding the demands placed on teachers, the students wanted teachers to rise above the worries of high stakes testing and allow them to experience social studies. Students know and understand that they need social studies for life after high school. They want to be knowledgeable consumers and effective citizens, so the least high school teachers can do is help prepare students for that endeavor.

Students wanted to experience social studies with more engaging instructional strategies, which includes primary sources, collaboration, and critical thinking. Experiencing social studies is key for the students in this study, which African American and female students. These students cited lack of inclusiveness and a factor for a
negative perception of social studies. They have heard the stories of women and people of color but were deterred when their stories were not included within classroom instruction. These students are demanding that all voices be heard. Inclusive classrooms can eliminate classroom bias, which was cited a factor leading to a negative perception of social studies. The survey and interviews confirmed that students wanted to see themselves within the content. Primary sources bring history to life, afford all voices a chance to be heard, and provide students to see themselves within the curriculum (Camicia, 2009; Cooper & Dilek, 2007; Fragnoli, 2006; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). The seniors in this study expressed a positive perception when history was brought alive and they saw themselves within the curriculum. Teachers can help build a positive perception of social studies by asking students to critically think, question, and reflect when in class and primary sources are one of many ways of giving students these opportunities.

Middle school teachers must remember the impact of the influence they have on their students as they enter into high school and that no subject is more important than another. Two students in this study did not take World Geography their freshman year. Student 2 did not take World Geography because she was encouraged by her middle school teacher to take an additional math class. She explained that this additional math class did not help her be any more successful in math than not taking the class. The class did not accomplish its promise of making math more understandable. Student 3 did not take World Geography because he did not like maps and none of his middle school teachers tried to encourage him to take geography by pointing out its significance and connection to the history courses he would be required to complete and pass or its importance in learning about the world.
Another common desire from all three students was for engaging classroom instructional strategies. They wanted classes that were fun, which meant engaging. The use of engaging instructional strategies was a factor of their perceptions of social studies. Teachers using engaging instructional strategies could help students understand that social studies is interwoven into all aspects of their lives, which was missing in all three students as evident in their interviews. All three students failed to see the role of social studies would play in life after high school. They failed to see how knowledge of governmental permits would be helpful in owning a small business. They were not offered opportunities to reach to governmental leaders to offer their opinions on current legislations or offering suggestions for new legislations. When they were engaged in classroom instructional, they had a positive perception of social studies and believed they would be capable of becoming effective citizens and not just learning facts to pass a test.

How Parents Can Help Build Students Build a Positive Perception of Social Studies

Research maintains that parent attitude towards subjects directly affect their students’ perception of that subject (Corbin, 1997; Fouts, 1987; Soni & Kumari, 2017). Parents need to be made aware and recognize the power and influence they have over their students. Any negative comment, at any time could have disastrous effects on a student’s perception. Parents can forever scare a student from a subject. For parents to help build a positive perception of social studies, they must have a positive perception of social studies. History is the story of everyone, which includes parents, and voting is everyone responsibility. When students see their parents exercise their rights and responsibilities, they understand citizenship is actual participation.
Additionally, parents should visit history with their students, and stop for historical markers. Visiting historical places allows parents and students to learn together while building lifelong memories. During this study, two students fondly recalled trips taken with their parents, which fostered a positive perception of social studies within them. Parents must realize their role within the American democracy and economy. Parents must abandon old thoughts of “my vote does not matter” or “no one listens to us.” As students hear these excuses for not engaging in the political process, they adopt these same beliefs. Parents need to be current on events while discussing and debating these issues with their students. If parents embrace social studies, become active citizens, and knowledgeable consumers of information; their students would follow with great fervor.

Further Research

The results of this study coupled with the constant reforms within education present many areas for additional research. Researchers could administer the survey used in this study to a larger sample than the 111 seniors in this study. The survey could be modified and administered to college students and adults. Not much modification would be needed for college students because even at a college level students could be exposed to primary sources and given opportunities to critically think and discuss. For adults, the primary sources questions could be replaced with general content knowledge and inquiry into how they keep abreast of current events. As various late night *Man on the Street* interviews would attest, adults can always learn more social studies. While student voice was heard during the surveys, the students’ voices during the interviews showed that they wanted interactive teaching strategies.
Wineburg (2001) cited a critical flaw in social studies teacher preparation programs: historians teach teachers. Historians tell stories and share research. Historians do not offer pre-service teachers the current pedagogical methods that are needed in twenty-first century classrooms. Teachers taught by historians perpetuate the cycle of lecture, test, and recite, which was shared by all three seniors as a direct factor to a negative perception of social studies. Studying the methods pre-services teachers are taught would provide much needed research on current social studies pedagogy. The National Council of Social Studies provides and teaches a basic framework for teachers: Powerful and Authentic Social Studies (PASS). On their website, the National Council of Social Studies offers teaching strategies to help engage students within this framework. Researchers could study students’ perception of social studies when taught by teachers who have completed and implemented this framework. However, making courses more engaging must be coupled with in-depth curriculum reviews.

All three students repeatedly cited curriculum overlap as a major factor when they displayed a negative perception of social studies. They recalled many times when they felt that they have learned this all before. The feeling of relearning the same material was a dominant factor when they had a negative perception of social studies. Reviewing social studies curriculum of all grade levels could reveal if an overlap exists or if the curriculum is not be implemented or taught as intended. In addition to curriculum overlap, inclusion within the curriculum could be studied. During the interviews, the students stated that they enjoyed seeing themselves within the curriculum, and Student 3 identified social studies as being the most bias subject within school. It is now time to include all voices at the social studies tables. Teachers must strive to ensure that all
students see that they have a role in America’s history, governmental and economic systems. Gone are days of studying battles and generals; social history must be embraced and incorporated within all social studies classes. Student 3 also found AP classes more rigorous than non-AP classes, which helped build a positive perception of social studies. Researchers could study the College Board framework to discover any differences in rigor and what aspects of the framework to include in non-AP classes.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to use student voice to hear the current perception of social studies among high school seniors. To hear student voice, a phenomenology was conducted using social learning theory. A survey was created and administered to 111 high school seniors. Reviewing the surveys, it was determined that the seniors ranked social studies third among the core content areas: social studies, math, science, and language arts. From the surveys, three seniors participated in a series of three interviews where they could share and reflect on their entire schooling experience within social studies. It was discovered that the students struggled to find relevance and purpose within their social studies classes. They wanted teachers to challenge them and present them with rigorous hands-on, engaging activities. Instead, they were presented with lecture, memorization, and recitation. They experienced tests receiving more importance than actual learning and understanding the role social studies has in their lives. Parents were a positive factor with the two students that displayed an overall positive perception of social studies. Memories, trips, and conversations were fond memories that contributed to a lasting positive perception of social studies.
Teachers must strive to understand the needs of twenty-first century students and open themselves to continual learning. Teachers must keep current on research and methods of teaching social studies, for social studies often becomes the only subject where students are allowed to freely speak, openly debate, and critically think. Teachers should actively seek and encourage opportunities for debate and critical thinking to meet the goal of social studies of producing effective citizens.

The results of the study suggest that teachers and parents all have an important role in forming positive perceptions of social studies. Teachers have an obligation to present social studies rigorously and relevantly to their students. Parents have a duty to live out their role of citizen with meaning, with their student visit places of significance, and help form students beliefs through active discussion of current and political events. When everyone fulfills their obligations, the goal of social studies is fulfilled.

At this point, I would like to offer some clarification on the title of this study: Let the dead bury the dead. During my readings of social studies and its history, I came across a story of John Dewey and social studies reformers at a conference. Dewey was advocating for his Problems with American Democracy course among a group of history professors, while they were arguing for a more traditional history curriculum with battles, generals, facts, and dates. In frustration, Dewey slams his hands on the table and screams “let the dead bury the dead.” I am not advocating eliminating all facts and dates from social studies classes, but with the presence and access of technology, the time has come for us to look at the social studies curriculum and identify that having skills within the current curriculum is a good and needed thing. Students must leave any social studies class a better student and citizen than when they entered it. They must be critical thinkers
and readers. They must know how to access good, reliable resources for current events. They must understand how the American government system works and how to participate in great change instead of feel beaten by the system. When they can do all these things, they will be effective citizens.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH APPROVAL
Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Mr. John Mangano
Mercer University
TiŌ College of Education
3001 Mercer University Dr
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: How does student perception of high seniors reflect the purpose of social studies? (H1703077)

Dear Mr. Mangano:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 01-Mar-2017 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) 6, 7 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 22-Mar-2017. The protocol expires on 21-Mar-2018. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
Add to the literature of student voice, teacher preparation, social studies curriculum and methods

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and ALL accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM.
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."
Friday, November 3, 2017

Mr. John Mangano  
Mercer University  
TiŌ College of Education  
3001 Mercer University Dr  
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: How does student perception of high school seniors reflect the purpose of social studies? (H1703077)

Dear Mr. Mangano:

On behalf of Mercer University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your Modifications for Expedited Review submitted on 23-Oct-2017 to the above referenced protocol was reviewed and approved on 03-Nov-2017 in accordance with Federal Regulations 46.110 and 46.111(a) under category(ies) 5 for expedited review.

Changes Approved:
- Student request for modification to include use of survey results from October 2015.

NOTE: The approval date of this modification does not change the annual renewal date of your protocol which expires on 21-Mar-2018.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM  
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)  
Member  
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent
Perception of Social Studies Among High School Seniors

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to your child to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what your child will be asked to do.

Investigators
John Mangano, a doctoral student of the Tift College of Education at Mercer University. Dr. Geri Collins is serving as the chair of my dissertation committee. I can be reached at my place of employment by calling 770-921-2874 or by email at john.p.mangano@live.mercer.edu.

Purpose of the Research
This research study is designed to study the perception of social studies among high school seniors.

The data from this research will be used to explain the perception of social studies among high school seniors and factors that help form those perceptions.

The results from this study will partially complete my requirements for my degree, and help contribute to the literature of student voice and social curriculum creation.

Procedures
If your child volunteers to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to complete a brief online survey. From that survey, some students will be randomly chosen for interviews.

Your child’s participation will take approximately 15 minutes for survey and, if chosen for the interviews, three sessions ranging from 15-9 minutes each interview.

If your child volunteers to participate in this study, they will be selected from among their graduating class.

They will be invited to let their voice be heard regarding their perceptions of and experiences in social studies

Potential Risks or Discomforts
There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study. If your child chooses to answer the survey, it will be during the school day during their advisement class. Your child will not lose any class time by participating. If your child is chosen for the interviews, they will be conducted after school. You will have a chance to review a transcript of the interview and make any changes to their responses. You may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, either temporarily or permanently.

Mercer University IEB
Approval Date 05/22/2017
Protocol Expiration Date 03/31/2018
Interviews will be recorded so by participating in the study, you grant permission for your child to be recorded. Your child’s name will be kept confidential, and all computer files will be password protected.

Your child’s participation in this study will not compromise any of their grades past, present, or future. None of their teachers will be notified of their participations in the study.

Potential Benefits of the Research
While there will be no monetary benefits to your child’s participation in this study, your student’s voice regarding the current state of social studies will be heard. If this study is published, other researchers will be able to use your child’s experiences in social studies and your child’s perception to possibly shape future social studies curriculum and teacher preparation programs.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
All information obtained will be held in strict confidentiality and will only be released with you permission. The results of this study may be published but your child’s information such as their name will not be revealed. The results of this study will be kept in a locked file within the Tift College of Education at Mercer University for 3 years in Dr. Collins’ office.

Incentives to Participate
While there are no monetary incentives in this study, if your child does participate during the interviews they will be offered snacks.

Participation and Withdrawal
Your child’s participation in this research study is voluntary. As a research subject, your child may refuse to participate at anytime. To withdraw from the study please contact John Mangano at john.p.mangano@live.mercer.edu and Dr. Geri Collins at COLLINS_GS@mercer.edu

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, please speak with John Mangano at john.p.mangano@live.mercer.edu and Dr. Geri Collins at COLLINS_GS@mercer.edu

Reasons for Exclusion from this Study
While there are no reasons for being excluded from participating in the study, regular attendance would be helpful in participating in all three interviews.

In Case of Injury
It is unlikely that participation in this project will result in harm to subjects. If an injury to a subject does occur, he or she may be seen at a local or regional medical facility. All expenses associated with care will be the responsibility of the participant and his/her insurance.
This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University's IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to my satisfaction.

Signature of Investigator ___________________________ Date ____________

Rev. 08/19/2010
APPENDIX C

INFORMED ASSENT
Dissertation Research
Informed Assent for Participants Ages 14-21
The Current State of Social Studies as Described by the Experience of High School Seniors

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators at Mercer University are doing a research study where we are trying to learn about the perception of social students among high school seniors.

Procedures
You will be asked to complete a perception survey and possibly participate in three 90-minute interviews. You have the right to refuse to have your information included in the research. Refusing to include your information will not jeopardize you receiving any services related to your classwork.

Questionnaires
You are being asked to complete a 40 questions survey. Most questions are on a 5-point scale. The other questions are open ended, asking for your comments.

Interviews.
If you participate in the interviews, there will be three 90-minute interviews. The questions for each interview are listed here.

First Interview Questions
• Describe your first school memory of social studies.
• While in elementary school, describe any memories you have of discussing current events or social studies topics with your parents.
• Other than your first school memory of social studies, what do you remember about social studies in elementary school?
• Did you enjoy social studies in elementary school?
• What about social studies did you enjoy or not enjoy?
• Was social studies taught in equal time to other subject areas?
The second interview will focus on their immediate experiences of social studies in high school.

Second Interview Questions
• Since we last spoke, have you remembered anything else about social studies in elementary school that you would like to share?
• In high school, what social studies have you taken?
• Describe when you have really enjoyed begin in a social studies class.
• What about that experience made social studies enjoyable?
• Describe when you have not enjoyed being in a social studies class.
• What about that experience made social studies not enjoyable?
• If you could design your own schedule, would you include social studies class?
• Which social studies classes would you include and exclude?

**Third Interview**
• Since we last spoke, have you remembered anything else about social studies in elementary school that you would like to share?
• What are you plans for life after high school?
• What career would you like to pursue?
• Has social studies help to prepare you for that career?
• What do you believe should be the purpose of social studies?
• What is your overall perception of social studies?
• What factors have had the biggest impact on your perception of social studies?

**Potential Risk and Discomforts**
There is no foreseeable risk associated with this study.

**Potential Benefits of the Research**
The benefits of participation in the research may not directly assist you but your help will add to the research and literature regarding student perception of social studies.

**Confidentiality and Data Storage**
Your name will not be associated with your responses and will be identified only by an assigned coded number. At no time will your name be associated with the results of the research. However, any identifying information you provide while being videotaped will never be used as part of the research or associated with the results of the study.

Your responses will be stored in a locked location and will only be used for research purposes by Mercer University School.

Your parent(s) have said that it is okay for you to be in this research study. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want. You can change your mind at anytime by telling your parent or guardian.

______ No, I do not want to be in this study.  ______ Yes, I want to be in this study.

__________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant  Date

__________________________  _______________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent  Date

Rev. 7/17/2009
Student Perception of Social Studies Survey

This survey is designed to measure high school student's perception of social studies.

* Required

1. Grade *
   Mark only one oval.
   □ 9th Grade
   □ 10th Grade
   □ 11th Grade
   □ 12th Grade

2. Sex
   This question is optional but helpful.
   Mark only one oval.
   □ Female
   □ Male
   □ Choose not to answer

3. Ethnic Group
   This question is optional but helpful.
   Mark only one oval.
   □ White
   □ Non-Hispanic White
   □ Black or African American
   □ Hispanic or Latino
   □ American Indian or Alaska Native
   □ Asian
   □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   □ Two or more groups
   □ Choose not to answer

4. Do you receive free or reduced lunch?
   This question is optional but helpful.
   Mark only one oval.
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ Choose not to answer
5. Please leave your student number if you are willing to participate in 3 interviews

Student Perception of Social Studies Survey

Favorite Class

Please rate these questions on a scale of 1-5.
1-My least favorite
2-In my bottom two choices
3-I enjoy the content
4-In my top two choices
5-My most favorite

6. When thinking of the four content courses of social studies, science, language arts, and math, how would you rank social studies? *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

7. When thinking of the four content courses of social studies, science, language arts, and math, how would you rank science? *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

8. When thinking of the four content courses of social studies, science, language arts, and math, how would you rank language arts? *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

9. When thinking of the four content courses of social studies, science, language arts, and math, how would you rank math? *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Student Perception of Social Studies Survey
1. When thinking of a career choice, social studies classes are the most important in preparing me for that career. 
   Mark only one oval.

2. When thinking of a career choice, science classes are the most important in preparing me for that career. 
   Mark only one oval.

3. When thinking of a career choice, language arts classes are the most important in preparing me for that career. 
   Mark only one oval.

4. When thinking of a career choice, math classes are the most important in preparing me for that career. 
   Mark only one oval.

5. As of right now, what is your career choice?

Student Perception of Social Studies Survey

Class Scheduling
Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1-5.
1-I would NEVER include this content area
2-I would ALMOST NEVER include this content area
3-I MAY include this content area
4-I WOULD include this content area
5-I WOULD DEFINITELY include this content area

15. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include social studies classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

16. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include science classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

17. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include language arts classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

18. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include math classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Student Percepcion of Social Studies Survey

Preparation for Citizenry

Please answer the following question on a scale of 1-5.
1-I have NO understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
2-I have a WEAK understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
3-I have a FAIR understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
4-I have a GENERAL understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
5-I have a STRONG understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1-5.
1-I would NEVER include this content area
2-I would ALMOST NEVER include this content area
3-I MAY include this content area
4-I WOULD include this content area
5-I WOULD DEFINITELY include this content area

15. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include social studies classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

16. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include science classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

17. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include language arts classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

18. If I were allowed to create my own schedule, I would include math classes. *
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Student Perception of Social Studies Survey

Preparation for Citizenry

Please answer the following question on a scale of 1-5.
1-I have NO understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
2-I have a WEAK understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
3-I have a FAIR understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
4-I have a GENERAL understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
5-I have a STRONG understanding of the governmental system of the United States.
19. My government/political systems class has prepared me to be a knowledgeable citizen for life after high school.
   If you have not yet taken government/political system class yet check the box.
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5

   [ ]

20. Check all that apply.
   [ ] I have not yet taken a government/political system class.

Student Perception of Social Studies Survey

Preparation for Market Participation

Please answer the following question on a scale of 1-5.
1-I have NO understanding of the economic system of the United States.
2-I have a WEAK understanding of the economic system of the United States.
3-I have a FAIR understanding of the economic system of the United States.
4-I have a GENERAL understanding of the economic system of the United States.
5-I have a STRONG understanding of the economic system of the United States.

21. My economics class has prepared me to be a knowledgeable consumer for life after high school?
   If you have not yet taken an economics class check the box.
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5

   [ ]

22. Check all that apply.
   [ ] I have not yet taken an economics class.

Student Perception of Social Studies Survey

Seeing Yourself in the Curriculum

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5.
1-I NEVER see
2-I RARELY see
3-I SOMETIMES see
4-I OFTEN see
5-I FREQUENTLY see
23. I have seen my ethnic group represented in World History classes? *
   Mark only one oval.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   
   24. If or when seen, I believe the representation of my ethnic group was honest and fair within the context of the class.
   Mark only one oval.
   
   Yes
   No

25. Comments
   Optional but helpful
   
   
   
   
   

26. I have seen members of my sex represented in World History class? *
   Mark only one oval.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   
   27. If or when seen, I believe the representation of my sex was honest and fair within the context of the class.
   Mark only one oval.
   
   Yes
   No

28. Comments
   Optional but helpful
   
   
   
   
   

29. I have seen members of my ethnic group represented in United States History class?
   Mark only one oval.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

30. If or when seen, I believe the representation of my ethnic group was honest and fair within the context of the class.*
   Mark only one oval.
   
   Yes
   No

31. Comments
   Optional but helpful

32. I have seen members of my sex represented in United States History class? *
   Mark only one oval.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

33. If or when seen, I believe the representation of my sex was honest and fair within the context of the class? *
   Mark only one oval.
   
   Yes
   No

34. Comments
   Optional but helpful

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
Student Perception of Social Studies Survey

Content Delivery

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5.
1-Never
2-Rarely
3-Sometimes
4-Often
5-Frequently

35. How often was lecture used in World History class? *
   *Mark only one oval.
   
   1 2 3 4 5
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

36. How often were primary sources used in World History class? *
   *Mark only one oval.
   
   1 2 3 4 5
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

37. How often was lecture used in United States History class? *
   *Mark only one oval.
   
   1 2 3 4 5
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

38. How often were primary sources used in United States History class? *
   *Mark only one oval.
   
   1 2 3 4 5
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

39. How often was lecture used in government/political systems class? *
   If you have not yet taken a government/political systems class, check the box.
   *Mark only one oval.
   
   1 2 3 4 5
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
40. Check all that apply.
   - [ ] I have not yet taken a government/political systems class.

41. How often was lecture used in economics class?
   If you have not yet taken economics, check the box.
   Mark only one oval.

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42. Check all that apply.
   - [ ] I have not yet taken economics

Student Perception of Social Studies Perception Survey

Graduation Requirements

43. Which social studies classes do you think should be required for graduation? *
   Check all that apply.
   - [ ] World Geography
   - [ ] World History
   - [ ] United States History
   - [ ] Government/Political Systems
   - [ ] Economics
   - [ ] All the above
   - [ ] None of the above
First Interview Questions

- Describe your first school memory of social studies.
- While in elementary school, describe any memories you have of discussing current events or social studies topics with your parents.
- Other than your first school memory of social studies, what do you remember about social studies in elementary school?
- Did you enjoy social studies in elementary school?
- What about social studies did you enjoy or not enjoy?
- Was social studies taught in equal time to other subject areas?

The second interview will focus on their immediate experiences of social studies in high school.

Second Interview Questions

- Since we last spoke, have you remembered anything else about social studies in elementary school that you would like to share?
- In high school, what social studies have you taken?
- Describe when you have really enjoyed being in a social studies class.
- What about that experience made social studies enjoyable?
- Describe when you have not enjoyed being in a social studies class.
- What about that experience made social studies not enjoyable?
- If you could design your own schedule, would you include social studies class?
- Which social studies classes would you include and exclude?

Third Interview

- Since we last spoke, have you remembered anything else about social studies in elementary school that you would like to share?
- What are your plans for life after high school?
- What career would you like to pursue?
- Has social studies helped to prepare you for that career?
- What do you believe should be the purpose of social studies?
- What is your overall perception of social studies?
- What factors have had the biggest impact on your perception of social studies?