

THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF HIGH STAKES TESTING AND ALABAMA'S PLAN 2020  
ON INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND CURRICULUM:  
A SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy and Alabama's Plan 2020, on the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers. This phenomenological qualitative instrumental case study design of four participants utilized guided interviews, document analysis, and a focus group interview. This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of constructivism, using the methodological foundations of the power relations theory of Michael Foucault. From this process, the researcher was able to understand the impact of these educational policies on instructional practices and curriculum. The results of the study indicated that the participants shifted their instruction and intensity to focus on state mandated testing due to the local school administration and internal pressures experienced. The results also displayed a lack of understanding for the new educational policy, a newly found instructional autonomy, and a fear of the return of state testing.

## DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family. My wife, Natasha, has helped me in so many ways throughout graduate school, and I could have never accomplished this achievement without her love and support as a wife and mother. My girls, Reagan and Riley, both of you provide constant inspiration and laughs every day, and I'm forever grateful to be your "Pappa". To my wonderful four legged children Katherine and Buddy, your commitment to staying up late with me whenever the light was on, helped me in so many ways. To Miller, your journey ended before this process was finished, but your love and dedication was endless. I love you all very much!

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter Introduction.....	1
Context for the Study.....	4
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Significance of the Study.....	8
Delimitations.....	9
Limitations.....	9
Overview of the Study .....	9
Definition of Terms .....	10
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	15
Chapter Introduction.....	15
Educational Policy and the Influence on Curriculum and Instruction.....	16
Federal Involvement in Educational Policy.....	17
State Involvement in Educational Policy.....	19
Historical Matriculation of Accountability and Testing.....	20
<i>A Nation at Risk</i> 1983.....	20

The Impact of <i>A Nation at Risk</i> 1983 on Social Studies.....	23
International Assessments (the PISA Assessment) and U.S. Outcomes.....	24
The Impact of International Assessments on Social Studies.....	27
<i>The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001</i> and the Impact of Testing.....	27
The Impact of <i>No Child Left Behind</i> on Social Studies.....	30
Statewide Assessments and AYP in Alabama.....	32
The Alabama High School Graduation Exam.....	35
The Impact of Statewide Assessments and AYP on Social Studies.....	35
How Testing Affects Teacher Pedagogy.....	37
The Curriculum of Social Studies.....	41
National Curriculum of Social Studies.....	41
State Development of Curriculum.....	43
The Curriculum and Pedagogy of the Common Core Initiative.....	45
Alabama’s Plan 2020.....	47
Social Studies Authentic Pedagogy.....	50
Cooperative Learning.....	51
Social Studies Cooperative Learning.....	52
The Use of Primary Sources.....	53
Primary Documents in Social Studies.....	55
Technology Integration.....	56
Technology Integration in Social Studies.....	57
Chapter Summary.....	58

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....	60
Chapter Introduction.....	60
Rationale.....	60
Theoretical Framework of Constructivism.....	61
Methodological Foundations of the Power Relations Theory.....	62
Governmentality.....	62
Shift of the Self.....	65
Discipline and Punishment.....	66
Technologies of the Self.....	67
Research Design.....	68
Participants.....	69
Data Collection Procedures.....	70
Interviews.....	72
Document Analysis.....	73
Focus Group.....	74
Phenomenological Data Analysis.....	75
Researcher Positionality.....	76
Trustworthiness/Validity.....	80
CHAPTER IV: THE RESULTS.....	81
Chapter Introduction.....	81
Brief Background.....	81
Research Question 1.....	82
The Difference in Intensity of Instructional Practices.....	83

Pedagogical Shift.....	86
Performance Pressures.....	88
Summary of Research Question 1.....	91
Research Question 2.....	92
Not Recognizing the Components of Plan 2020.....	93
Newfound Autonomy of Plan 2020.....	94
Fear of the Return of Testing.....	98
Summary of Research Question 2.....	100
Chapter Summary.....	100
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	102
Chapter Introduction.....	102
Theoretical Framework of Constructivism.....	102
Methodological Foundations of the Power Relations Theory.....	103
Phenomenological Analysis.....	105
Emergent Themes of Question 1.....	106
Emergent Themes of Question 2.....	112
Implications.....	116
Future Research.....	119
Conclusion.....	120
REFERENCES.....	122
APPENDICES.....	141
A    Consent To Participate.....	142
B    IRB Certification.....	145

C	IRB Approval.....	147
D	Interview Protocol and Questions.....	149
E	Protocol Process for Document Collection.....	152
F	Focus Group Protocol and Questions.....	154

## LIST OF TABLES

1.	Data Chart.....	72
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Chapter Introduction**

Educational policies, either by state or introduced by the federal government, have a significant impact on curriculum and instruction (Center on Educational Policy, 2009). In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education released *A Nation at Risk*, which determined that the U.S. public education system was in a state of failure based on poor international assessment models and a gradual reduction in SAT performance over the last 20 years. Originally called the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the SAT is a college entrance examination testing students in reading, writing, and mathematics (The College Board, 2014). The SAT is developed and administrated by the College Board. An outcome of *A Nation at Risk* was the evaluation process of education; including using continuous testing to monitor the progress of students (Mehta, 2013). Along with the economic crisis of the 1980's, and the Cold War struggles with the Soviet Union, *A Nation at Risk* prompted the desperate desire to drastically change education, ushering in the age of educational accountability by using standardized testing as the measure (Guthrie & Springer, 2004).

Since 1983, the Alabama Department of Education has administered the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). In its early inception, the graduation exam only focused on basic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics. This

exam was originally at a 6th grade level, and its purpose was to ensure that students had the basic skills required to graduate from high school.

By 2000, educational accountability and testing students to measure progress and achievement were manifested in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This national law brought new federal guidelines to states and mandated accountability measures. “The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (United States Congress, 2002, p.15). As part of *No Child Left Behind*, states had to provide evidence of achievement in state testing. State assessments provided the public direct results of local school systems in the areas of reading and mathematics, which became the main tool for establishing Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), the achievement measure of NCLB. Annual Yearly Progress is the accountability portion of *No Child Left Behind* in which each state should establish intermediate goals as annual measurable objectives. Although these new national standards were in place, states had direct autonomy over the type, level, and subjects tested.

After the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the Alabama High School Graduation exam added components such as social studies and science. State testing became increasingly more rigorous, adapting the test used to an 11th grade level. This examination was used until November of 2013, when the Alabama State Board of Education voted to end it.

Although terminating the graduation exam, the Alabama Department of Education developed a new educational accountability policy called Alabama’s Plan 2020. This new educational policy focused on new accountability measures that include innovative models for teacher evaluations, administrative evaluations, the reinforcement of common core standards,

called College and Career Readiness Standards, and new testing accountability for high school students, requiring all 11th graders to take the ACT. The Alabama Department of Education (2012) stated

The new aligned assessment system is focused on measuring college-and career-readiness from Grade 3 through Grade 12 and uses the ACT as the capstone assessment to determine college readiness; that will be administered to this same class as eleventh graders in 2013-14 (p. 161).

The ACT, or American College Testing, is a college entrance examination in which focuses on Reading, Writing, English, Mathematics, and Science Reasoning (ACT, 2014). The ACT is developed and administered by ACT, Inc. Due to the nature of the transference in educational policy, there appears to be a common belief that this will cause an instructional transformation. “It is anticipated that instructional practices will change as a result of this activity which will ultimately lead to an increase in student achievement in mathematics and English Language Arts” (Alabama Department of Education, 2012, p.173).

In addition to testing and possible related instructional reforms, the additional curriculum of the Common Core, CCRS (Alabama) – College and Career Readiness Standards was reinforced by Alabama’s Plan 2020. The Alabama Department of Education (2012) announced

On November 18, 2010, Alabama joined a number of other states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands in adopting the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts, with the current total now having reached 45.

The adoption of internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards along with selected Alabama standards creates a set of standards that will prepare students for a successful future in the ever-expanding global environment (p.186).

By the modification of educational policies, fluctuating to the new Plan 2020, social studies teachers would experience a new curriculum that affects their instructional practice.

### **Context for the Study**

Due to the progression of accountability, and the focus on testing as a use of measurement, problems with the concept of accountability began to emerge. *No Child Left Behind* brought two dramatic changes to public education: new accountability measures regarding student assessments, and, most importantly, an overall impact on student achievement.

One of the new accountability measures for states was to provide evidence of achievement by establishing state testing. Although these new national standards were in place, states had direct autonomy over the type, level, and subjects tested. Without national standards directly linked with *No Child Left Behind*, there is no comparison model between states regarding testing.

Another factor involving state assessments has been the continual change in the assessment itself. To ensure meeting the national guidelines of NCLB, states have begun to “meet the standard” by changing the assessment, and the graduation requirements. An example of the state-lined change in graduation requirements was with the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. In 2003, Alabama required students to pass all five parts (Math, Reading, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies) of the state examination in order to graduate; however, by 2008, the Alabama Credit Based Diploma only required passing three portions of the state assessment (passing only reading, math, and one additional section). The class of 2015 in Alabama will be required to take End-Of-The-Course examinations and the ACT, instead of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. This new requirement of End-Of-The-Course assessments and taking the ACT are a part of the new Alabama’s Plan 2020. Due to the

changing method of assessments and standards, it is difficult to establish if individual schools and states are achieving results, or if the assessments have been changed to meet the requirements of NCLB.

One of the most important factors regarding the implementation of *No Child Left Behind* is the impact on student achievement. Some of the current research would suggest that significant gains and closing the achievement gap has been a direct result of NCLB. The Center on Education Policy (2009) argues that if a test has been in place for several years, student achievement would increase if higher stakes are introduced in the accountability system. As states continue to change the type of accountability assessments and establish new methods of graduation requirements for secondary schools, it is difficult to prove if student achievement has increased, or states have moved requirements so that progress is shown through NCLB. There is also additional research that has contradicted the achievement levels of students outside their required state assessments. Jehlen (2009) states

Koretz gave students the old test, the one that no longer carried high stakes so teachers didn't prep students to take it. Their scores plummeted. His conclusion: Four years of rising scores did not reflect real achievement, just teaching to a new test (p.15).

In the fall of 2013, the Alabama State Board of Education abruptly ended the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. This modification in educational policy altered the course of implementing Plan 2020 in the fall of 2015. Instead, execution of Plan 2020 would begin immediately across Alabama by the end of the fall semester of 2013. This new educational policy and accountability measures had instantly three apparatuses that could impact curriculum and instruction: the newly developed End-Of-The-Course examinations, the participation of 11th

graders taking the ACT, and the full infusion of the College and Career Readiness Standards (Alabama Department of Education, 2012).

### **Statement of the Problem**

High stakes testing, a result of *No Child Left Behind*, has had several detrimental effects including a narrowing of the curriculum, diluting the purpose of education to multiple choice performance based fact regurgitation process, and adding pressure to perform leading to a change in teacher pedagogy (Gerwin & Visone, 2006; Johnston, 1998). This translates into teachers preparing students for tests with pedagogies that focus on rote memorization and lower-order thinking as the tests themselves are usually structured to assess breadth of often shallow, fragmented bits of knowledge (Au, 2009; Li & Ni, 2012; Vogler, 2003). The problem of educational policies, like high stakes testing, is the trickle down dynamics of policy effecting assessments and the change to instructional practice (Au, 2009). Therefore, the impact of assessments also affects instructional practice and curriculum.

Educational policies such as Alabama's Plan 2020, reinforce instructional practices within the social studies classroom. Although this educational policy covers a range of educational topics, the most significant to social studies classrooms, are the recently established End-Of-The-Course examinations, the mandated involvement of 11th graders taking the ACT, and the instituted College and Career Readiness Standards (Alabama Department of Education, 2012). Because this policy was recently implemented in the state of Alabama, the absence of evidence, of the effects of this educational policy, is critical to the investigation.

As a result of the high stakes nature of the graduation exam, students had to successfully pass all portions or three portions of the graduation exam, based on their desired diploma options, in order to graduate. With Alabama's Plan 2020, the End-Of-The-Course exams and the

ACT are not high stakes examinations. Only participation in Alabama's Plan 2020 is needed to graduate high school, not a passing score. This dynamic transference of educational policies concerning accountability is so substantial that investigating how Alabama's Plan 2020 impacts instructional practices and curriculum must be investigated along with the impact of high stakes testing.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the potential impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy and Alabama's Plan 2020, on the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers. With the influence of *No Child Left Behind*, a pedagogical shift could occur from a more authentic form of instructional delivery to a test driven environment. Instead of educating students freely from the pressures of testing, where teachers have academic autonomy, administrative expectations could become internalized within daily practice of teaching; thus, shifting pedagogical and instructional methodology. Since the graduation exam has ended in the fall of 2013, and the introduction and implementation of the new Plan 2020 standards, this investigation allows for a central focus on the how the new educational policy could have a potential impact regarding instruction and curriculum.

A shift in pedagogy is defined as a "pedagogical environment in which the very foundations of history, as a discipline are called into question; a space in which history is shaken-it's habitual meanings and ways of making meaning are exposed as custom and the prescribed is unsettled by a shift" (Segall, 1999, p.371). Teachers' instructional practices have been altered by the pressures associated with high-stakes testing (Au, 2009; Li & Ni, 2012; Vogler, 2003). The prospective impacts that are related to could be explained in greater detail through the qualitative research triangulation of interviews, document analysis, and a focus

group interview rooted from phenomenological theory. If the educational policies are affecting instructional practice and curriculum, then the pressures and reasons for the impact should be analyzed. The possible impact of high stakes testing and Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum is imperative to investigate.

### **Research Questions**

1. What was the perceived impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy on instructional practices and curriculum of four 12th grade secondary social studies teachers?
2. What is the current perceived impact of Alabama's Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum of four 12th grade secondary social studies teachers?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it attempts to recognize the phenomenological impact of educational policies; specifically those related to high stakes testing and Plan 2020, could possibly have on instructional practices and curriculum. If this impact occurs, then what forces create this instructional and curriculum influence? Currently, after an exhaustive research pursuit on standardized testing, specifically the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, no available qualitative research on the issue of high stakes testing affecting the instructional practices in Alabama has been found. The findings and results of this investigation could prompt further and more meaningful discussion pertaining to the aims of education such as the classroom being a place of authentic learning or strictly an area of test preparation. With Alabama's Plan 2020, this innovative policy brought forth new accountability measures that replaced the Annual Yearly Progress under *No Child Left Behind*; therefore, investigating the replacement policy of high stakes testing could bring new information regarding the possible alteration of instructional practices and curriculum.

This research is also significant because it might offer greater insights into understanding of how educational policies could have an effect on instructional practices and curriculum in Alabama. Recently nearly 30 states added student performance of testing as part of the teacher's evaluation, therefore; this research might offer understanding in how state policies directly impact teachers concerning their own instructional delivery.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations in research allow the research a more concise management of the data collected (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). This study was limited to only four participants who were social studies teachers in Alabama. The four participants, selected by a purposeful sample, volunteered to participate in the interviews, document analysis, and focus group interview.

### **Limitations**

Due to the nature of the instrumental case study design, only a small number of participants were focused in the research. Assertions to a larger population of teachers would be difficult (Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold, 1992). All research designs have limitations and considerations (Patton, 2002; Schram, 2006).

The four participants are all 12th grade social studies teachers. The researcher did not use random selection to choose the participants, but rather a purposeful sample was used (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Other limitations could possibly emerge as the research develops with the participants.

### **Overview of Study**

This dissertation is an instrumental case study design that examines how educational policies could impact instructional practice and curriculum. An instrumental case study, which is

a multi-case design, attempts to gauge the situation in multiple locations (Stake, 2006). Chapter I presents an introduction to the topic, context of the study, an explanation of the purpose, elaborates the problem statement, research questions, significance of the study, the delimitations, limitations, and offers a definition of terms. Chapter II offers a current relevant review of the literature. Chapter III describes the method and research design, and explains the methods used to analyze the data. Chapter IV presents the qualitative data collected from the interviews, document analysis, and focus group interview. Chapter V illuminates the implication of the findings and possible future research.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions will be used to explain the terms within this study.

ACT- the ACT, or American College Testing, is a college entrance examination in which focuses on Reading, Writing, English, Mathematics, and Science Reasoning. The ACT is developed and administered by ACT, Inc. (ACT, 2014).

*A Nation at Risk*- a report commissioned and created by Reagan administration Secretary of Education Terrel Bell, assailed the nation's poor educational performance by notably high levels of illiteracy, poor performance on international comparisons, and a steady decline in SAT scores from 1963 to 1980. The report's recommendations called for a revamped high school curriculum with fewer electives and more required courses in Math, English, Science, and Social studies. However, as tool of measurement and achievement, more testing for students would be used and interpreted as indicators of proficiency (Mehta, 2013).

Alabama High School Graduation Exam- the social studies section of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was introduced in 2004. This section of the state assessment, like other portions is completely 100 percent multiple choice. The questions range from simple knowledge

based questions, to questions that include graphs and charts. There are 100 questions on the social studies section. The content of this high stakes assessment is from the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (Alabama Department of Education, 2003).

Alabama's Plan 2020- the current educational policy, focusing on new accountability measures that include innovative models for teacher evaluations, administrative evaluations, the adoption of end of the course examinations, the reinforcement of common core standards, called College and Career Readiness Standards, and new testing accountability for high school students, requiring all 11th graders to take the ACT (Alabama Department of Education, 2012).

Annual Yearly Progress- the accountability portion of No Child Left Behind in which each state should establish intermediate goals as annual measurable objectives to meet the following requirements: 1) assessments of mathematics and reading or language arts, 2) all objectives will be the same for all schools and local educational agencies in the State, 3) a single minimum percentage of students who are required to meet or exceed the proficient level on the academic assessments that applies separately to each group of students, 4) all students will meet or exceed the State's proficient level of academic achievement on the State assessments within the State's timeline, and 5) may be the same for more than 1 year (United States Congress, 2002).

Authentic Pedagogy- instructional methods to provide meaningful student engagement, based on educational practice, experience, and decision making ability of professional educators, which may include: discipline-based literacy, multi-disciplinary awareness, information gathering and analysis, inquiry and critical thinking, communication, data analysis, and the

prudent use of twenty-first century media and technology (National Council for the Social Studies, 2008; Ross, 2006).

College and Career Readiness Standards of Alabama (CCRS)- “On November 18, 2010, Alabama joined a number of other states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands in adopting the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts, with the current total now having reached 45. The adoption of internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards along with selected Alabama standards creates a set of standards that will prepare students for a successful future in the ever-expanding global environment” (Alabama Department of Education, 2012).

Common Core- “The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, state officials, and other experts to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare students for college and the workforce” (Alabama Department of Education, 2012).

High Stakes Testing- a test is considered to be “high stakes” when important decisions and consequences, such as graduation and promotion of students, used as a type of evaluation for teachers, and categorize schools and administrators, are determined as a result of the performance on the examination (Burroughs, 2002; Madaus, 1988; McNeil, 2000,).

*No Child Left Behind*- the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 is actually the amended Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The law was renamed the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 and passed in January of 2002. *No Child Left Behind* states “The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic

achievement standards and state academic assessments” (United States Congress, 2002, p.15).

This purpose can be accomplished by: 1) ensuring that high-quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials are aligned with challenging State academic standards, 2) meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children 3) closing the achievement gap between high- and low performing children, 4) holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable, 5) distributing and targeting resources, 6) improving and strengthening accountability, teaching, and learning, 7) providing greater decision making authority and flexibility to schools, 8) providing children an enriched and accelerated educational program, 9) promoting school wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies, 10) significantly elevating the quality of instruction by providing staff with professional development 11) coordinating services, and 12) affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children (United States Congress, 2002).

Race to the Top-“Authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the Race to the Top Assessment Program provides funding to consortia of States to develop assessments that are valid, support and inform instruction, provide accurate information about what students know and can do, and measure student achievement against standards designed to ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace” (United States Department of Education, 2010).

SAT- originally called the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the SAT is a college entrance examination testing students in reading, writing, and mathematics. The SAT is developed and administrated by the College Board (The College Board, 2014).

Teacher Pedagogy- internalized decision making as teachers view their role as professional instructors, sharing in the intellectual growth as students. By addressing the issues of content, local education authorities are positioned to decide for themselves what frameworks will emerge at the district, school, and classroom levels (Ross, 2006).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Chapter Introduction**

Over the last 30 years, social studies has slowly developed into a study of educational accountability and crisis. The dynamic national shift in educational policy and the new constructs of accountability have reduced social studies to a second tier subject, one that has been omitted from the educational sphere of subjects such as mathematics, language arts, and the sciences (Howard, 2003; Savage, 2003). Part of this crisis was centered on the issue of testing, which has been a consequence of the *No Child Left behind Act of 2001*, and the subsequent narrowed curriculum resulting from the components of accountability established in *A Nation at Risk*. This chapter will present the literary research concerning the connections between educational policy and instruction, the historical matriculation of accountability and testing - starting with *A Nation at Risk* through *No Child Left Behind* - and detailing recent research on how testing impacts teacher pedagogy, emphasizing the curriculum impact on social studies by national, state, and the Common Core standards. Additionally, research regarding the influence of the newly developed Alabama's Plan 2020, as well as the types of authentic pedagogy within a social studies classroom will be presented. Finally, a summary will encapsulate the recent, detailed literature review as a foundational text for the next chapter.

## **Educational Policy and the Influence on Curriculum and Instruction**

One of the primary policy objectives of standards-based educational reform efforts is to motivate teachers to improve their instruction based on academic content standards (Smith & O'Day, 1990). Policies that incorporate standardized testing offer these types of policies as a solution to poor curriculum and instruction (Bishop & Mane, 2001). According to Cohen (1995), reform initiatives are usually intended at creating policies that result in new and improved instruction for teachers and learners. Policy reforms have taken the form of initiatives aimed at defining professional standards for teachers, paralleling teacher education curricula with state curriculum standards, and increasing accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Educational policy is political in nature because it shapes student's understanding of the world (Whang & Waters, 2001). Ball and Forzani (2009) argues that schooling has never delivered high quality education to all students; therefore, policy makers and educational leaders are calling for multifaceted goals to prepare students for the demands of the 21st century. Educational policies such as *No Child Left Behind* call for an established system of rewards and sanctions to states, districts, and schools as an apparatus to advance student achievement (Pedulla et al., 2003).

The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy contends that classroom instructional practice can be improved from a system-wide integration of policies (National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, and Policy Making, 1998). Reform policies have become more comprehensive, striving to promote greater change within the instructional component of schooling (Honig, 2006). Due to the larger and more complex shifting of educational policy reforms, instructional focus can also shift (Hatch, 2001). The attempt at the federal and state levels to have a commonality among standards for students, and instructional methods for

teachers, can be interpreted differently among states, districts, schools, and teachers (Elmore, 2007). Furgol and Helms (2012) states, “Policy is never static, but rather evolves, propelled by the processes and environments that shape delivery” (p.778). Educational policy had a traditional view of evaluating the accountability finances; now the accountability has shifted to evaluate performance (Behn, 2001).

Most of the policies concerning education today attempt to assert the link of educational achievement to that nation’s global competitiveness (Rothman, 2011). More recent educational policies have made it less likely for schools to be able to accomplish their societal goals (Lipman, 2011). Instead, educational policies have tended to focus on increasing surveillance of instructional practices resulting in an increase in standardized test scores (Lipman, 2004). Educational policies related to the daily operation of the school can limit the time necessary for teachers to concentrate on their instructional practices (Cotton, 1992).

### **Federal Involvement in Educational Policy**

The United States government has a profound impact on educational policy and the implications of educational reforms (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003). Tensions in educational policy have been on the rise between student centered instruction and policies concerning standardized instruction and assessment (Anderson & Stillman, 2011). In policy studies, P-12 education often has dilemmas in implementing reform initiatives, especially where policy makers have relied on mandates from high stakes testing as a means of holding programs accountable for educational outcomes (Finnegan & Gross, 2007). Peck, Gallucci, and Sloan (2010) states, “A recurring theme in contemporary struggles around teacher education policy has to do with the ways in which policy makers may implicitly frame teaching as essentially technical work that can and should be effectively controlled by centralized agencies and authorities” (p. 452).

Federal policies such as *No Child Left Behind*, and more recently the Blueprint for Reform from the U.S. Department of Education, have encouraged states to intensify their standardized assessments as measures of student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and instruments of public policy (McMillan, 2008). The Blueprint for Reform is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act centered in four areas: improving teacher and principal effectiveness, providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, implementing college- and career-ready standards, and improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions (United States Department of Education, 2010). Policy makers on the national level are more concerned with novice teachers obtaining the content knowledge so that their students can perform well on the measure of standardized tests (Imig & Imig, 2006). Moffitt and Cohen (2010) contend that imposing a policy of bad news might reshape instructional practice and improve instruction. Palmer and Rangel (2011) state that "high-stakes accountability policies began to appear in U.S. classrooms in the mid-1980s as states moved to reform education by holding schools, teachers, and students accountable for student achievement." (p.615). More recently, the federal government has used educational funds, particularly grants and Race to the Top, as a catalyst of educational policy reform to reach a system of national goals (Manna, 2010). Federal reforms such as *No Child Left Behind* interjected ideas and concepts concerning educational policy and practice (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009). Even to qualify for the Race to the Top program, states would have to give up some of their own autonomy concerning educational policy changes (Hsieh, 2010). According to Thompson and Barnes (2007), these policies were specifically designed to transform consistently struggling schools into good schools.

## **State Involvement in Educational Policy**

One of the primary focal points of education policy is how local knowledge reviews, adapts, and implements the new educational policy (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). Some of these policies led to students experiencing a narrowed curriculum which emphasized only basic skills to prepare for multiple-choice standardized tests (Firestone, Camilli, Yurecko, Monfils, & Mayrowetz, 2000). Other educational policies that emerged from high stakes testing created classrooms in which students were simply ignored and excluded (Haney, 2000). Watanabe (2007) indicates that these exams play a tremendous role in the daily instructional practices of teachers. From the current accountability movement, multiple forms of educational policies have emerged to guide teacher practice (DeLuca & Bellara, 2013). Weiner et al., (2001), suggests that policy evaluation by teacher educators is significant to understanding how and why reforms function. Kaufman and Stein (2010) stated,

Policy shifts and uncertainty about standards and instruction are particularly detrimental to the learning needs of teachers who are expected to understand the full intent of instruction reforms and use them successfully within their classrooms, as well as the learning needs of administrators who must know enough about the reforms to both support and evaluate the teachers who are using them (p.564).

Coburn (2004) also articulates that the way teachers experience one instructional policy can directly impact and alter their view of another instructional policy. How principals and districts relay educational policies have a strong consequence on teacher instruction (Coburn, 2005). The educational policy of holding individual schools accountable for standardized testing results has been well established in our educational systems (McDonnell, 2008). Federal and state educational policies have pushed local districts to reorganize failing schools as a method to

improve student performance (Maxwell, 2009). Grant (2001) contends that the educational policy surrounding the New York State Regents test played a significant factor in social studies teachers' instructional decisions.

### **Historical Matriculation of Accountability and Testing**

#### ***A Nation at Risk 1983***

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education released a unique education report called *A Nation at Risk*, which determined that the U.S. public education system was in a state of failure based on poor international assessment models and a gradual reduction in SAT performance from 1963 to 1983. "In a short report that employed bold and ominous language, the report assailed the nation's poor educational performance, famously declaring that the United States was caught in a "rising tide of mediocrity" that imperiled the nation's economic future." (Mehta, 2013, p. 296). Smith and Fey (2000) stated,

The report implied that governments should assume responsibility for policies to solve the problem of academic deficits. State and federal governments should set high academic standards and mandate testing programs so that schools can be made accountable. The federal education policy of at least three presidencies has been tied to using high-stakes testing, which is linked to national standards (p.335)

This government report, based on a study conducted at the direction of President Reagan, noted that the "Federal Government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education." (Kessinger, 2011 p.272). *A Nation at Risk* called for more supplementary alternatives to improve student achievement such as a longer school day, higher entrance expectations for universities, and continuous testing to monitor the progress of students (Mehta, 2013).

As a consequence of *A Nation at Risk*, federal, state, and local education officials mobilized evaluating education, thus looking for new ways of igniting educational reform. In 1984, over 250 state task forces had been assembled to evaluate localized education and recommend changes that were needed (Guthrie & Springer, 2004, p. 14). At the time *A Nation at Risk* was released, the U.S. was facing an economic recession along with lackluster performances on international assessments; it appeared that the U.S. was losing its powerful economic dominance within the world, and the present education system was to blame. “Indeed, the now famous 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* identified increasing pressures on schools to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems as a core threat to providing quality education.” (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008, p. 34). *A Nation at Risk* not only recommended more testing, but also made schools a scapegoat for the economic failures that gripped the nation (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983; Sacks, 1999). Successively, *A Nation at Risk* became the catalyst for the modern educational reform movement; a further extension of the federal role in the nation’s school districts (Davies, 2007; Lewis & Young, 2013). “It signaled the ever-growing federal role in public education characterized by an interest in providing and achieving equality of educational opportunity as well as developing citizens capable of performing effectively in the Global Economy” (Johanningmeier, 2010, p.348).

The impact on education was immediate, with a tidal wave of institutional reforms involving curriculum and instruction. *A Nation at Risk* ushered in the high stakes testing movement (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005). Epstein (2005) commented,

The lack of valid comparative state data in the wake of reaction to *A Nation at Risk*, paved the way for the Educational Testing Service to expand NAEP by developing state-

level NAEPs. In 1984 the Testing Service lobbied the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to participate in a pilot state-NAEP program (p.16).

Tests are useful policy instruments because they are cheaper means of improving education (Smith & Fey, 2000). Politicians are inclined toward tests because opinion polls show that the general public believes schools and students should be accountable for outcomes as measured by tests (Heubert & Hauser, 1998). A test is considered high stakes when its results are used to make important decisions that immediately affect students, teachers, administrators, communities, schools, and districts (Madaus, 1988). Assessments are considered high stakes when the ranking and categorization of schools, teachers, and children are developed from those results (McNeil, 2000). Guthrie and Springer, (2004) explain,

Another has been the willingness to define student achievement exclusively by standardized tests, a trend that was spurred by NAR's flawed analysis of test score declines and that may have foreclosed reform of policies regarding other, equally important aspects of student achievement (p.9).

One effect was a pedagogical change that shifted from children centered driven instruction to more traditional views of education that focused on student mastery (Mehta, 2013). Another modification was the responsibility of schools. Edmonds (1979) argues that effective schools could bring dramatic results, especially from students living in poverty. This alteration focused less on personal and parental accountability and placed a larger responsibility on the effectiveness of schools. By developing higher standards and tests, there developed a system for holding students, teachers, and schools accountable (Haertel, 1999). Schools responded by raising graduation requirements in nearly 45 states (Firestone, 1990; Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001). Due to the new pressures of testing brought on by the findings of *A Nation at Risk*, social

studies courses were increased, but social studies as a subject was excluded from testing. Consequently, social studies became a secondary subject field without the same amount of significance as others tested.

### **The Impact of *A Nation at Risk 1983* on Social Studies**

In one manner that *A Nation at Risk* affected social studies was the immediate adjustments in coursework. *A Nation at Risk* pushed for more “challenging courses,” including taking three years of taking social studies (Caboni & Adisu, 2004; Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001; Sacks, 1999). The Department of Education “acknowledged the importance of an educated citizenry for democracy, but focused on the need to develop general skills such as literacy, critical thinking, and labor market skills rather than skills, knowledge, and thinking specific to civic participation and deliberation.” (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008, p. 34). *A Nation at Risk* changed public education by shifting towards “standards based” reform that included accountability measures (Howard, 2003).

One of the more positive aspects of *A Nation at Risk* was the increase in content coursework as a requirement. Instead of a few social studies courses, the number of courses required to complete high school increased. “The educational reform that led to standards-based education in Illinois began in 1985 with the passage of legislation (Public Act 84-126) establishing broad state goals for learning in six subject areas, including the social sciences” (Bettis, 2004, p.239). This offered a deeper understanding of additional social studies content, and a grander opportunity to develop civically aspiring students. Even with additional social studies course requirements, much of the focus was not toward civic education. Instead, the new standards based curriculum eventually lead to high stakes testing in which social studies was not tested, or tested as a secondary requirement (Pahl, 2003; Virtue & Vogler, 2007). “One of the

factors that has led to the reliance on high stakes standardized tests is that *A Nation at Risk* and the rhetoric that followed undermined public confidence in teachers” (Savage, 2003, p.201).

### **International Assessments (the PISA Assessment) and U.S. Outcomes**

Another avenue in education that has transcended the issue of educational accountability has been the association models of international testing. “Since standardized tests today are largely for accountability purposes, teachers and administrators have become focused on having students pass standardized tests” (Westerlund & West, 2001, p. 1). Testing has led to a type of quantitative comparison to display the “problems” and “failures” of U.S. public education, striking fear into the public discourse concerning how international countries, along with their systems of education, are doing better job educating the new globalized citizenry. Several international assessments have consistently ranked the United States low in comparison to those of other developed countries (Medrich & Griffith, 1992). Baker and Smith (1997) argue that in some of the earliest of international assessments, the U.S. consistently produced second-rate results. “The perception of poor performance by U.S. students on international comparisons is typically attributed to the ineffectiveness of American public education” (Boe & Shin, 2005, p. 689). U.S. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan stated, “American students are poorly prepared to compete in today’s knowledge economy... Americans need to wake up to this educational reality—instead of napping at the wheel while emerging competitors prepare their students for economic leadership” (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013, p.2). These comments were collected from data by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), based on the results from the 2009 administration of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Since 1997, PISA has been one of the more dominant forms of international testing and a common comparative assessment when evaluating international education. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment given to students (age 15) in reading, mathematics, and science (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013). These assessments are considered high stakes due to the nature of potential social placement. Most of the examinations are to advance to the next level of education, graduate from high school, or gain admittance to a local or national university. “The controlling mechanism of schooling has been the existence of a super competitive examination system” (Synott, 2001, p. 139). Testing greatly reduced the genuine purpose of education such as nurturing a true spirit of knowledge and free thinking (Synott, 2001). These standards-based international assessments attempt to guide and improve instruction (Black & William, 1998). With such a structure of testing, countries such as China and South Korea are experiencing performance pressures at both the student and teacher levels (Li & Ni, 2012; Synott, 2001). Instead of the assessments measuring the impact and learning of the curriculum, the curriculum has shifted to the accessible material that will be tested. International assessments have unfortunately dictated the significant curriculum that must be specifically taught and emphasized due to the implications and results of testing.

Another impact of international assessments is the introduction and implementation of a national curriculum, which is the framework concept in South Korea and the Netherlands. Instead of a strict concept of curriculum, South Korea and the Netherlands both have a loose construction of a national curriculum, which allows local districts to choose frameworks, content related curriculums, and even assessments. National examinations are given to ensure that content related material has been taught; schools may choose from a variety of exams or develop their own (Pajak & Hooghoff, 1992). Although it is technically a national curriculum,

tremendous autonomy and flexibility are given at the local level to implement decisions that provide a more locally relevant purpose to curriculum and instruction. Government mandates that include laws, policies, and educational frameworks are very much a part of each national education system and the national curriculum. “At the top of the Dutch support system is the National Ministry of Education and Science, primarily responsible for enacting legislation, implementing policy, and distributing funds to various education agencies” (Pajak & Hooghoff, 1992, p.76).

One of the contributing factors for the difference in international instructional design is the pressures of testing. Synott (2001) explained,

The controlling mechanism of schooling has been the existence of a super competitive examination system culminating in the University Entrance Examination, held at the end of senior high school. After twelve years of being exhorted to strive for national success, success or failure in this exam was a gateway for not only economic security but a measure of personal value (p. 139).

The importance of testing has not only driven instructional methods, but the fear of ill performance has stagnated creative design and lead to a teacher-driven direct approach to teaching (Li & Ni, 2012). Although traditional direct instruction has prevented collaborative and sometimes application forms of education, if education excellence is viewed as maintaining the top status on the PISA, then teacher centered instruction in China and South Korea has purpose and results to prove its effectiveness. These international facets regarding testing such as international accountability, the development of national curriculums, and the modification of instruction due to pressures of national and international testing, display a connective process

that critiques American public education, and provides a link concerning the relative factors of high stakes testing within the U.S.

### **The Impact of International Assessments on Social Studies**

Since the public acceptance of international assessments as a determining factor of public education quality, the U.S. public education system has been viewed as second rate and ineffective in global competition with developing nations (Baker & Smith, 1997; Boe & Shin, 2005). Due to the lack of confidence in public education, additional accountability factors, including the extension of standardized testing, became more present as a system of evaluation and measuring student achievement. The extension of global competition and a “low performance” among students on international assessments continued to spark additional statewide testing. These international assessments affected public education, including social studies, with a focus on “testable material.” When there is public pressure to improve test results, schools and teachers emphasize test material in their instruction (Shepard, 1991). The PISA, one of the largest international assessments, concentrates on reading, mathematics, and science as the evaluated subject areas (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013). Social studies became restricted regarding PISA, which places educational priorities on other subject areas. With a lackluster international performance, the focus of global competition continued to push social studies away from other determining educational subjects such as reading and math, thus creating and limiting the social studies curriculum as a significant portion of a liberal arts education.

### ***The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Impact of Testing***

Nationally, since the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the Alabama High School Graduation exam added additional components such as social studies and science, and was becoming increasingly more rigorous as it was adapted the test to an 11th grade level. *No Child*

*Left Behind* “required states to develop improvement plans that established challenging content and performance standards, implement assessments to measure student progress in meeting these standards, and adopt measures to hold schools accountable for the achievement of the standards” (Webb, 2006 p.335). Assessments are used to measure a school’s effectiveness regarding standards based education (Linn, 2000). These assessments attempt to measure proficiency of student achievement (Sanders & Horn, 1995). The Alabama High School Graduation Exam was being used by the Alabama Department of Education to assess the Annual Yearly Progress of schools throughout the state, and was considered a high stakes test for determining school graduation rates.

The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy reported that schools tend to emphasize the subjects appearing on state tests (Pedulla et.al, 2003). The potential power of tests to affect the decisions and actions of districts, schools, and teachers is greatly due to reliance of high stakes tests (Elmore, 2002). Even though high school courses “follow” a state course of study for each subject, the emphasis for Annual Yearly Progress was assessed based on reading and mathematics proficiency scores. Other domains of knowledge are covered on state examinations, such as English language arts and social studies, but vary from state to state (Catterall, Mehrens, Ryan, Flores, & Rubin, 1998). The common outcome of high stakes testing is the narrowing of the curriculum (Kohn, 2000; Riffert, 2005).

Mathematics and reading have an advantage within the curriculum concerning measuring school efficiency. One nationwide survey found that 71% of the districts reported cutting at least one subject to increase time spent on reading and math as a direct response to the high stakes testing mandated under NCLB (Renter et al., 2006). With the added pressure placed on mathematics and reading, additional academic courses have been reduced to a form of secondary

curriculum. Hillard (2000) argues that narrowing the curriculum addresses a few specific subjects, leaving out others such as art and music, thus placing a level of importance on some and neglecting other portions of curriculum. Research indicates that the standards imposed through high stakes testing of K-12 students narrows the curriculum to test-driven content (Haney, 2000). The fear is that because of how the curriculum has been narrowed, the only material worth teaching is the material on the test, thus creating a hierarchy of school curriculum (Froese-Germain, 2001; Savage, 2003; Vogler, 2003). Surveys of educators confirm that testing promotes teaching to the test and narrowed curricula, particularly in schools that serve minority students (Clarke et al., 2002). This would contradict the purpose of testing, which is to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and achievement of students (Phillips, 2006).

Instead of an assessment that measures the whole school experience, including knowledge, skills, and learning, high stakes testing narrowly focuses on a few specialized areas. A test is considered high stakes when its results are used to make important decisions that immediately affect students, teachers, administrators, communities, schools, and districts (Madaus, 1988). Multiple studies show a decline in achievement in states with high stakes tests in relation to those with low stakes testing (Stecher, Hamilton, & Gonzalez, 2003). The result is that schooling becomes a product of the test itself, a replacement for true education. As part of the "accountability" movement, stakes are also deemed high because the results of tests, as well as the ranking and categorization of schools, teachers, and children that extend from those results, are reported to the public (McNeil, 2000).

By the year 2000, every state but Iowa administered a state mandated test (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). Part of the *No Child Left Behind Act* was to usher in accountability, especially in the areas of reading and mathematics. NCLB is built around high stakes testing,

mandating that by 2006, all students be tested in reading and math in grades 3-8, and once in high school (Au, 2009). To measure this accountability, states instituted high stakes testing to interpret the AYP of schools. Hilliard (2000) explains that high stakes testing concerns include meaningful test validity, matching the test to standards, very low level forms of thinking, a lack of curriculum alignment, and poor or inadequate instruction. Tate (2001) argued that testing plays a role in creating low level curriculum opportunities for minority students, especially in urban schools. Tests often fail to measure the objectives that are most important to educators who determine academic standards (Rothman, Slattery, Vranek, & Resnick, 2002).

As *No Child Left Behind* has progressed, teachers, administrators, and students have found methods to negotiate the test. Under NCLB, all students in all subgroups are expected to score at 100% proficiency by the year 2014 or schools will face the sanctions (Au, 2009). All of these components fall into the category of multiple choice tests, all of which are at the epicenter of achievement to graduate. The pragmatic approach to these tests is that they are simply poor assessment tools to accurately measure the achievement of students. As testing attempts to provide an accurate assessment of student learning, it fails to measure more than the knowledge obtained, but what students are capable of doing and the skills that used in the problem solving orientation (Kohn, 2000). For the general public, they are the acceptable measurements of high school students. Educational outcomes are the result of the accountability process (Moe, 2003). Student learning remained at the same level as it was before the policy of high stakes tests was instituted (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

### **The Impact of *No Child Left Behind* on Social Studies**

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* has deeply impacted social studies, mainly through the avenue of high stakes testing (Au, 2009; McCall, 2006). “The requirements of the *No Child*

*Left Behind Act* (NCLB) emerged particularly in relationship to assessment, reading instruction, and accountability” (Agnello, 2007, p. 217). Social studies was most frequently cited as the place where reductions occurred (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Leming, Ellington, & Schug 2006). At the elementary and middle school levels, reductions in social studies was dominant as schools were more concerned with the accountability subjects of reading and mathematics (Karp, 2003; Von Zastrow & Janc 2004). Tanner (2008) added,

When second- and fifth-grade teachers nationwide were asked how much of their average week is devoted to teaching social studies, 23 percent indicated that they spend less than two hours, 47 percent between two and four hours, and 15 percent five hours or more (p.41).

Teachers reported increasing the time they spend on reading, writing, and mathematics, and decreasing the time on untested subjects such as social studies, science, the arts, and health and fitness (Stecher & Chun, 2001; Darling-Hammond 2006). Due to the movement toward “essential learning” involving reading and mathematics, subjects such as science and social studies are relegated to secondary status (Froese-Germain, 2001; Howard, 2003; Savage, 2003; Vogler, 2003). Teachers limit their instruction of social studies because of directed testing of other subjects that are seen to have advanced educational value (Gahan, Shaw, & Hollifield 2006; Winstead, L., 2011). *No Child Left Behind* sets the tone for accountability, the curriculum to be taught, and how the teachers should use instruction (Doppen 2007). Teachers are forced to focus their curricula and teaching on achieving high scores on tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, and avoiding the embarrassment of becoming a "failing school" (Mitsakos & Ackerman, 2009). “*No Child Left Behind* and the standards movement have contributed to this marginalization of diverse groups” (Journell, 2009, p.160). In some states such as Alabama,

social studies was included in the accountability system of testing at the high school level. The curriculum will narrow to the measureable social studies objectives, and place constraints regarding graduation (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005).

*No Child Left Behind* simply reinforced the accountability system by mandating that statewide assessments provide evidence of academic achievement in reading and mathematics. This narrowed the curriculum throughout the maturation of education from elementary to secondary education in social studies, and in some cases social studies was completely omitted from the curriculum based on the content covered in the state assessments. In other cases, social studies became another subject of mastery, not in achievement, but based on the conceptual assessments of multiple choice testing and simplistic fact regurgitation. As the *No Child Left Behind Act* spurred states into requiring annual performance examinations, textbook companies have begun to provide more options for assisting students in their preparation for exams, including the summarization of key points of each major theme into a few short pages, with outlines, bulleted points, and lists of key vocabulary words (Ahmad & Szpara, 2007). In both educational environments, “civics education,” purposefully attempting to prepare active and motivated citizenry, was removed.

### **Statewide Assessments and AYP in Alabama**

Student assessment is the primary aspect of the accountability and standards-based context of U.S. public education (Ryan & Feller, 2009). The amended Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, also known as *No Child Left Behind*, required a number of testing and accountability provisions that require changes in many states (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002). *No Child Left Behind* has prompted states to use standardized assessments as measures of student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and instruments of public policy (Mazzeo, 2001; McMillan,

2008). “Many states had such a system in place before NCLB took effect, but since 2001–2002, every state in the United States has had to develop and implement a standards-based accountability system that meets the requirements of the law” (Zigmond & Kloo, 2009, p.478). “AYP toward academic and graduation goals is the central measure of success or failure for high schools under NCLB” (Balfanz, Legters, West, & Weber, 2007, p.560). Annual Yearly Progress establishes a ceiling effect that confirms excellence for some schools and classifies other schools as needing improvement (Chester, 2005). “The state of Michigan was among the first crucibles for early experiments with school accountability in adopting the Michigan Accountability System in the early 1970’s, and statewide mandatory testing was its basic tool” (Sacks, 1999, p. 78). At the time, the state governor of Michigan was using this system to ask for additional money for state education, aspiring for great results.

Control and surveillance of education also became political avenues. After *A Nation at Risk*, states began to require high stakes testing for the purpose of graduation. “The earliest and most common form of high-stakes testing was the practice of attaching consequences to high school graduation exams” (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005, p.4). “Among the points of concern for high-stakes accountability measures are that reliance on test-based outcomes will result in narrower instructional content and services provided and restricted teacher authority and professionalism; some groups of students will be disproportionately punished” (Chester, 2005, p. 40). Assessments are used to approximate school effects, and the impact of deviations of one cohort from school results over time are reduced (Hill and DePascale, 2003). New York’s Regents examinations and 17 other states such as Florida, Alabama, Nevada, and Virginia had instituted high stakes graduation since the 1980s (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005).

Since 1983, the Alabama Department of Education has administered the Alabama High School Graduation Exam- AHSGE (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). In its early inception, the Alabama High School Graduation Exam only focused on basic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics. This exam was originally at a 6th grade level in 1983, revised to an 8<sup>th</sup> level in 1991, and its purpose was to ensure that students had the basic skills required to graduate from high school (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). Balfanz, Legters, West, and Weber (2007) explained,

Most significant, however, is the combination of state decisions on the difficulty of the high school accountability tests, where initial high school baselines were set relative to existing eighth grade achievement levels and the pace of improvement expected in the initial years of NCLB (p.560).

For Alabama, students must have passed the reading, language, mathematics, biology, and social studies portions of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam to receive a standard diploma. Alabama also returned to a “back to the basics” approach by developing a high stakes test to assess the student achievement of graduates. Beginning with the graduation class of 2004, the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was a requirement to successfully receive a regular diploma (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). In Alabama, the Alabama State Legislature passed its Education Accountability Law in 1995, which raised the graduation requirements (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). “In states, high schools with low graduation rates and minimal or no improvement can make AYP by improving the achievement levels of only the students who make it to the 11th or 12th grade” (Balfanz, Legters, West, & Weber, 2007, p.577). Schools that failed to meet improvement objectives had to adopt alternate instructional approaches or programs (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002).

## **The Alabama High School Graduation Exam**

The social studies section of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was introduced in 2004 (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). This section of the state assessment, like other portions is completely multiple choice (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). The questions range from simple knowledge based questions, to questions that include graphs and charts. There are 100 questions on the social studies section, and for a student to receive a passing score, they must successfully answer approximately 53 questions correctly. The content of this high stakes assessment is from the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). These specifications were framed into seven sections that included America's exploration, impact of the influences of intellectual and religious thought on the political systems of the United States, essential documents of the United States government, the American Revolution, the Era of Expansion, the Civil War Era, the settlement of the West, industrialization and urbanization, World War I, the Great Depression and the New Deal, and World War II (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000). The content curriculum within this document comes directly from the 10th and 11th grade courses in the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000).

## **The Impact of Statewide Assessments and AYP on Social Studies**

The concentration on tested content areas comes at the expense of content domains that are not tested, such as science, history, and the arts (Stecher & Hamilton, 2002). For social studies, a mixed level of significance occurs in Alabama. At the elementary and middle school levels, social studies was not included in the process to gain AYP; therefore, social studies was not tested and rarely taught as a primary subject, such as reading or mathematics. In its

implementation model of testing and accountability, NCLB does not include history, geography, civics and government, and economics as core subjects; it does not include social studies as an area to be tested (Neill & Guisbond, 2005). “The report suggests that an unintended outcome of the legislation’s preoccupation with academic achievement could be an eclipsing of the civic and public mission of American schools” (Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005, p.14).

In Alabama, the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was not required until the graduating class of 2004, and testing did not begin until 2002 (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). There is evidence that teachers place greater emphasis on material that is covered on a high stakes test than other material (Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, & Rosenthal, 2001). At the high school level, the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, which includes a social studies component, was used by the Alabama Department of Education to assess the AYP of schools throughout the state, and was considered a high stakes test for determining school graduation rates. The social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam consisted of 100 multiple choice questions, and was considered high stakes because without a passing score, students could not graduate. “Thirty states have mandated tests for social studies. Out of these, the majority of states have plans for, or already have in place, tests that are “high stake,” linking student performance to graduation or other measurements of success or accountability” (Burroughs, 2002, p. 315). The shift in significance, from elementary to high school in social studies uniquely depends on the consequences for students, the school, and the system. In 2008, the Alabama Department of Education released the Credit-Based Endorsement Diploma. The Credit-Based Endorsement Diploma “requires passing all standard coursework and passing 3/5 sections of the AHSGE, including Reading and Mathematics” (Alabama Department of Education, 2008 p.2).

Due to the implementation of this new diploma, students had to pass reading and mathematics plus one additional subject area such as language, biology, or social studies. This again limited the significance of social studies as students who passed the required portions and language or biology, and did not need to pass social studies to graduate.

Meeting the Credit-Based Endorsement Diploma requirements did not hurt the overall graduation rate for each high school. The purpose of this change in educational policy was to “help those students who have successfully completed all of their curriculum requirements, but have been unable to pass all five sections of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), complete high school with a recognized diploma” and to “improve Alabama’s high school graduation rate” (Alabama Department of Education, 2008 p.1).

### **How Testing Affects Teacher Pedagogy**

Another possible effect of high stakes testing was the potential change of teacher pedagogy within the classroom. In 55 districts in Mississippi, teachers reportedly narrowed their content to match the tests and adopted more teacher centered instruction as a more efficient means of delivering the content demanded by the tests (Vogler, 2003). Due to the increased pressure of student and school performance, teachers could alter their instructional approaches in their classrooms from places of authentic teaching to test preparation centers. An analysis in Arizona showed that the burden of testing produced test preparation drilling on assessment materials and pedagogy to test-like learning activities (Smith & Rottenberg, 1991). Kohn (2000) explains that to raise test scores, schools could be pushed from being the agency of learning to test prep factories with the goal of producing the results for public demand. The pressure to raise test scores led to instructional activities, which was purposeful to raise test scores (McNeil & Valenzuela, 1999).

Testing creates an instructional shift from a meaningful, critical thinking, skill oriented environment, to a process of drill, practice, and regurgitation. The effects have begun to be realized as teachers are leaving the profession frustrated, replacing critical thinking with drill and practice, and continuing the gap between socio-economic groups (Solley, 2007). Standardized testing reveals that teachers do not take creative approaches to educational practice, but to teach towards the test (Froese-Germain, 2001; Riffert, 2005). Savage (2003) elaborates that the consequences have leaked as good teaching has been replaced with drill and preparation strategies for good performance on the statewide assessments. M. L. Smith (1991) argues that high stakes tests simply promote multiple choice teaching. If the high stakes test itself was the only measurement of education, especially in measuring the achievement of students and the performance of teachers, then teachers could shift their priorities of instruction to what was being evaluated.

Due to the constraints and mandates required by *No Child Left Behind*, specifically the Alabama High School Graduation Exam in Alabama, the educational process has been adversely affected by narrowing the curriculum, modifying instructional approaches to drill and practice, and diluting the educational experience to a multiple choice test. Teachers' instructional practices have been altered by the pressures associated with high stakes testing (Au, 2009).

Burroughs, Groce, and Webeck (2005) stated,

All the high school teachers agreed that pressures are felt by all involved in high stakes testing. They said students are trained to memorize facts and to cram for tests; consequently, students come to believe that if it cannot be tested with a multiple-choice (or other standardized format) test, it is not worth learning. The teachers said that districts

pressure them to use test prep programs, to have all tests mirror the state exam, and to devote large blocks of time to pretesting and testing (p.17).

Pressure to guarantee high test scores has damaging effects on teaching (Johnston, 1998).

Gerwin and Visone (2006), during their research of high stakes, testing-related social studies instruction, found that teachers displayed dramatic increases in the amount of teacher centered, fact-driven instruction. The higher the stakes on a given test, the greater the level of teacher focus on test preparation and teaching to the test (Herman & Golan, 1991). Cimbricz (2002) suggests that the grade level, subject matter, status, and experience influence teachers' reactions to high stakes state testing. Instructional quality suffers because it is assumed that all students who failed need some type of remediation (Riddle, Buly & Valencia 2002). Grant (2007) argues that some novice teachers and their veteran peers feel pressured to undercut their pedagogical goals in reaction to state test pressures.

Additional problems such as cultural dominance of test development, displacing students due to a lack of performance, disparity between authentic instructional approaches to schools that fail to meet the standards, student test anxiety, language barriers, lack of an academic challenge, the pressure of losing state funding, and the measurement of teacher quality are all impacts that are directly related to the power of implementing high stakes testing. "Standardized tests have the effect of driving curriculum and instruction, and diversity in teaching may disappear" (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000, p. 395). An overemphasis on state assessments can actually undermine the pursuit of primer education (Maehr & Midgley, 1996). Even with the negative aspects of high stakes testing, the public still demands accountability in public education. One solution could be the standards movement, which is to formulate to a specific set of standards

that offer a greater variety of assessing the student instead of a one shot standardized test (Vogler, 2003).

Organizations such as the Common Core Initiative are now arguing for a nationalized standards based curriculum throughout the U.S. Currently, all but eight states have adopted the Common Core Initiative (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). However, the issue was not the standards or the curriculum, but the development of an assessment that can accurately measure the achievement of students. The assessment tools to evaluate student achievement should become more meaningful and authentic. Some of these assessments might include student portfolios and performance based evaluations.

Student portfolios could display multiple forms of assessment that are given throughout an entire school year to measure the progress and performance the student has displayed (Froese-Germain, 2001). Student portfolios can be assessed by teachers and administrators, or be based on a criterion based system for evaluation. Performance based assessments could also be another alternative that offer an opportunity to display critical thinking and evaluation. Solley (2007) clarifies that performance based assessments can give students an opportunity to evaluate a problem, think critically, and attempt to offer solutions. These forms of assessment appear to merge with the measurement of evaluating the true achievement of what students have learned, skills obtained, and ability rather than simply what students can remember. For this transition to occur, educational policy makers must convince the general public that to replace high stakes testing with another assessment would be beneficial to the educational process and provide accountability to the school.

## **The Curriculum of Social Studies**

### **National Curriculum of Social Studies**

The content curriculum of what is known as social studies undoubtedly had its origins in the National Education Association's 1916 committee on social studies, which introduced the term, and included the first scope and sequence of contemporary social studies curriculum (Ross, 2006). The committee defined social studies as "those whose subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups" (National Education Association, 1916, p.9). One of the more controversial changes to the previous curriculum included courses from outside the realm of history, including courses focusing on social improvement issues, civic action, and social progressivism (Woyshner, 2006). Reuben (1997) contends that the primary focus of the National Education Association's 1916 committee on social studies was to rebuild the concept of citizenship, shifting the focus to the community instead of the collections of individuals.

The National Education Association's 1916 committee on social studies produced a curriculum outline which detailed courses relating to history, civics, geography, and a problems of democracy course that briefly included social, economic, and political topics (National Education Association, 1916). With this social studies curriculum outline, a nationalized suggestive plan was detailed of what could be expected in social studies classrooms. Although the National Education Association's 1916 committee on social studies makes no specific mention of instructional methods or pedagogy, it does mention certain instructional issues such as resources, specifically textbooks (National Education Association, 1916).

From the early 1950's to the mid 1970's, Social Studies took a turn in curriculum with the focus of the "New Social Studies" (Rice, 1992). The New Social Studies attempted to

redefine the curriculum with the incorporation of emphasizing induction; thus, using reflective thinking, discovery, inquiry, problem solving as a pathway for developing knowledge (Rice, 1992). Reflection and inquiry approaches provided the opportunity for students to engage in decision making regarding social, economic, and political issues (Massialas, 1963). It increased the use of instructional strategies that emphasized students' inquiry in the learning process, presaging later constructivist arguments for greater engagement of students in the learning process." (Martorella, Beal, and Bolick, 2005, p.16) Switzer (1981) argues that the largest problem of the New Social Studies movement was to have adequate research that supported the new crusade. By the mid 1970's, the movement had fizzled back to a more conservative viewpoint of knowledge attainment through traditional instructional methods (Rice, 1992).

In a more contemporary form of social studies, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) first adopted standards for social studies teachers in 1997 (National Council for the Social Studies, 1997). This set of established standards included thematic standards such as culture, time, people, individuals, power, production, global connections, science and technology, and civic ideals (National Council for the Social Studies, 1997). This also accompanied disciplinary standards such as history, geography, civics and government, economics, and psychology (National Council for the Social Studies, 1997). The National Council for the Social Studies added a pedagogical components that framed instructional elements that included learning styles, critical thinking, active learning, inquiry and investigation, planning for instruction, types of assessments, and reflection and professional growth (National Council for the Social Studies, 1997). Although organizations such as the National Education Association and the National Council for the Social Studies provided a

national framework regarding significant elements to social studies, most of the curriculum regarding social studies was still left for the states to determine.

### **State Development of Curriculum**

Alabama started public education in 1854 with the Alabama Public School Act, also referred to as the Free School Law (Alabama State Legislature, 1854). In his first written address, outlining the public school system and the operation of the public schools, W.M. Perry, the first state superintendent, gave modest instructions regarding public school operations, including curriculum and instruction (Perry, 1854). Within the Alabama Public School Act, specifically in Article V, a brief and somewhat vague curriculum framework that consisted of subjects including reading, writing, and arithmetic was provided to schools and teachers (Alabama State Legislature, 1854). By December of 1954, a course of study had been outlined that included social studies subjects such as geography, U.S. history, universal history, and the Constitution of the United States (Perry, 1854). According to Weeks (1915), by the early 1900's the course of study relating to social studies topics had not changed at all.

Currently, the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study, which was adopted in 2010, is one of the dominant curriculum documents in social studies classrooms in Alabama. The purpose of the current Alabama Social Studies Course of Study is to build and mold students that are responsible, active citizens through courses such as economics, geography, history, and civics and government (Alabama State Department of Education, 2010). According to the Alabama Department of Education (2010),

In order to be successful citizens in today's world, students need to be knowledgeable about the economic, geographic, historical, and political perspectives of the world and its people. Since students are more directly involved in these issues and need information

and strategies to make informed decisions, the theme of the 2010 *Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies* is responsible citizenship. Responsible citizens are informed and active citizens. They are aware of and participate in various levels of civic responsibility. Mastering standards included in this document provides all students in Grades K-12 with essential knowledge regarding economics, geography, history, and civics and government (p.10).

With regard to this document and the intended purpose of this research, for 12th grade social studies classes in Alabama, the subject matter for 12th grade is government and economics. Even with this being the dominant curriculum document, another curriculum document had tremendous influence during the high stakes testing policy under *No Child Left Behind*: the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

The Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was a document that gave a detailed testing outline of specifications, sometimes referred to as the eligible testing content (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000). These specifications were framed into seven sections that included America's exploration, impact of the influences of intellectual and religious thought on the political systems of the United States, essential documents of the United States government, the American Revolution, the Era of Expansion, the Civil War Era, the settlement of the West, industrialization and urbanization, World War I, the Great Depression and the New Deal, and World War II (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000). Most of the content curriculum within this document comes directly from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade courses in the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000). All of the material in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade course that is after World War II is not tested on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (Alabama State Department

of Education, 2000). A few government items in 12th grade are on the Item Specifications, and no economics is mentioned (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000).

### **The Curriculum and Pedagogy of the Common Core Initiative**

Since the introduction of *No Child Left Behind in 2001*, a gradual movement towards the nationalization of requirements has developed. This process of nationalization of standards has continued as the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers began to push the Common Core Initiative (Common Core Initiative, 2010). The mission of the Common Core Initiative is to “provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them” (Common Core Initiative, 2010 p.4). Recently, U.S. President Barak Obama appealed to the Common Core Initiative by offering states extra points on their Race to the Top applications, a national grant in response to commitment for federalized educational policy reform, if the Common Core curriculum had been adopted by each state. This has prompted educators to consider the possibility of both a nationalized curriculum accompanied with a national assessment (Smith & Fey, 2000). With *No Child Left Behind* and the Common Core Initiative, the movement towards the nationalization of educational requirements appeared to be on the horizon.

Even though there are no social studies standards that have been adopted by the Common Core Initiative, there are literacy standards for social studies that are included in the English language arts portion of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). These standards are not content specific, but instead are more pedagogical in nature, focusing not on detailed subject, but instructional literacy methods that are commonly found within social studies classrooms (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The purpose of these standards by the Common Core Initiative (2010) is explained as follows:

Literacy standards for grade 6 and above are predicated on teachers of ELA, history/social studies, science, and technical subjects using their content area expertise to help students meet the particular challenges of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in their respective fields (p.3).

One of the first literary standards of Common Core dealing with social studies is a writing standard about citing evidence from primary and secondary sources. “Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p.61). In addition, implementing vocabulary as an instructional method is also a requirement of the standards specific to domains related to history/social studies. (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Another instructional method that is interrelated with the standards is the incorporation of visual aids with other information in print (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The standards also added reading as an independent mode of learning. Part of the standards state that students should read and comprehend texts independently and proficiently (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).

Also found within the Standards for Literacy in Social Studies are writing standards that include developing a formal writing style, citing specific evidence, using content detailed vocabulary, establishing a method of peer review, using technology and other resources in the research development of the writing activity, and implementing short project based writing activities (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The Common Core Standards state, “The standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p.6). These are not content related curriculum standards, but instead imply certain instructional methods to accomplish the

standards of the Common Core Initiative. The nature of Common Core is more pedagogically focused than that of a content course of study set of standards.

### **Alabama's Plan 2020**

Plan 2020 is an educational policy that was developed by the Alabama Department of Education and used as a waiver for the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Alabama Department of Education, 2013). This new accountability policy changed the process of educational accountability and the goals that are to be achieved. The previously established goals under the *No Child Left Behind Act* included 100 percent proficiency for students in English language arts and mathematics by 2012-2013. Before the implementation of Plan 2020, the proficiency measure was Annual Yearly Progress, which for secondary schools in Alabama was determined by student performance on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Plan 2020's goals supplanted 100 percent proficiency of English language arts and mathematics with the new goal of reducing proficiency gaps by 2017 (Maddox & Washington, 2013). The *No Child Left Behind* accountability status labels such as AYP would be eliminated, and replaced with new performance measures (Maddox & Washington, 2013). On June 21, 2013, Plan 2020 was accepted by the United States Department of Education as a waiver for the *No Child Left Behind Act*, thus removing the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and instead using the Alabama Department of Education's Plan 2020 (Alabama Department of Education, 2013). The implementation phase was to begin during the 2012-2013 school year, gradually moving from the former *No Child Left Behind* policy to the new Plan 2020. High stakes testing was to continue until the end of the 2013-2014 school year. In November of 2013, the Alabama State Board of Education cancelled the Alabama High School Graduation, thus propelling the full Plan 2020 into immediate action.

On November 14, 2013, the Alabama State Board of Education passed a resolution immediately ending high stakes testing by removing the Alabama High School Graduation Exam in order to receive a high school diploma (Alabama State Board of Education, 2013). Due to the natural progression and recent acceptance of the Plan 2020 waiver, a gradual phasing out of the exam was expected. With the immediate educational policy reform, this change brought the end of high stakes testing in Alabama. With Plan 2020 in full implementation, the result brought changes that included three apparatuses that could impact curriculum and instruction: the newly developed End-of-Course assessments, the participation of 11th graders taking the ACT, and the full infusion of the College and Career Readiness Standards (Alabama Department of Education, 2012).

One of the crucial elements of Plan 2020 was the implementation of End-of-Course assessments. These examinations are assessments given after a completed course or courses over a two year period. End-of-Course assessments began in 2012-2013, with examinations in English 9, English 10, Algebra I, and geometry. Although the purpose of the End-of-Course assessments was used to measure student achievement, these assessments focused only on 9th and 10th grade students. The remaining 11th and 12th grade students in 2012-2013 still had to take and pass the high stakes test, the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. By 2013-2014, additional End-of-Course assessments would be added, including English 11, Algebra II, chemistry, and U.S. history (Alabama Department of Education, 2012). In 2014-2015, finally English 12, pre-calculus, and physics would be additional subjects that would feature End-of-Course assessments. The implementation of End-of-Course assessments for the 2013-2014 school year have been delayed, thus currently no End-of-Course assessments have been given statewide in social studies.

Another important component of Plan 2020 is the mandated American College Testing examination of all 11th graders in the state of Alabama (Alabama Department of Education, 2012). Because the ACT is a college entrance examination, the Alabama Department of Education viewed the ACT as a significant assessment reflecting the college readiness of students (Alabama Department of Education, 2012). Alabama's Plan 2020 states, "The new aligned assessment system is focused on measuring college and career readiness from Grade 3 through Grade 12 and uses the ACT as the capstone assessment to determine college readiness; that will be administered to this same class as eleventh graders in 2013-14" (p.161). Due to the ACT, and the focus on a different set of curriculum standards that are a part of the ACT, the Alabama Department of Education assumed that the addition of the ACT would enhance instruction in secondary education, specifically high school classrooms (Alabama Department of Education, 2012).

Besides the implementation of End-of-Course assessments and the ACT, the most profound instructional impact of Plan 2020 is the infusion of the Common Core State Standards, also referred to as Alabama's College and Career Readiness Standards. The Alabama State Department of Education (2010) declared,

On November 18, 2010, Alabama joined a number of other states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands in adopting the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts, with the current total now having reached 45. The adoption of internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards along with selected Alabama standards creates a set of standards that will prepare students for a successful future in the ever-expanding global environment (p.186).

Although mentioned earlier, these standards are not subject content related to social studies, but are more pedagogical in nature relating to the use of primary sources, vocabulary, the use of visual aids, and research and formal writing (Common Core Initiative, 2010). The three main components of Alabama's Plan 2020 that directly affected secondary education, particularly high school curriculum and instruction, are the implementation of the End-of-Course assessments, the mandated participation in the ACT, and the acceptance and application of the Common Core State Standards, referred as Alabama's College and Career Readiness Standards.

### **Social Studies Authentic Pedagogy**

The purpose of social studies education is to enable students to become critical thinkers and to become active participatory citizens (Ross, 2006). Social studies education is more than just history; it is a mixture of history, sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, and geography. Ross (2006) stated,

Rather than a singular conception that all social studies educator must agree upon, there can be a divergent and competing definitions of citizenship education that all work toward the same goal of encouraging citizens to participate in, and hence strengthen, their democracy (p.93).

Stanley and Nelson (1994) contend that a subject centered, civics centered, issues centered approach would grant the necessary reflective thinking and analysis to help cultivate agents of change. Vinson (2006) articulated,

The goal of civic participation is to develop among citizens the participatory skills required to monitor and influence the formulation, implementation, adjudication, and enforcement of public policy, as well as to participate in voluntary efforts to solve neighborhood and community problems (p. 62).

In accomplishing this goal of citizenship education, social studies teachers activated learning through various authentic instructional methods such as cooperative learning, using primary sources as a content and inquiry based investigative strategy, and utilizing a variety of technology related resources to formulate a meaningful and relevant classroom.

### **Cooperative Learning**

One of the authentic instructional methods incorporated by secondary social studies teachers was the use of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is when students work together towards a common learning goal; a process leading to the social construction of knowledge (Martorella, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). It is group work designed to develop strong social interdependence with students (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007). The modern use of cooperative learning began in 1966 with the training of teachers at the University of Minnesota in the instructional use of small groups (Johnson, 1970). Researchers agree that cooperative and collaborative learning are valuable components of classroom teaching and learning (Blumenfeld, Marx, Soloway, & Krajcik, 1996). Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewand (1992) argue that cooperative learning is a form of critical pedagogy that moves classrooms and societies closer toward the ideal of social justice. For students to be effective, they must have experience in cooperative situations (Cohen, 1990). Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, and Johnson (2005) suggest that “cooperative learning requires carefully structured individual accountability while collaborative does not” (p.3). Larson and Keiper (2007) argue that the fundamental structure of cooperative learning “has a positive impact on social interactions among students because students learn how to interact with one another” (p.185). Instructors model best practices through the use of highly interactive cooperative learning and project based learning (Clay, Cohen, Ligonis, & Roff, 1998).

Cooperative learning provides additional components, such as group processing of information that is not usually found in traditional learning instruction (Johnson and Johnson, 1986). Outcomes and processes that are associated with cooperative learning suggest that it can effectively promote academic achievement and social skills development (Elmore & Zenus, 1992). Cooperative learning is a powerful technique that has increased student achievement (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Miller, 1992). Besides instructional and student achievement benefits, cooperative learning can build self-esteem and a positive attitude toward school, thus building cohesion among students who may be separated due to stereotypes (Banks 2006; Slavin, 1991). Dewey (1938) observed that social arrangements of the classroom play a significant role in the formation of an individual and group's democratic skills. Cooperative learning requires an individual student to listen to others' opinions instead of solely persuading others to accept his or her own individual viewpoints (Costa & O'Leary, 1992). Cooperative learning emphasizes that "working in groups must socially negotiate a common understanding of the task" (Jonassen, Howland, Marra, & Crismond 2008, p. 5).

### **Social Studies Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning can further be defined as "an instructional technique that is peculiar among teaching strategies because of its ability to aid teachers not only with teaching subject matter but also with teaching certain social skills and dispositions that pervade the school curriculum" (Schul, 2011, p.88). Some common cooperative learning strategies found in secondary social studies classrooms presently include think-pair-share, jigsaw, small group teaching (project based learning), and group investigation (Schul, 2011). Students are able to do their best when they help one another in collaborative experiences (Keedy & Drmacich, 1994; Vansickle, 1992). "Cooperative learning allows students to engage in a decision-making process

similar to real historical figures” (Levitsky, 2006, p.405), “by allowing students to take on roles in cooperative learning groups that help them work in teams while encouraging high levels of personal performance” (Cramer and Crocco, 2005, p.143). “In today's social studies classroom, students in cooperative learning groups are encouraged to be interdependent and accountable, with everyone expected to contribute to the group effort” (Wilen, 2004, p.51). Cooperative learning methods encourage social development as well as understanding (Lopus, Morton, & Willis, 2003). Grskovic and Holliday (2002) contend social studies classrooms “encourage students to work in mixed ability, cooperative groups, which allows each one to learn from multiple perspectives” (p.8).

### **The Use of Primary Sources**

A primary source in a historical context was defined as an original document or object that provides a first-hand account or direct evidence created by witnesses or recorders that experienced those events at the time in which they occurred. Primary sources may also include autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories recorded or written later (Galagano, Arndt, & Hyser, 2013; Library of Congress, 2013; Yale University, 2008). A primary source is an uninterrupted original document produced not by academics, but by everyday people describing their personal and unique experiences. A secondary source is an interpretation of an event developed by someone without experiencing the original occurrence. Authors of secondary sources such as textbooks or publications, use multiple primary sources to write, in a scholarly context, an account of the past (Galagano, Arndt, & Hyser, 2013; Library of Congress, 2013; Yale University, 2008). Primary sources enable students to understand the conflicts faced between public opinion, personal opinion, and the rule of law (Landman, 2007). Most secondary

sources are created by professional academics who analyze history through a multi-faceted approach by using a continuous variety of primary sources.

Primary sources offer multiple qualities that are excellent for the academic benefit of examining social studies. Primary sources offer an unhampered personal account of historical knowledge, which can be used to construct historical truth by analyzing the perspectives of the source. “Student historians” examine primary sources, consider multiple perspectives, conduct analysis, and develop historical interpretations (Bass & Rosenzweig, 1999). Students at any age have the ability to engage in higher order thinking such as interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing knowledge (King, Newmann, & Carmichael, 2009). Multiple primary sources can verify or confirm historical knowledge by collecting perspectives. In the construction of historical knowledge, whereas primary sources might depict variations of the same event, the most significant concept is not to rely on merely one primary source, but several in the process. From primary sources, students learn about bias and authenticity (Ruffin & Capell, 2009).

The use of primary sources as an instructional strategy provides the opportunity for students to engage in the development of history, like a professional historian, through a deeper evaluation and analysis of materials. This type of reflection and evaluation results in effective engagement (Martorella, 1997). Barton and Levstik (2003) concluded,

This means that in order for teachers to present history as an investigative, interpretive undertaking, they must have a purpose that cannot be served by focusing on coverage and control; their goal must be one that can be met only by having students work with primary sources, consider multiple perspectives, and so on (p.358).

## **Primary Documents in Social Studies**

Primary sources include diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts that transport history to life (Moss, 2008). “Students who are asked, not to memorize, but to grapple with, analyze, and evaluate problems in history are far more likely, not only to remember information but understand why they are remembering it” (Levitsky, 2006, p.405). Primary sources offer a rich complexity for students to understand and construct history by allowing them to take on the roles of archivists and researchers by collecting and analyzing primary sources (Costa & Doyle, 2004; Potter 2007). Risinger (2008) stated, “The overall goals of social studies haven't changed--we still want our students to be critical thinkers, to be able to use primary sources, to compare and contrast issues, to understand the relationship with humans and their environment, to recognize propaganda” (p.380). Students also use primary sources as a tool to critically evaluate secondary sources such as historical accounts, textbooks, and media (Buchanan, Hofer, & Stoddard, 2008). “What is new in the last ten years is the number of digitized documents available online that teachers can download and use in their classrooms” (Schur, 2009, p.15). Buchanan, Hofer, and Stoddard (2008), explained,

Emphasis in recent years in the field of social studies education has been on the development and use of digitized historical documents in facilitating the inquiry process and developing skills in historical thinking, and to a lesser degree on models of web inquiry including Web Inquiry Projects (WIPS) and WebQuests (p.144).

Through the use of primary sources, students can examine governmental and public narratives of history, thus, providing a sense of authenticity (Claunch, 2008; Decatur, Potter, & Stutzman, 2007).

## **Technology Integration**

As the digital age emerges, and as education continues to evolve and change through finding new forums to develop students and increase student achievement, digital curricula moves into every portion of education. Children aged six and younger spend about two hours a day in front of screen media, which is almost the same amount of time they spend playing outside (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). From grade level and across the boundaries of subject area curriculum, new areas of technology have and continue to affect teaching and learning. Within the area of digital curricula, implementation of technology integration in secondary social studies was centered and associated with instructional and learning strategies. Through this process, technology will serve as the forum and tools to construct and develop students who will become civically engaged denizens within their communities.

All teachers should have the ability to demonstrate technology in their classrooms to impact and enhance teaching and learning (Futrell, 2011). Digital learning can be defined as requiring students to use some form of technology to develop products or facilitate learning (Russell, Bebell, O'Dwyer, & O'Connor, 2003). A tremendous amount of resources, including internet based resources, offer developing possibilities to spawn new concepts in teaching and learning (Becker, 1999). Teachers' pedagogical beliefs greatly impact the amount of technology that is used in the classroom (Ravitz, Becker, & Wong, 2000). This classroom format also is appealing to students because it flows with the digital interfaces that students are already deeply rooted with various forms of social media (Caillier & Riordan, 2009). "The millennials are impacted by media and the Internet the way the baby boomers were affected by television" (Ross, 2006, p.81). The accessibility of technology has also improved student achievement (Bebell & O'Dwyer, 2010). With the new generation of technology learners, the incorporation of

instructional methods that have embedded technology are vital in making social studies learning meaningful.

### **Technology Integration in Social Studies**

Part of authentic pedagogy was to develop learning activities that make content more meaningful and engaging. Technology needs to become an indispensable part of students' foundations for life in a digital society (O'Brien, (2008). Technological applications and programs have been interwoven with, applied to, and used within social studies curriculums (Martorella 1997). The NCSS "Technology Position Statement and Guidelines" states, "we cannot predict the future, we can anticipate where the emerging communication and information technologies might take us and start discussing how best to prepare ourselves and our students for what might occur" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2006, p.330). Acikalin and Duru (2005) identify a surplus of technological applications with social studies content.

Through the use of online discussion forums in social studies classes, many opportunities developed for students to engage in meaningful dialogue, including teachers assisting in the development of students' historical inquiry skills (Blankensip, 2009). Technology based, online discussion aids in the promotion of developing historical conversations and historical analysis from multiple perspectives. "The good news for history teachers is many of the sites already providing downloadable primary sources and teaching resources have expanded their inventory to include podcasts by historians and historical figures" (Hofer & Swan, 2009, p.95). Podcasts allow for instantaneous access to videos and primary documents for students to analyze and obtain unique historical perspectives. Well-developed web-based resources for teachers and students designed to democratize historical understanding and to develop core features of academic literacy are key in social studies (Leon, Martin, Rosenzweig, & Wineburg, 2008). "The

Wiginquiry model forces students to evaluate sources while also helping them gain an understanding of the nature and limits of history textbooks. “Wiginquiry emphasizes reading and writing, both fundamental in social studies education.” (Buchanan, Hofer, & Stoddard, 2008, p.144). This activity, Wiginquiry, allows teachers to develop classroom wikis, post historical information such as primary documents, and then engage the class through online historical discussions.

With hundreds of educational web sites for a wide range of disciplines within social studies, including world history, government and law, citizenship education and political science, geography, economics, anthropology, sociology, and psychology in twenty-first-century classrooms, students should be learning with technology (Lawson, 2009). Virtual field trips can be used as instructional tools to promote student engagement in a meaningful learning environment (Clark, Libler, Nail, Schlee, & Shriner, 2010). Virtual fieldtrips give classrooms the opportunity to discover and “visit” places students might otherwise not be exposed to, exploring through online visual and audio media. Digital media sources such as eyewitness testimonies promote authentic social studies instruction through online videos. (Manfra, & Stoddard, 2008). Geographic information system (GIS) technology permits the user to analyze and manipulate different geographic data layers such as roads, streams, population, vegetation, land use, voting patterns, and pollution sites (Baxter & Broda, 2003). GIS technology permits teachers to use online systems and programs for explaining, creating, developing, and using information to analyze and explore maps and location.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with a discussion of the connection between educational policy, instruction, matriculation of accountability, and testing, starting with *A Nation at Risk* and

moving toward the present federal mandates of *No Child Left Behind*, a brief introduction to the social studies curriculum, and an overview of Alabama's Plan 2020, with literature of expected social studies classroom pedagogy. The current literature indicated that statewide testing affects instructional practice in social studies classrooms, especially in areas where high stakes testing was implemented.

The aim of this study attempted to investigate the educational policy of high stakes testing, specifically the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, to determine the potential impact this might have had on instructional practices and curriculum. In addition, a secondary investigation will also be examined to determine if the new educational policy, Alabama's Plan 2020 might also have impacted instructional practices and curriculum.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Chapter Introduction**

This chapter describes the research method used in this study. The first section details the rationale, theoretical framework, and methodological foundations. The next section provides information concerning the participants, the data collection procedures, and the type of data analysis. The last section describes researcher positionality and the processes and procedures the researcher utilized to add validity and trustworthiness to the study.

#### **Rationale**

This study was designed to investigate if the factors incorporated by the educational policies of standardized testing, specifically the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, and the new educational accountability policy, Alabama's Plan 2020, has affected and influenced the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers. Stake (1995) argues that a case study attempts to uniquely understand that particular case. Due to the constructivist approach to this study, rooted in phenomenological theory, the impact of the educational policies will be evaluated if the phenomenon occurs in the participants' classrooms.

This instrumental case study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What was the perceived impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy on instructional practices and curriculum of four 12th grade secondary social studies teachers?

2. What is the current perceived impact of Alabama's Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum of four 12th grade secondary social studies teachers?

### **Theoretical Framework of Constructivism**

This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of constructivism, thus attempting to understand why participants construct meanings and actions from particular situations.

Charmaz (2006) explains that constructivism is “how, and sometimes why, participants construct meanings and actions from certain situations” (p. 130). Constructivism allows the researcher to attempt to understand and interpret meanings and actions. Glense (2011) states that due to the nature of constructivism, being rooted from interpretivism, “shares the goal of understanding human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or in terms of the wider culture” (p. 8).

Aside from providing a simplistic answer of yes and no concerning if the phenomenon was present, I planned to critically evaluate each pressure experienced by each teacher, behind the potential shift in their pedagogical approach and the socially constructed power structure of the school, and the dynamics linked to this decision making. There was no previous research conducted in social studies classrooms in Alabama that linked standardized testing and Alabama's Plan 2020 to the modification instructional pedagogy; however, national studies indicated that this experience has occurred in other areas of the United States (Au, 2009).

Understanding this dilemma and the educational pressures previously described was the essential element of constructivism. Since the constructivist framework seeks to understand, this theoretical framework overlaps other issues such as the power relations of the classroom. Using several of Foucault's power relations, I intended to understand and construct meanings from the marginalized group, mainly teachers, within this study.

## **Methodological Foundations of the Power Relations Theory of Michael Foucault**

The methodological foundation that will support the theoretical framework of constructivism in my research was the power relations theory of Michael Foucault. As part of Foucault's power relations, I used the concepts of governmentality, shift of the self, discipline and punishment, and the use of technologies of the self as part of a critical lens with which to evaluate the possible impact of the educational policies of high stakes testing and Alabama's Plan 2020.

### **Governmentality**

Governmentality is the pressure imposed by an institution on individuals to produce docile citizens. For Doherty (2008), governmentality focuses on strategies, techniques, methods, and technologies that are incorporated by the state to maximize resources, thus granting state intervention into the lives of citizens. For the issue of governmentality, standardized testing and Plan 2020, the hierarchy of governmental pressure started at the congressional level and the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*. In 2001, the United States education system began one of the largest transformations as assessment, accountability, and teacher quality became issues of public policy, resulting in Congress passing the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This national law brought new federal guidelines to states and mandated accountability measures. "The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (United States Congress, 2002). *No Child Left Behind* brought dramatic changes to public education including new accountability measures regarding student assessments and improving student achievement.

One of the new accountability measures for states was to provide evidence of achievement by establishing state testing. These state assessments provided the public direct results of local school systems in the areas of reading and mathematics, which became the main tool for establishing Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). “In this sense, the practice of government leads to consideration of the multitude of the techniques, schemes, structures, and ideas deliberately mobilized in attempting to direct or influence the conduct of others (Peters & Beasley, 2008, p.196). Although these new national standards were in place, states had direct autonomy over the type, level, and subjects tested. Without national standards directly linked with *No Child Left Behind*, there was no comparison model between state testing. Another factor involving state assessments has been the continual change in the assessment itself. To ensure that states were meeting the national guidelines of NCLB, states began to “meet the standard” by changing the assessment and the graduation requirements. An example of the change in graduation requirements was in Alabama with the Alabama High School Graduation exam in 2003, which required students to pass all five parts of the assessment (math, reading, science, language arts, and social studies), the Alabama Credit Based Diploma in 2008 (only reading, math, and one additional section), and End-of-Course and ACT assessments from the graduating class of 2015.

The Alabama Department of Education also recommended a transformational educational policy, which was a part of the waiver for changing the reforms of *No Child Left Behind*. This new waiver for Alabama, referred to as Alabama’s Plan 2020, included groundbreaking models for teacher evaluations, administrative evaluations, the strengthening of Common Core State Standards or College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), and End-of-Course assessments. It mandated that all 11th graders take the ACT. Therefore, AYP would no longer be the

measuring goal; instead, Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs) would be used to measure the achievement and success of Alabama.

Due to the changing method of assessments and standards, it was difficult to establish if individual schools and states were achieving results, or if the assessments had been changed to meet the requirements to avoid the loss of federal funds. The most important concept of *No Child Left Behind* was the impact on student achievement. Some of the current research would suggest that significant gains have been a direct result of NCLB (Center on Education Policy, 2009). As schools continue to change the type of accountability assessments and establish new graduation requirements for secondary schools, it is difficult to prove if student achievement has increased, or if states have changed requirements so that progress is shown through NCLB (Jehlen, 2009).

*No Child Left Behind* can only show an increase in student achievement through state assessments, but show no increase on national assessments. Governmentality is profoundly rooted in the federal, state, and local school districts as power and pressure falls directly into localized classrooms. This institutional and governmental hierarchy existed as the federal government used financial, in the means of federal funding, and political pressure, through congressional legislation, to ensure that states followed the federalized guidelines outlined in *No Child Left Behind*. Just as Foucault (1988) contends, the state exercises their power by creating docile and practical citizens. Thus, governmentality is the exercise of political power (Peters & Beasley, 2008). As a result of national governmentality, states then established policies, assessments, and guidelines for local districts to reinforce federal mandates. The localized districts, needing to provide “public accountability,” placed instructional priorities in schools with the aspiration of meeting the federal goal of Annual Yearly Progress, or now the AMOs

granted by Alabama's waiver, subsequently titled Alabama's Plan 2020. Even for classrooms, curriculum, policy and pedagogy could potentially become altered based on the performance of the school and the pressures established by the governmentality of schools, districts, states, and the U.S. federal government. Governmentality in Foucault's power relations existed in a hierarchy that extended from the federal government to the local school.

### **Shift of the Self**

One result of governmentality at the local level for Alabama educators was the shift of the self. Peters and Beasley (2008) argue that individual control and conduct are significant elements of the state. For Foucault, the shift of the self in power relations was to ultimately produce docile and practical citizens. Due to the pressure of local schools and districts, and the influence of governmentality, possible shift of the self could be in the transformation of independent classroom instructional practitioners to programmed, trained, technical, scripted classroom teachers who become docile practitioners fearing the evaluation and instructional backlash. As a possible result, teachers could be independent and autonomous in their classroom instruction and become transformed into willing participants of the state, yielding professional judgment and practice due to governmentality. "In several respects, the prison must be an exhaustive disciplinary apparatus: it must assume responsibility for all aspects of the individual, his physical training, his aptitude to work, his everyday conduct, his moral attitude, his state of mind" (Foucault, 1977, p.235). Due to the performance pressures and governmentality, school districts and schools might impose mandates and instructional practices that reduce independent thinking and instructional decision making into forced instructional methods for the purpose of merely passing the requisite standardized assessment, or meeting the requirements of educational policies.

## **Discipline and Punishment**

Another power relation that was a possible influence during this research was discipline and punishment. This is possible when teachers were forced to use instructional methods to increase student performance on standardized testing or by newly mandated curriculum. Discipline and punishment can be developed by observation and punishment, which is considered to be an administrative act through a rationalized system of learning (Pongratz, 2008). One example of possible discipline could be the surveillance of teaching during walkthroughs conducted by school administration. Instead of independent and autonomous teaching, where the teacher independently developed lessons based on practitioner and pedagogical content knowledge, scripted or mandated instructional techniques and activities could be imposed, and walkthroughs could restrict classroom instruction to guarantee that prescribed instructional methods were being followed.

The punishment of not following the “recommended” instructional methods would result in a poor evaluation performance.

Foucault (1977) states, although the police as an institution were certainly organized in the form of a state apparatus, and although this was certainly linked directly to the centre of political sovereignty, the type of power that it exercises, the mechanisms it operates and the elements to which it applies them are specific. It is an apparatus that must be coextensive with the entire social body and not only by the extreme limits that it embraces, but by the minuteness of the details it is concerned with (p.213).

For new teachers, this indicated a new purpose of teaching and learning. Instead of teaching and learning that was focused on reading, writing, and research, instructional methods could be developed for students to learn factual information to regurgitate on the standardized assessment,

or by curriculum standards that shifted instructional focus to prescribed instructional practice. The veteran teachers could possibly face losing tenure and benefits due to a poor teacher evaluation. In either situation, it might create docile teachers who were willing to conform to the educational policies of the school or district.

### **Technologies of the Self**

Lastly, was the power relations concept of technologies of the self. Technologies could be described as items to improve the productivity and training that result in the shaping of individuals (Peters & Beasley, 2008). Teachers might possibly consider the actual high stakes testing and Plan 2020 as a technology of the self, used to judge and assess not only student performance, but also a teacher's performance in the classroom. For the teacher's evaluation, many states and districts already used student achievement data on standardized assessments as a factor in evaluations. As a technology of the self, the teacher might determine that low student achievement is a result of instructional practices used in the classroom, and might alter pedagogy that improved student achievement. The assessment could be considered a technology of the self, hoping to alter the instructional practices that enabled teachers to be more productive and increase student test scores so that schools and districts make the necessary benchmarks to maintain AYP or Alabama's Plan 2020 requirements, thereby creating a creditable view within the community. As Foucault (1977) argues, power also includes self-regulation.

I used the power relations theory of Foucault as a methodological consideration to construct meaning from the power dynamics of governmentality, shift of the self, discipline and punishment, and the use of technologies of the self as part of a critical lens that evaluated the impact of educational policies - specifically high stakes testing and Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum inside social studies classrooms.

## **Research Design**

An instrumental case study, which is a multi-case design, attempts to gauge the situation in multiple locations, will be used as a research design (Stake, 2006). This type of design allows for a coordination of understanding between the individual case studies (Stake, 2006). This design is a collection of case studies within the same context of research. Applying this type of design will allow for the collection of multiple cases in a collective nature, thus examining a phenomena in numerous cases instead of just one (Glenese, 2011; Stake, 2006). This design was applied to four 12th grade social studies classrooms in three secondary high schools, all from urban or rural school districts in Alabama that have not continuously made AYP. Two schools were in urban settings, and one school was in a rural setting. Glenese (2011) states that the purpose of a case study “tends to involve in depth and often longitudinal examination with data gathered through participant observation, in depth interviewing, and document collection and analysis” (p. 22). “Each case study is instrumental to learning about the effects of the marking regulations but there will be important coordination between the individual studies” (Stake, 2006, p.3). Ary, Jacobs Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) suggest that the greatest advantage of a case study is the possibility of depth, or understanding the individual in the totality of that individual’s environment.

In this instrumental case study, interviews, document analysis, and additional insight through a focus group interview allowed the researcher to capture and illuminate the participants’ experiences and gain more meaningful understanding through a rich triangulation of data, of the impacts that emerged from the educational policies of high stakes testing, and of Alabama’s Plan 2020.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were four male 12th grade social studies teachers, from urban and rural high schools in Alabama that have not continuously made AYP. Participants were from two urban schools, and one rural school. The two urban schools were range between 500-1000 students, they were classified as Title I schools, with a majority of students on free or reduced lunch. This meant that most of the students were from families of poverty. The rural school had between 1000-1500 students, and was not a Title I school. Participants were all 12th grade teachers because this was the last year the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam would be administered, thus ending with the senior class of 2014. They were selected from schools that had not made AYP for the last three years, which yielded greater factors that influenced instructional practice. Teachers from different ethnic backgrounds were purposefully selected, with one being a minority teacher, to give a greater variety of experiences that could be potentially influenced by the same phenomena. Two female teachers were asked to participate in the study; however, they were unwilling to volunteer. As a result, the participants were all male teachers. The participants were required to have had at least two years of teaching experience to offer instructional experience, and have students who needed to pass the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam to earn a standard diploma.

A multi-site design was developed to insure that if the impact was occurring, it would occur in different classrooms from at least two different school systems. This could render similar or different instructional factors based on the type of educational setting - either rural or urban. After they were selected, the teachers were provided the rationale for the study and informed consent documentations. The participants were given one week to consider participation and have all questions and concerns addressed.

Purposeful sampling was used as part of the research design. Purposeful sampling indicates a sample that is selected, yet can be directly related to a larger population (Weiss, 1994). Ary, Jacobs Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) state that “purposive samples believed to be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding of what they are studying” (p.472). Guba and Lincoln (1981) contend that sampling is purposive, intended to offer multiple perspectives and a fresh outlook as fully as possible. Patton (2002) argues that purposeful sampling leads to rich cases for study in depth. By virtue of it being the last year of the Social Studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was to be administered, this was the last senior class that ended the educational policy of high stakes testing. This sample of educators was the only social studies teachers who were potentially impacted by high stakes testing. Selection of this purposeful sample could pose certain limitations such as time and cost. This is due to a limited amount of funding to expand the research to a broader area in Alabama.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A qualitative triangulated method of data collection that consisted of interviews, document analysis, and focus groups were used. Glenese (2011) indicates that triangulation is the practice of using multiple forms of obtaining data. “Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.252). The selection of this method of triangulation were focused on exposing the power relations of governmentality, shift of the self, discipline and punishment, the use of technologies of the self, and how these factors combined could impact instructional practices and curriculum.

Classroom observations was one of the first desired methods of data collection. However, due to the late approval of the research, 12th grade students were already dismissed for the academic year, making observations unattainable. Observations would have granted greater

insight into observable classroom instructional practices and curriculum; however, the data were collected after the students were no longer present on school campus.

Three interviews were conducted after the high stakes testing and during the early developmental implementation of Alabama's Plan 2020. In these interviews, the teachers were given an opportunity to answer questions that might have changed their instructional methods after the examination. Teachers were able to voice their insight regarding factors concerning the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. For the interviews and focus group, a digital recorder was used to collect specific questions and responses from the researcher and the participants.

Teachers were also asked to submit three lesson plans during the months in which the graduation exam was administered, and three lesson plans during the first phases of Plan 2020. These lesson plans were evaluated using a document analysis of phenomenological theory. Finally, a focus group interview was conducted toward the end of the data collection process. In this final interview, teachers were asked questions in a group setting about their experiences with the Alabama High School Graduation Exam and their instructional methods in their classrooms. Since a shift in pedagogy had been previously established by the earlier data collection, this final session focused on factors that caused the shift, and the new accountability system which utilized End-of-Course and ACT assessments.

Before the data collection procedures were initiated, Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission was obtained. Once IRB permission was granted, and participation consent was obtained (see Appendix A), I engaged the participants in interviews, a document analysis, and a focus group. As data were collected, using phenomenological theory, categories emerged from the data and were analyzed. I then gathered the data, continued with further evaluation, and constructed the interpretation of the findings.

Table 1

*Data Chart*

Research Questions	Data Source	Data Analysis	Timeline
1. What was the perceived impact of Alabama’s high stakes testing policy on instructional practices and curriculum of four 12th grade secondary Social Studies teachers?	Interviews, Document Analysis, Focus Group Interview	Phenomenological Analysis	Data Collection Spring 2014 Data Analysis Summer 2014
2. What is the current perceived impact of Alabama’s Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum of four 12th grade secondary Social Studies teachers?	Interviews, Document Analysis, Focus Group Interview	Phenomenological Analysis	Data Collection Spring 2014 Data Analysis Summer 2014

**Interviews**

Interviewing is an active process in which the interviewer and interviewee produce knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Ary, Jacobs Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) state that

interviews “provide insight on participant perspectives, the meaning of events for the people involved, information about the site, and perhaps information on unanticipated issues” (p.480). Interviews allow the researcher to understand the daily activities of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Respondents answer questions that researchers need to untangle that their questions generate (Glenese, 2011). Three teacher interviews (see Appendix D) were conducted to gain personal insight regarding reasons teachers might change their instructional practices and the professional factors that surround the educational policies of high stakes testing and Alabama’s Plan 2020. Additional research questions that flowed from the methodological foundations of the power relations theory of Michael Foucault included governmentality, shift of the self, discipline and punishment, and the use of technologies of the self were developed, and aided in the constructivist approach of building knowledge as themes emerged from the data and through phenomenological theory.

I also used a notebook to detail body language or construct additional questions that arose during the interview process. Questions may have developed spontaneously through interaction and dialogue (Glenese, 2011). All of the data collected during the interviews, both written and recorded, were transcribed for analysis. These transcriptions were sent to the participants for confirmation as a form of member checking, thus adding reliability and validity to the data.

### **Document Analysis**

Another qualitative data source used in this investigation was document analysis. Document analysis requires that data, from documents produced and shared, are examined and interpreted to gain greater understanding and knowledge (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Documents can include “advertisements, agendas, attendance registers, minutes from a meeting, manuals, papers, books, brochures, diaries and journals, event programs, letters

and memoranda, maps and charts, newspapers, press releases, program proposals, application forms, summaries, radio and television scripts, organization and institutional reports, survey data, and various public records” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). This type of research methodology, especially in qualitative case studies, produces a rich description of a phenomenon (Stake, 1995).

Document analysis also aims at supporting other forms of qualitative data, such as interviews and observations, and verify findings (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000; Connell, Lynch, & Waring, 2001). The inclusion of names, references, and details of events makes documents advantageous in research (Yin, 1994).

For this investigation, the documents analyzed were the lesson plans from 12th grade social studies teachers. Three lesson plans were analyzed and examined from August to November of the school year, which was the time frame in which the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was still used as an exit document in order to receive a high school diploma. Three additional lesson plans were gathered and evaluated from January to May, which was the time frame of a new educational policy adopted by the Alabama State Department of Education entitled Alabama’s Plan 2020. After these documents were collected, they were examined and analyzed using phenomenological theory.

The protocol for document analysis was to allow the teacher participants to choose two options for lesson plan collection. The researcher requested and collected a hard copy of the participants’ lesson plans, or the participants submitted a digital copy by email.

### **Focus Group**

A focus group, which is similar to a group interview, is centered on a certain issue, and allows the researcher to stimulate group discussion and note the interaction of the group (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). This creates an environment where focused questions can

be expressed from various perspectives using multiple opinions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This type of interview allows the researcher to identify trends and perceptions revealed through a thorough evaluation (Krueger & Casey, 2008). One focus group interview, comprised of the four teacher participants, was conducted to give the participants the opportunity to voice their instructional concerns and to share the professional practices used in their own classrooms. The intent of the focus group was to encourage further discussion regarding the factors concerning testing from the various perspectives of the participants as they contributed in the development and construction of truth regarding testing.

Comparable to the interview process, I used a video recorder for capturing the answers to prescribed questions. I also took notes to be added for field notes. All of the data collected during the focus group, both written and recorded, were transcribed for analysis. These transcriptions were sent to the participants for confirmation as a form of member checking, thus adding reliability and validity to the data.

### **Phenomenological Data Analysis**

The type of analysis I used in this research is phenomenology. Phenomenology is the systematic approach of interpreting an experience as perceived by the people that participated in it (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Patton (2002) describes phenomenology as an approach to analyze the meaning of a lived experience. Instead of developing categories initially without looking at the data, categories developed as the data was read, analyzed, and coded; identifying the essence of the phenomenon. This process of identification is referred to as phenomenological reduction (Patton, 2002). Then the data was clustered around emergent themes (Creswell, 1998). Finally, structural synthesis is conducted, which describes the

phenomenon and its structure (Creswell, 1998). Multiple forms of data collection were used over a period of time instead of using one type of source.

While conducting interviews for this research, transcriptions, memos, and field notes will be analyzed and categories will be gradually developed. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) suggest that this experience offers a unique opportunity as the researcher becomes a member of the environment, thus experiencing the same effects as the participants. This situation offered the researcher incredible insight into the experience of the participants, resulting in the creation of a sense of “closeness” to the actual event or phenomena. Field notes were constructed with the intended purpose of developing a preliminary outline, which allowed for the formulation of more detailed notes (Wolfinger, 2002).

Document analysis involves the process of skimming, reading, and interpreting (Bowen, 2009). The next sequence is to reexamine the data again, thus adding additional categories, if needed, or narrowing the categories throughout the second coding process; referred phenomenological reduction. This analysis continued until saturation occurred, allowing the “discovery” and interaction of the phenomena to become clear and evident (Creswell, 1998). Subsequently, a secondary analysis was performed during a member check within research triangulation. During these data collection methods the categories are not predetermined, but emerged as the data was assessed. I intended to link emerging themes from phenomenology to the power relations of Foucault, and then use Foucault as a critical lens, thus providing a constant shift of the macro to the micro, and then the micro to the macro.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I once thought of positionality as a singular or linear form to simply exclude my viewpoint or insight from polluting the data and eventually the results of my research.

Positionality is the concept of interaction between me, the participants, and the environment. From the micro to the macro, positionality had infused itself in my research with the environment, which is the place of interconnection between the social phenomena and the participants' embodiment; as the body and the senses are exposed, and social justice; the causality of radical change for the social good of the community.

The environment was a critical aspect the research; it created the interconnection between the social phenomena and the participants. I encroached on the environment by intending to serve as an active participant within the research. I hoped to have greater insight by experiencing the environmental conditions and pressures along with my participants. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) suggest, this experience offers a unique opportunity as the researcher becomes a member of the environment, thus experiencing the same effects as the participants.

Another important part of positionality is embodiment. Embodiment can be portrayed in many different facets. One part of embodiment is the physical/sensory experience in which the senses are investigated in a culturally specific context (Pink, 2009). The sensory experience can be opened as the body and the senses can be exposed, possibly from the pressures of testing. From the student's and teacher's perspective, the physical conformity of school and the body greatly resemble the "embodied" and "confined" ideology of standardized tests, thus conforming to the social norms that are expected. For students and teachers to be praised for their performance, conforming accountability must be insured regardless of the embodied cost. Containing the body is the objective and goal, just as it is to contain the knowledge obtained and measured.

Another embodied element is the perceptual aspects of power that the researcher brings to the environment and the effects of embodiment. Inadvertently, researcher's bodies reinforce power over their participants (Ellington, 2006). Researchers can be viewed as "experts" or "knowledgeable," leaving the participants as secondary experts within the field of research. Although this might be unfounded, impressionable views of the researcher as being an "expert" only promotes the power hierarchy within the research process. One way to combat this situation was for the researcher to divulge the results and information so that participants could take part in the construction of knowledge, instead of the researcher building knowledge individually. Instead of the researcher becoming the expert, all those who participated became a part of the community of scholars for knowledge construction. Incorporating the participants in the knowledge building and process is one directional method of ending the authoritarian elitism of scholarship.

One of my biggest fears is the aspect of participant exploitation. I am concerned that the embodied effect that I used - the participants to construct knowledge - will only benefit me. What will happen after the process is finished? Although I may have a constructed knowledge that I could publish or benefit from in the scholarly community, the participants would still be in the same environment with little or no benefit from the research. Even though participant exploitation could exist, it must be described early within the research process, along with the benefits and cautions. The participants must realize how the research will add to the body of knowledge and become the mechanism to spark the social justice portion of the process.

Part of my own positionality emerged concerning the goal of the research. In my subjective nature of truth, I advocated, as a part of social justice, for the end to the pragmatic state of high stakes testing in education. Although this could be considered an advantageous

goal, I felt that part of my research responsibility was to become an advocate for the research, the participants, and the effects on the realm of education. “Objective representation of reality is impossible” (Denzin, 2010, p. 38). This social justice response was to actively advocate for change; a change in policy, assessment, and accountability. I intended, at the end of the research, to fully disclose my results and my goals for the findings. This will provide an opportunity to give teachers a voice concerning high stakes standardized testing. With this admission prior to beginning the research, I have confronted my own positionality and how it can affect the research. In my construction of knowledge, I clearly accepted my intent to promote social justice. Denzin (2010) argues that social justice can help produce positive change in the world. I accepted my subjective nature and my course of social justice. Like Denzin, my version of social justice is produce a positive change in the world; specifically education. With regards to this study, this research is significant because of the evaluation of educational policies and their possible impact of instructional practices and curriculum.

I first thought that positionality should be a neutral concept that would not taint the results of the research; that objectivity would create a stronger sense of validity. However, this objective view is obsolete because the subjective layers of truth emerged as we, as researchers, all have a subjective perception of the knowledge constructed and examined. Positionality was a circular process that incorporated the views of the researcher, the environment, the embodiment of the researcher, the issues of hierarchy power order, the participants, and the benefits of social justice. Omissions of these challenges and issues can only spring ideas and plans on how to both manage and embrace these aspects of positionality. One goal that developed from my positionality was to use a type of theoretical framework to critically analyze my research topic; therefore, I selected the theoretical framework of constructivism.

## **Trustworthiness/Validity**

Validity is a term used to define the trustworthiness of a dissertation. Lather (2007) defines validity as a boundary line of what is acceptable and not acceptable; therefore, validity is the power to distinguish between what is science and what is not science. “Researchers are ultimately responsible for their decisions and doing “good,” meaningful, trustworthy, and valid research—they cannot escape their responsibilities or leave the rigor or trustworthiness of their research for others to create, inspect, or evaluate” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p.604). As a result, the purpose of validity was to confirm the trustworthiness of the research by incorporating methods to seek the truth. Some techniques used to establish validity are researching effects, triangulating, weighing the evidence, checking the meaning of outliers, using extreme cases, following up surprises, looking for negative evidence, making if-then tests, ruling out spurious relations, replicating a finding, checking out rival explanations, and getting feedback from informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). One of the more common practices of validity is triangulation. Triangulation is accomplished when the researcher uses a variety of data sources, investigators, and multiple theoretical perspectives (Glenese, 2011). During this dissertation, investigation methods included interviews, a document analysis, and a focus group interview. Member checking was also used during the initial coding of interview transcripts so that the categories that emerged could be explained through a peer review process.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RESULTS

#### **Chapter Introduction**

This chapter discusses the data using the theoretical framework of constructivism, incorporating the foundational power relations theory of Michael Foucault, and analyzing data using phenomenology. The first section provides a brief background for the study. The enduring components of the chapter relate to the two research questions. Question 1 familiarizes the reader with the impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy on curriculum and the instructional practices of four 12th grade secondary social studies teachers. The results of Question 2 reveal the more recent impact of Alabama's Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers.

#### **Brief Background**

Previous research suggests that educational policies such as high stakes testing have directly impacted social studies curriculum and instructional practices (Au, 2009). With the full implementation of Alabama's Plan 2020, no research was yet published analyzing this new educational policy and its possible impacts on social studies curriculum and instruction. This study was designed for the purpose of discovering the impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy and Alabama's Plan 2020 on the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers. To triangulate the data in answering the research questions, interviews, document analysis, and a focus group interview were conducted (see Table 1).

## **Research Question 1**

*What was the impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy on instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers?*

To answer this question, interviews were conducted, following the interview protocol, and comprehensively coded using phenomenological analysis. The interviews (Appendix D) were constructed to allow the participants to convey tremendous insight involving the nature of high stakes testing, and the possible impact that it had on instructional practices and curriculum. Lesson plans (Appendix E) were collected and also coded and analyzed using phenomenological analysis. One focus interview (Appendix F) was conducted, allowing the participants to discuss questions in a group format, thus providing additional understanding about the impact of high stakes testing. This interview was also extensively coded and analyzed using phenomenology. From these triangulated qualitative methods of data collection (see Table 1), three emerging themes were discovered describing the impact of high stakes testing on instructional practices and curriculum of the four 12th grade social studies teachers. The themes that appeared were (1) the difference in intensity of instructional practices and curriculum shift used to review for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), (2) the pedagogical shift in social studies instruction, and (3) the performance pressures of the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

Even though the themes emerged during the coding phenomenological theory analysis, there were also comments from participants in the individual and focus group interviews concerning their perceptions about the high stakes test, the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The participants were designated Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Teacher D.

Their responses provided clarity concerning the impact that testing had on social studies instructional practices and curriculum.

### **The Difference in Intensity of Instructional Practices and Curriculum Shift**

The first theme that emerged in the coding process was the difference in intensity of instructional practices and curriculum shift. From the individual interviews, the document analysis of lesson plans, and the focus group interview, there was evidence that the intensity of instructional practices to review and prepare for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam varied throughout the year. During daily practice, from August to November of 2013, every teacher in this study conducted some form of daily review or test preparation for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Evidence collected and analyzed found that although this was a part of the participants' daily practices, it did not cover the entire lesson every day. These types of instructional methods included activities such as bell ringers, warm ups, review games, and flash cards. Regarding bell ringers, Teacher C stated, "Instead of economics and government bell ringers, I did graduation exam bell ringers and had a quiz, usually on a weekly basis." As the 12th grade social studies teachers got closer in schedule to the graduation exam, especially within two weeks of each graduation exam period, the instructional practices of test preparation intensified, thus becoming the dominant form of instruction. Teacher C further stated,

Especially in classes where that many kids still needed to practice. You would almost have to deviate away from certain things; maybe we are on the executive branch of U.S. government, but I know for a fact that the graduation exam is coming up in two weeks; maybe we have to go back and review the Constitution. We would have to go back to the Articles of Confederation; we have to go back to some United States history.

Besides the professional decisions that were made by the teachers regarding the frequency of instructional practices, administrative factors also influenced the frequency. Teacher B stated,

Administrators did expect you to be focused on the exam prior to its administration, to basically stop what you were doing, at least two weeks before the exam was given, and to focus on exam material and during that time, to cram as much of that stuff in as you possibly could. So, it turned into very much a rogue learning sort of situation, especially in times when we were very test focused, in those weeks before the exam. So three times, so two weeks before each test, I'm having to back down on government, and then on a caveat of that, not every student had to take the exam.

As the intensity of instructional practices altered during the testing period, the curriculum of the 12th grade social studies teachers in the study also transformed. Through a quarter of their daily practice, all of the social studies teachers in this study focused on the Alabama Course of Study, and minimally used part of their instructional time in preparation for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. As the school schedule moved closer to the actual graduation examination time frame, especially within two weeks of the exam, all of the teachers shifted their curriculum away from the Alabama Course of Study, and solely focused on the social studies content of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Teacher C stated,

I mean theoretically, you're supposed to teach it as part of the daily curriculum, whether with a starter or a warm up or whatever; but in reality, when you shut the door, it has to be about this graduation stuff. It is supposed to be intertwined throughout, but in reality it was much more important than that.

Teacher B explained the significance of curriculum on the state assessment, "The graduation exam effected the things that I chose to cover in class, um, essentially anything on the exam

became important, regardless of whether I think it's actually something important for students to know". Instead of teaching their class content, every 12th grade social studies teacher in this study moved from teaching government and economics, and focused primarily on curriculum covered in the 10th and 11th grade U.S. history courses, which is the greater part of the social studies eligible content on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Teacher B further stated,

The grad exam standards to me, when you are told quit one thing and start doing another. You're told give priority to these standards. Ultimately if I had not covered everything in the Alabama Course of Study, not many people would have cared at all, but if I had not reviewed these graduation exam standards then it would have come out well, you never told us about this and people would have cared.

Teacher C added, "The graduation exam, by making it a high stakes test, it matters; we will meet every seven years to discuss it; these 100 questions, these are the really important things. We had an Alabama High School Graduation Exam question that we did every single day". Teacher C went on to describe the deviation that occurred in the curriculum,

These seniors that I had would be taking government; they had not had any U.S. history in at least two years. If it was the block, it is was two and half years; so it requires us, it requires me at least, to deviate from the curriculum, more so as we approached the exam though. They know it's a big deal; it's a high stakes test, and it made you deviate from the curriculum, but it was not something that I necessarily got worked up over.

Daily instructional planning was also impacted by the shift in curriculum. Teacher D commented,

On our lesson plans, there was a place that indicated, it had ASHGE on there, you know specifically - What are you going to do specifically pertaining to the graduation exam? So

with that you had to, you know, stick with the lesson plan, and come up with something that had to deal with the grad exam.

### **Pedagogical Shift**

Another emerging theme that developed during the coding and analysis process was the pedagogical or instructional shift evident in all of these 12th grade social studies classrooms. In average daily practice and review or test preparation, activities such as bell ringers, warm ups, flash cards, review games, and PowerPoint reviews were merely a part of the instructional time. Teacher A added,

For me, I found myself very consciously focusing on the factual material that the exam covered, and kind of a check list, cover this, cover this, and teach it in such a way to at least get it on a multiple choice test, to some extent, focusing more on facts than concepts.

One of the participants mentioned his daily involvement with remedial methods in preparation for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Teacher C stated, “I started off in my classroom my first eight years here, warm up, then graduation exam question”.

Additional instructional methods that accompanied daily lessons included the infusion of technology resources, direct instruction, small group discussions, cooperative learning, the evaluation of primary documents, formal writing, literacy reading strategies that were a part of strategic teaching, and informal and formal assessments. As time progressed, getting closer to the date of the examination, especially during the two week period before the test, these review instructional methods intensified from being a part of daily practice, to becoming the dominant

or only instructional practices used in preparation for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Teacher B stated,

I did a lot of rote memorization, just a lot of drilling, and information that they might memorize until the day of the test and then immediately forget, which ideologically is not what I'm all about, but it seemed like the best way to recall low level facts.

Another type of drill and preparation instructional practice was the use of flash cards so students could memorize important dates, people, and places. Teacher C explained,

We made flash cards; it was a lot of memorization stuff. The social studies exam was not deep thinking; it was not the causes of the Civil War, or the geopolitical implications of the Articles of Confederation. It was, what year was the Articles of Confederation, the document that rules this country? So we did not focus on a lot of high learning things, it was here, you remember the Articles of Confederation from 1781-1789.

Another type of remediation and test preparation included small group cooperative learning, in which students would review and quiz each other. Teacher D added,

I don't want to say rote memorization, but it was just simple recall, answer, multiple choice, things they would see on the test, the structure of the test. Flashcards, small groups, peer instruction, peer tutoring; What else did we use? Visual aids. These types of drill and practice were successful and proven methods, despite the shallow depth of learning.

According to Teacher A,

I had a list of 100 flash card facts, and I never once, not one time, had a kid make 100 flash card facts and learn them, never had one fail the exam. So I always felt like if I had

a kid that did not pass the graduation exam, it was because they did not do what I asked them to do, period.

This shift in instructional methodology moved from lessons that were student driven or student centered, to lessons where teachers became the center of test preparation. During the policy of high stakes testing, a portion of the daily lesson plans was consumed with review activities.

Teacher D stated, “But leading up towards it, it became more teacher driven. I was... I even had some of the students quiz the whole class sometimes; but when it got closer to the test, usually I was the one that quizzed the whole class”. Many of the teachers felt they were preparing students to remember facts and regurgitate those for the purpose of testing, which is one of the lowest forms of learning.

### **Performance Pressures**

The last major theme that materialized was the issue of performance pressures, both administrative and personal. All of the teachers felt administrators placed instructional demands, either explicit or implied, in relation to preparation for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. These instructional demands were required on a daily basis and reviewed before the graduation exam. Teacher C commented,

You are viewed somewhat among your administrators and peers by your success or failure there. So I think it's a big factor, because teacher A had all these kids last year, and I'm teaching 11th grade, and you know I had 25 kids that still need to pass the grad exam then you are not doing something right. So I think your biggest factor is your reputation among your peers and especially your administrators. You better get them ready or you're not paying your mortgage, or you're doing something different. Because that's what many of the administrators are looking at, not how well you're teaching or

how poorly you're teaching, but rather wow.... This guy has 98% of his class pass, or he had this kid pass the graduation exam under his watch. You know, sometimes it's outside pressure from administration, to where you want those numbers, those numbers are published in the newspaper, and the outside they look at those numbers and that's a big deal, and those administrators did it. They opened the faculty meeting every year, hey, you know the grad standards, those need to be implemented at least partly on a daily basis. You need to be specifically mentioning something about graduation requirements daily, that was reiterated at every faculty meeting; especially at some of these lower level classes where you had 50% of the kids that had not yet passed it. There were expectations that you do something about it.

Teachers noticed that despite teaching at multiple schools, administrators had the same outlook and procedure for blocking out instructional time to review for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Teacher B states,

At the different high schools that I've taught at, at each one I've had administration at each one say, it's time to stop and it's time to review for the graduation exam. I've been told that explicitly every place that I have worked. Then you talked about your reputation being built on it, we had done a good job getting kids over the hump for the graduation exam, we had people coming around patting us on the back. Then they took it away, but you had people come around, hey nice job for that, but not for creative lesson plan ideas. Then you know where the priorities lie. I think it was pretty wide spread emphasis, I think administrators definitely put emphasis on it; they put emphasis on me and the kids.

Instructional planning was also impacted, as teachers were required to display the instructional planning for preparing students to take the state assessment. Teacher D described,

On our lesson plans, there was a place that indicated, it had AHSGE on there, you know specifically, what are you going to do specifically pertaining to the graduation exam? So with that, you had to, you know, stick with the lesson plan, and come up with something that had to deal with grad exam.

Even with the demands of administrators, all of these 12th grade teachers felt a personal responsibility to help students pass the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The participants in the study all described the importance of the high stakes test, and what was ultimately in jeopardy for students; therefore, the teachers felt it was their duty, calling, and obligation to help the students pass the examination. Teacher D stated, “Yeah, I agree; I do feel that you are going to let the kids down if you don’t adequately prepare them for something that it going to have that much of an effect on their life.” Teacher A added, “I even had a girl that I did not teach, but I tutored for the graduation exam come up and hugged my neck for helping her pass the exam.” Even if the teachers disagreed with the instructional methods that they used, from their own personal experiences, this was the best way to prepare students for the high stakes test. Teacher B stated,

I think it had to be focused somewhat on that, because it was such a high stakes test, to where you felt as if you were failing the kids if you did not adequately prepare them for that. So even if you disagreed with it pedagogically, if you felt, your job is ultimately to prepare those for success, and if you did not address it then you were doing them a disservice. I emphasized it; I choose to do that because I did not want to let anybody down. I didn’t want my kids not to pass the test, and the kids themselves put emphasis on it because they realize they can’t graduate without it.

Besides administrative pressure, personal obligations to students and the compassionate need to see their students pass the test were also reasons to perform well on the high stakes test. Teacher C explained,

I think you feel a certain amount of pressure as a teacher. You know, you get to know these kids, you love these kids, and you know that it is a big deal to them. So, while you feel pressure to teach them the duties of the president, it's still important to them, and to be quiet honest, probably more important to them and their success, to go ahead and prepare them to pass the graduation exam.

Due to the pressures of high stakes testing, teachers did everything they could to help students pass the state assessment. Teacher A stated, "I always felt an enormous amount of pressure to do all that I could to help a kid graduate from high school".

### **Summary of Research Question 1**

The four teachers in this study identified the impact high stakes testing had on instructional practices and curriculum, specifically the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam identifying the instructional intensity and curriculum shift, pedagogical shift, and performance pressures. The uniqueness of the "two week" period of time during their academic year spent reviewing for the graduation exam became the dominant form of instructional practice. The issue of intensity was an emergent theme not found in previous research literature. The teachers also confirmed that although they used the Alabama Course of Study during the academic year, with a slight focus on the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, when they approached the examination period, the curriculum shifted from the Alabama Course of Study to the eligible content for the graduation exam. These factors led to the pedagogical shift from classrooms that experienced the infusion of technology

resources, direct instruction, small group discussions, cooperative learning, the evaluation of primary documents, formal writing, and literacy reading strategies that incorporated graduation exam bell ringers, warm ups, flash cards and review games, to classrooms in which bell ringers, warm ups, flash cards, and review games became the dominant or only instructional methods applied before the graduation exam. The teachers described the administrative pressures of the exam and noted their personal obligations to help their students pass this form of high stakes testing.

## **Research Question 2**

*What is the current impact of Alabama's Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers?*

To adequately answer this question, interviews were conducted (see Appendix D), following the interview protocol, and systematically coded using phenomenological analysis. The interviews were developed to allow the participants the opportunity to expand their understanding of the nature of Plan 2020, and the possible impact that it had on instructional practices and curriculum. In addition, lesson plans were collected (see Appendix E) and also coded and analyzed using phenomenology. Lastly, a focus interview was conducted (see Appendix F), allowing the participants the opportunity to discuss questions in a group format, thus providing them with additional knowledge about the impact of Plan 2020. This interview was also expansively coded and analyzed using phenomenology. From these triangulated qualitative methods of data collection (see Table 1), three initial themes were revealed, revealing the impact Alabama's Plan 2020 had on instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade social studies teachers. The three themes that appeared within the data were (1) the unintentional

failure of not recognizing all of the components of Plan 2020 and how they impact curriculum and instruction, (2) the newfound autonomy in Plan 2020, and (3) the fear of the return of testing.

### **Failure of Distinguishing the Components of Alabama's Plan 2020**

Although all of the teachers had extensive knowledge about Alabama's high stakes testing policy and the use of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, all of them had very little knowledge concerning Alabama's Plan 2020. Teachers openly admitted their lack of knowledge regarding Alabama's Plan 2020, and what administrators might look for with this new instructional curriculum. When Teacher B was asked about College and Career Readiness Standards, he stated

Concerning specifically College and Career Readiness and Plan 2020... No, I guess I don't know what they are looking for with regard to those things. I feel like I know what they are looking for in other areas, but not with regard to that. I'm honestly not familiar with Plan 2020.

Due to the abrupt and immediate implementation of this educational policy, some teachers confused the policy with technology based standards. Teacher A stated, "But now part of the College and Career Readiness I think is a more independent use of technology; I completely agree with that. I've grown a lot in the past few years, but I have a lot of growth to do with my own comfort level". In addition, they did not realize that the College and Career Readiness Standards were more instructional in nature than a true social studies content curriculum. They identified portions relating to skills and writing, but added little information pertaining to the use of primary sources and vocabulary, which was a part of the social studies literacy standards of CCRS. Teacher B stated,

And if there has to be some kind of assessment for kids, that has to be standardized at all, I would like it to be something that is more skill based, and I feel like the CCRS standards are moving us in that direction, so I feel do about that.

Throughout all methods of data collection, no teachers within the study ever mentioned the End-of-Course assessment, which should have been implemented during the academic year, but was delayed by the state. There was some association with the ACT assessment, but with this being a participatory part of Plan 2020, the teachers viewed this as the next possible high stakes test.

Teacher A commented,

Unfortunately, I think so. The ACT has its place, but I won't want everyone judged on it. As long as the vast number of colleges and universities use the ACT as the standard of admission and scholarships, then you talk about high stakes testing? Have we switched from one test to another then? To give the ACT to measure the educational progress, the only way to do it is to give the test in 9th grade and give it again in 12th grade, and showing the progress.

### **Newfound Autonomy of Plan 2020**

Even with their limited knowledge about Plan 2020, all of the teachers felt a new form of autonomy and sense of relief from no longer having to prepare for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. One advantage of this newfound autonomy was their abilities to plan instructional activities that were rarely experienced due to the instructional restraints of the graduation exam. The removal of the Alabama High School Graduation also profoundly affected curriculum. Instead of focusing on the eligible testing content curriculum, which was limited in spectrum, the teachers were able to primarily focus on the social studies Alabama Course of Study for content. The lesson plans analyzed using phenomenology supported this conclusion

because the Alabama High School Graduation Exam review activities were completely removed from the teachers' lesson plans. Teachers experienced greater instructional range and were no longer restricted by the testable social studies content of the graduation exam. Teacher B explained,

I liked all the time that it freed up, that was nice. Like, I got to do some projects in my U.S. history class that I would never have gotten to do. I would have spent that time reviewing for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. This year, when we got to the 50s and 60s, I was able to have a Civil Rights project, and it took them three weeks to do it. It took them a while to research their subject, put it into technology, and do presentations. I would have never had that time; they would have way too much time to spend. I would have not been able to do it earlier because it had nothing to do with the graduation exam.

With the test being removed from the requirements of graduation, some teachers felt that instead of focusing on reviews, they could have more instructional time and autonomy to improve instructional quality. Teacher D stated,

After looking back at my own experience over the past year, once we got rid of the test, like I said, I felt like I had more time to do higher quality instruction, and things I would not have had the chance before. That freed me to teach on a higher level and make a more lasting impact, so to me getting rid of the test, that was very much high stakes, and didn't always reflect someone's ability accurately, and pushed me to teach at the lowest possible level.

This change in educational policy offered an opportunity for greater professional decision making regarding instructional practices and curriculum. Teacher C commented,

For teachers, I think it gives us more autonomy in the classroom, to allow us, to be honest, to do what we have been trained to do, to do what we have been educated to do, to teach these kids, not just content knowledge, but pedagogically; you know, to where we are learning, and we all know what works and what doesn't work.

With the removal of the high stakes test, many teachers felt this new educational policy provided a new type of instructional relief. Teacher C explained,

I started every day off with a graduation exam question, before we got into anything government related. But I don't ever do that. Now we start off with a word of the day. Now we talk about something in the unit, maybe something like the press secretary or something like that, maybe something we never get to in the lectures. We spend 10 minutes talking about the role of the press secretary, but before that, we would be solely on some specific fact on the Civil War.

Besides instructional autonomy and having greater professional decision making, changing the educational policy of high stakes testing to Alabama's Plan 2020 allowed for more instructional time for larger activities such as project based learning. Teacher B explained,

Without a state test, the content that I covered would have been slightly different, but maybe not nearly as much as the way that I taught and the types of assignments that I gave. Without the state test, you can be more free, to be more of a facilitator of student learning. You can also do more things where you allow the students to take ownership of their own learning in terms of choosing their own research subjects and how they are going to be graded; choose their projects and that kind of thing. Without a state test, you can also take more time to do more long-term projects; have kids put together products to

show that they are learning; give them time to actually do research and write papers, because not only do you gain the time where you used to not be able to go over new content; that was devoted to cramming for the test. Also, because you can go so much more in depth with subjects, because if you don't cover something in depth, that's all right, maybe in that time, you developed their ability to write a paper, or put together a PowerPoint presentation, or to compare and contrast two things; you spend more time on thinking and writing and listening skills. I'm no longer spending weeks before each exam cramming for that exam. That's one thing that I think is good. And number two, I can feel more free to bring in things like project based learning, and I feel more free to experiment with different lesson plan ideas and different lesson types.

Another positive result of the change in policy was the potential to take the course and learning to outside, real world experiences where learning can become more relevant. Teacher D stated, I would, wow, I would feel free, more open. I would feel more open to, and I've done this a couple of times, to just go outside, and see government outside, on our campus. A street sign, and how does government affect this street sign? However you want to phrase it. I would feel more free, more open, to um, to know that I can teach you. I think you would have a group of people, students that would be relieved that they do not have to, that this test would cause them not go on in life, to not be able to receive a diploma; to not be able to get this or that or go to school or whatever, and so you would have a group of kids that would not be afraid to try something different or take a risk on learning or whatever.

## **Fear of the Return of Testing**

Another emerging theme that related to the impact of Alabama's Plan 2020, was the possible return to standardized testing in Alabama, and the possible consequences it could have involving teacher evaluation, similar to other states, such as Florida, that use students' test scores to reflect classroom performance (Isensee & Butrymowicz, 2011). Many of the teachers revealed that if they were to be measured by students' test scores, it would affect their job location and their instructional methods. They viewed the practice as an unfair measure of teacher performance. Teacher B commented,

I would feel essentially penalized because of where I chose to work. I would have a hard time feeling that it was fair, that I was going to be evaluated negatively, because of the place that I work, while teachers at schools that were more affluent or had students that had stronger academic backgrounds would receive more positive evaluations. That would bother me.

They also believed that the use of standardized testing to measure teacher performance was poor in nature, and not a good measuring tool for the instruction given in the classroom. Teacher B continued,

I don't think you can consider standardized test scores to be the measure of the teachers, or you have to believe that there is something good and capable about teachers that teach that bring in students from the highest socio-economic levels, and all teachers at schools that are classified as failing are just bad at their jobs. I don't believe that's the case; there are too many factors that isolate that to say that this test is bad because the quality of teaching is poor.

When asked about test results changing their instructional practices, Teacher C replied,

I guess it would even further drive us in that direction, to where that would be all we really cared about. No longer do we care about any of them having the knowledge of why World War I led to World War II. We have to know this ended World War I in this year, everything else be darned. Why teach research skills? Nothing. They are not going to do research on the graduation exam. Why teach writing skills? Further down the line, it will make it worse. Just teach them to bubble in the right answer. You're right, incentives shape behavior. If we are incentivized to teach at the lowest possible level, that is what people will do to protect their jobs. I'd be very focused on getting a good score on that evaluation tool. Because if that's what my job security depends on, then that's what I'm going to be focused on. I think anyone else would do the same thing, just out of a sense of self-preservation.

Another factor that could influence the dynamics of using testing as a measure of teacher performance could be the actual students who were tested. Teacher C added,

I would feel pressure, but that's not the right word. I would feel that it's not a fair slate. There are so many factors that are going into this; I mean, if you had a classroom of kids that were lower socio-economic status, if you had a classroom with kids that were not as high performing, even IQ level, then is that fair? I think it would have to; I mean, if you were determined, how that, this kid does well on the test is how your evaluation goes on your file whatever, then I think you would straight up teach to that test. I mean nothing else; we can all say that we would stay true to ourselves, but I don't care, but let's be honest; no one wants to be viewed poorly.

Another teacher mentioned that there are multiple variables that could potentially impact the results. Teacher D commented,

I would be nervous; I would be scared that my performance would be based off of my students' performances. Whether the students were not having a good day, didn't test well that day, or if the students did not like me. It is just a whole bunch of variables placed into that.

### **Summary of Research Question 2**

The four teachers in this study clearly identified the impact that Alabama's Plan 2020 had on instructional practices and curriculum by the three themes that appeared within the data, which included (1) the unintentional failure of not recognizing all of the components of Plan 2020 and how they impact curriculum and instruction, (2) the newfound autonomy in Plan 2020, and (3) the fear of the return of testing. Since Alabama's Plan 2020 was immediately put into place with the end of the graduation exam, the teachers openly admitted to not knowing all the content and concepts of Alabama's Plan 2020. With the elimination of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, teachers had a greater sense of autonomy regarding classroom instruction because of not having to be instructionally restricted by the high stakes test. They explained that if testing returns, even to fit Alabama's Plan 2020, it would affect their job environment, classroom instruction and curriculum, and would be a poor measure of classroom instruction and teacher performance.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the qualitative data was obtained by interviews, a document analysis of lesson plans, and one focus group interview. All of the data were analyzed extensively using phenomenology. The data exposed three themes that arose from the impact high stakes testing had on instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade social studies teachers. The themes that appeared are (1) the difference in intensity of instructional practices and curriculum shift, (2)

the pedagogical shift in social studies instruction, and (3) the performance pressures of high stakes testing, specifically the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The data also concluded that three emerging themes were revealed while examining the impact Alabama's Plan 2020 had on the instructional practices and the curriculum of 12th grade social studies teachers. The three themes that appeared within the data are (1) not recognizing all of the components of Plan 2020 and how they impact curriculum and instruction, (2) the newfound autonomy in Plan 2020, and (3) the fear of the return of testing. Chapter five will exhibit conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### **Chapter Introduction**

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to investigate the potential impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy and Plan 2020 on the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers. By using the theoretical framework of constructivism, and through the power relations theory of Michael Foucault, this research used phenomenological theory analysis to expose, interpret, and evaluate the findings of this investigation. The outcomes of Research Questions 1 and 2 uncovered six themes that answered both research questions. The discussion section will provide an explanation and implication for each emergent theme, and the chapter will end with a discussion on the implications for social studies teachers and possible areas of future research.

#### **Theoretical Framework of Constructivism**

This investigation is grounded in the theoretical framework of constructivism, and therefore attempts to provide greater understanding of why participants construct meanings and actions from certain situations. Charmaz (2006) explains that constructivism is a defining circumstance in which participants construct meanings and actions. Glense (2011) describes that the nature of constructivism is entrenched from interpretivism, which shares the understanding of human ideas and interactions in specific cultural contexts. Thus, understanding why and how the educational policies of high stakes testing and Alabama's Plan 2020 impacted the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade social studies is the fundamental lens of evaluating this

research. I endeavored to understand and construct meaning from the marginalized group, and how the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam and Alabama's Plan 2020 impacted the instructional practices and curriculum of the participants within the 2013-2014 academic school year.

### **Methodological Foundations of the Power Relations Theory of Michael Foucault**

Due to the understanding nature of the constructivist framework, this theoretically overlaps other circumstances such as the power relations of the classroom. The methodological consideration that supported the theoretical framework of constructivism is the power relations theory of Michael Foucault. The concepts of governmentality, shift of the self, discipline and punishment, and the use of technologies of the self, was used to establish the structure of the investigation. Based on previous literary research, these four components of Michael Foucault's power relations theory established a structure or critical lens that led to the development of interview and focus group interview questions that helped to understand the reasons of why, thus supporting the theoretical framework of constructivism in this research.

One of the main power relations theory was governmentality. Governmentality is the pressure imposed by the institution, on individuals, to produce docile citizens (Foucault, 1988). Governmentality became intensely engrained in the federal, state, and local school districts as power and pressure flows directly into localized classrooms; therefore, the docile citizens are not only the students, but also the teachers who conformed to the mandates imposed. Governmentality is the exercise of political power (Peters and Beasley, 2008). Localized districts placed instructional priorities in schools in an attempt to meet the federal goal of Annual Yearly Progress that was once a part of *No Child Left Behind*, which included the high stakes testing policy, or currently the AMOs granted by Alabama's waiver: Alabama's Plan 2020.

Another part of power relations theory is the shift of the self. Shift of the self occurs when teachers who were self-determining and autonomous in their classroom instruction become willing participants of the state, yielding professional judgment and practice due to governmentality. Foucault (1977) contends that the institution is a comprehensive disciplinary apparatus that conforms all aspects of the individual. Due to the pressure of local schools and districts, and the influence of governmentality, the shift of the self was in the alteration of independent classroom instructional practitioners to automated, skilled, technical, scripted classroom teachers who become compliant practitioners fearing the evaluation and instructional repercussion from their administration.

A fear that is incorporated with the power relations theory is the fear of discipline and punishment. Discipline and punishment are the penalties of failing to follow the suggested activities (Pongratz, 2008). For teachers, with the context of high stakes testing or Alabama's Plan 2020, administrators might have anticipated certain activities that involve instructional practices and curriculum. The teachers unwillingness to conform might result in poor evaluations. For Foucault (1977), discipline and punishment are the powers in which the social body must conform to the expectations of those in power or face the consequences, regardless of if the expectations are broad or specific.

The technologies of the self, which is how efficiency could modify and expand the performance of people (Peters & Beasley, 2008). Foucault (1977) contends that technologies of the self is a form of self-regulation. Technologies of the self could have resulted from the teachers desire to improve their instructional practices for the benefit of improving their test scores, or for the improvement of student achievement. Technologies of the self is reflective in

nature, aspiring to reform practices to better themselves as individuals or the individuals around them.

### **Phenomenological Analysis**

Phenomenological analysis was the mode of analysis used in this investigation on the data that was collected. Phenomenology is the systematic approach of interpreting an experience as perceived by the people that participated in it (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Patton (2002) describes phenomenology as an approach to analyze the meaning of a lived experience. Multiple forms of data collection were used over a period of time instead of using one type of source; identifying the essence of the phenomenon. This process of identification is referred to as phenomenological reduction (Patton, 2002). Even with the creation of interview and focus group questions based on the power relations theory of Michael Foucault, which provided a structuralized context of the study, the categories that emerged from the data were not predescribed. The sequence in this research reexamined the data multiple times, thus adding additional categories as needed, or narrowing the categories throughout the coding process which continued until saturation occurred and clustered around emergent themes (Creswell, 1998). Finally, structural synthesis is conducted, which describes the phenomenon and its structure (Creswell, 1998). The results of Research Questions 1 and 2 exposed the themes of (1) the pedagogical shift in the social studies instruction, (2) the difference in intensity of instructional practices and curriculum shift used to review for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, (3) the performance pressures of high stakes testing, specifically the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, (4) the unintentional failure of not recognizing all of the components of Plan 2020 and how they impact curriculum and instruction, (5) the newfound autonomy in Plan 2020, and (6) the fear of the return of testing.

## **Emergent Themes of Question 1**

*The Pedagogical Shift in the Social Studies Instruction.* The first theme that was very evident was the dramatic shift in instructional practices due to the educational policy of high stakes testing. From the document analysis of lesson plans and the interviews conducted throughout the fall semester of the school year, under the high stakes testing policy, only a small portion of instructional time was used as part of the daily practice focusing on test preparation instructional methods. For most of the instructional time in the teachers' classes that were investigated, methods such as technology based instruction, direct instruction, small group discussions, cooperative learning, the evaluation of primary documents, formal writing, literacy and reading strategies were a part of strategic teaching; project based learning, along with informal and formal assessments. As the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam approached the school calendar, the instructional practices took a shift in direction. Instead of normal instructional practices, the drill and practice test preparation methods that were only a small portion of classroom instruction shifted to become the dominant form of instructional practices.

Teachers replaced authentic instruction with drill and practice to simply teach to the test (Froese-Germain, 2001; Solley, 2007; Riffert, 2005). Instructional practices used to prepare for state examinations are more teacher centered instruction with memorization and test example activities for the purpose of passing the test (McNeil & Valenzuela, 1999; Gerwin & Visone, 2006; Smith & Rottenberg, 1991; Vogler, 2003). Test preparation activities such as bell ringers, warm ups, flash cards, review games, and PowerPoint reviews became the prevailing forms of instructional practices, especially during the two week time frame before the examination. Bell ringers and warm ups are simplistic factual knowledge questions that began the lesson.

Authentic teaching under high stakes testing gets replaced with drill and practice or multiple choice teaching (Savage, 2003; Smith, 1991). High stakes testing can lead to low level instruction and curriculum (Hilliard, 2000; Tate, 2001). This concept of pedagogical shift is directly linked to the issue of instructional intensity.

Due to the influence and governmentality of *No Child Left Behind*, the political power structure and influence of the federal government had a direct impact on requiring states to produce state wide assessment to evaluate student achievement. This led to a perpetual filtering of state requirements, making the Alabama High School Graduation Exam the high stakes test which reflected school, teacher, and student performance, influencing the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade social studies teachers who participated in this investigation. The pedagogical shift that occurred was also a result of the shift of the self. Teachers as a matter of professional decision making were willing to conform to the pedagogical shift due to increasing their own performances and their students' performance. The teachers simply modified their instructional practices because of their belief in maximizing student performance. This pedagogical shift occurred before the testing examinations in September of 2013.

*Intensity of Instructional Practices and Curriculum Shift.* One of the most noticeable observations concerning social studies instruction, under high stakes testing, was just how dominant testing was a part of daily instructional practice. Instructional methods were used to hold schools accountable for student achievement and school effectiveness (Linn, 2000; Sanders & Horn, 1995). For each teacher, the test was infused in some manner on a daily basis into their curriculum and instruction. From August to November of 2013, every teacher directed some form of daily instructional practice as test preparation for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. These types of instructional methods included activities

such as bell ringers, warm ups, review games, and flash cards. The daily use of these instructional practices for test preparation did not consume the entire lesson; however, as time progressed during the school year, especially during the two week period before the exam, these activities became the dominant mode of instruction. Haney (2000) argues that high stakes testing narrows curriculum to test-driven content. Although previous research mentioned test preparation activities, there was no literature that mentioned the change in intensity, thus this theme became new evidence within this body of research. This instructional intensity also directly affected the social studies curriculum.

Several power relations intertwined with the issue of instructional intensity. Governmentality was clearly identified with frequency as the state examination, which was a part of the state accountability and the measuring instrument of *No Child Left Behind*, became clearly the most important aspect of instruction, curriculum, and learning. Shift of the self also overlapped frequency as the teachers moved away from their routines of daily instructional practices and followed the directions of administration. The teachers themselves made the decision to review for the graduation exam a top instructional priority. Discipline and punishment were also considerations, as teachers were concerned with the performance of their school, their classroom, and the specific students, fearing the results would lead to poor performance of instruction.

Even with the daily introduction of minimally using test preparation methods, most of the instruction given from August to December focused on curriculum grounded in the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study. As the intensity of these test preparation instructional methods increased, especially two weeks before the examination, the curriculum shifted from the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study to the eligible content Social Studies Item

Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. This curriculum shift occurred because the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam content is directly from the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

The most important curriculum therefore, is the curriculum that is going to be on the test (Froese-Germain, 2001; Savage, 2003; Taylor et.al, 2001; Vogler, 2003). High stakes testing also confirms the problem in which the test limits instruction only to the preparation of the test (Clarke et. al, 2002). Testing became more evident in the 12th grade social studies classes because the course content for 12th grade covers American government and economics, which is rarely tested on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The primary curriculum focus was teaching the American government and economics curriculum from the Alabama Course of Study, then shifting to the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The most important curriculum taught is the one that will be tested (Nichols et. al, 2005). These two curricula are completely different, leading to a greater and more exaggerated shift than in other social studies courses where the Alabama Course of Study and Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation overlap. The intensity of test preparation instructional methods and the curriculum shift had a direct relationship as an impact of the educational policy of high stakes testing was being implemented.

Governmentality infused within the curriculum shift during the policy of high stakes testing. The governmentality of performance at the school, teacher, and personal student levels, led to a shift in curriculum as the primary instructional focus moved away from the Alabama Course of study, which prescribed the 12th grade social studies content, and moved to the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Shift of the self

also occurred in the curriculum modification as teachers were either willing or asked by administration to prepare students prior to the examination period. Teachers were either willing to conform to the mandates of the power within the school, or were willing to conform due to the performance measures of themselves or the school in which the participants served.

Technologies of the self corresponded with the other power relations with the curriculum shift. Some teachers naturally shifted the curriculum as a reflective tool to improve performance with regards to the state assessment. The reflective reaction to the needs and demands of the high stakes testing policy was a contributing factor that lead to the curriculum shift.

*The Performance Pressures of High Stakes Testing.* The last theme that developed from Question 1 was the performance pressures of high stakes testing. Teachers' instructional practices can be transformed by the pressures related to the educational policy of high stakes testing (Au, 2009). One of the performance pressures that was a reoccurring element was pressure by local school administration. School districts commonly used large blocks of time and instructional programs that mirror the state exam to prepare for high stakes testing (Burroughs et. al, 2005). Due to the nature of Annual Yearly Progress, which was a part of *No Child Left Behind*, schools were graded based on their performances on state assessments. Testing created pressure from state accountability fed to school administration that was passed down to faculty at the school level. The local school administrators were deeply concerned about the academic performance of the students, and asked in several different forms that teachers ensured students were prepared to take the state assessments. High stakes testing reduces teacher professionalism as a result of accountability measures that are reliant on test-based outcomes (Chester, 2005).

Two parts of the power relations theory extremely evident in accordance with administrative pressures were governmentality and discipline and punishment. Because of state

assessments being the political measure of student achievement for *No Child Left Behind*, administrators were to ensure that teachers had adequate instructional time to prepare for the exam. This, at times, was a direct mandate in faculty meetings, but also in requirements for lesson plans, and was magnified significantly during the two week period before the examination. If conformity to administrative expectations was not met, then the assumption from the participants was a possibly poor evaluation would result as the outcome of discipline and punishment. Teachers became the docile citizens, or docile teachers by willing to conform out of fear of administrative backlash. This conformity was noticeable and accepted by the administration, a clear pressure within the classroom.

Another pressure of high stakes testing was from the internal pressure teachers placed on student performance. Due to the nature of the high stakes test, and students not being able to graduate from high school as a result of poor performance, teachers felt a deep sense of duty and responsibility to make sure that students were adequately prepared for the mandated state assessment, the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The nature of the high stakes policy is to provide public accountability for student and school performance on state testing (McNeil, 2000). A test is considered high stakes when it affects decisions about students, teachers, and schools (Madaus, 1988). During the policy of high stakes testing, everyone knows the attached consequences (Nichols et. al, 2005).

The internal pressures teachers experienced were exhibited by shift of the self and technologies of the self. Because of the outward governmentality expressed by local school administration, a shift of the self occurred in several participants. This is the willingness to obey the requirements and school expectations involving instructional review and preparation for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. This shift of the self led to conformity in instructional

practices, curriculum, and also instructional planning. Even with the outward pressures from each institution; however, internal pressures existed in technologies of the self. Teachers were deeply concerned about their class performances and student performance due to the high stakes atmosphere of the assessment, especially regarding graduation. This growing concern was reflective from the teachers' perspectives; therefore, these pressure led to instructional methods to aid students in passing the assessment.

### **Emergent Themes of Question 2**

*Failure to Recognize the Components of Alabama's Plan 2020.* One of the first themes to emerge during this study for Question 2 was the failure by teachers to recognize all of the components of Alabama's Plan 2020. Due to the abrupt ending of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam in November of 2013, Alabama's Plan 2020 was immediately put into place as the new accountability plan for public education in Alabama (Alabama State Board of Education, 2013). Part of this recognition is perhaps the failure of the Alabama State Department of Education and local districts to further explain the new educational policy. This plan consists of three main mechanisms for secondary education, especially high schools, which includes the requirements of students taking End-of-Course and ACT assessments, and the full implementation of the College and Career Readiness Standards (Alabama Department of Education, 2012).

From the data collected in this study, the End-of-Course assessments; especially in U.S. History were never mentioned. From the initial plan provided by the Alabama State Department of Education, the End-of-Course assessments would begin during the school year in which the study was conducted. The Alabama Department of Education has delayed the End-of-Course assessments in history, conducting the EOCs in only mathematics and reading. No date has been

confirmed regarding the implementation of End-of-Course assessments in history. The ACT was implemented in the spring of 2014, and was one of the more recognizable aspects of Alabama's Plan 2020; nevertheless, the direct connection of the ACT being a part of Plan 2020 was never acknowledged by the participants. Lastly was the connection of the College and Career Readiness Standards in which teachers had a limited knowledge about the standards and the link to Alabama's Plan 2020. It appears that the College and Career Readiness has not been fully explained to the participant teachers and the expected pedagogical features that are part of Alabama's Plan 2020.

Governmentality was found in this theme, but only with the educational policy itself. The teachers knew about the policy in name, but not in practice. The beginning development of governmentality in Alabama's Plan 2020 is in its efficacy, not in its totality. With the new educational policy only started in Alabama, additional research will need to be conducted to detail any of the power relations that might emerge from the new policy.

*The Newfound Autonomy in Alabama's Plan 2020.* Although the teachers who participated in this study had little knowledge of Alabama's Plan 2020, they were able to experience a newfound autonomy and instructional freedom with the removal of the high stakes educational policy, specifically regarding the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Watanabe (2007) indicates that state exams have a tremendous impact on classroom instruction. With the removal of state accountability assessment, teachers could solely focus on the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study and not the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, which was the eligible content curriculum for the examination. Testing policies often result in test preparation methods of test-like activities (Smith & Rottenberg, 1991). The most common occurrence of high stakes testing is narrowing the curriculum to what

is being tested. (Kohn, 2000; Riffert, 2005). This resulted in curriculum autonomy of focusing on the Alabama Course of Study by removing a content-rich specific curriculum guide that greatly influenced instructional practices and became dominant during preparation for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

Another autonomy that was mentioned was more pedagogical in nature, resulting in a new form of academic freedom to plan activities that were more meaningful than simply test preparation instruction that was imbedded in daily instruction and became dominant as the graduation exam approached. Teachers experienced curriculum and instructional independence with the removal of high stakes testing and the application of Alabama's Plan 2020.

One power relations that corresponded with newfound teacher autonomy was technologies of the self. After the ending of the high stakes educational policy, teachers reflected on their instructional practices and curriculum. The participants realized the abundance of instructional time that was now allotted instead of focusing on merely the state assessment, thus incorporating instructional strategies that would not have been implemented. Their reflection brought a new type of instructional freedom. The governmentality of administrative pressures relaxed and now teachers opened up their instructional repertoires, leading to a newly discovered autonomy.

*The Fear of the Return of Testing.* The last emergent themes that developed from the research concerning Alabama's Plan 2020 were the fear of the return of testing. Many of the teachers that participated feared that high stakes testing could return to Alabama, similar to other states in which teacher evaluations are based on student performance on state assessments. Synott (2001) contends that the system of testing creates a system of academic competitiveness.

The group of teachers investigated revealed that if their evaluation was measured by such a standard, it would affect curriculum, instruction, and the professional environment of teaching.

Educational policies such as *No Child Left Behind*, and more recently the Blueprint for Reform from the U.S. Department of Education, have encouraged states to use standardized assessments as a means of analyzing teacher effectiveness (McMillan, 2008). The Blueprint for Reform is the reauthorization of the of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (United States Department of Education, 2010). Palmer and Rangel (2011) contend that the system of high stakes testing aids in making teachers accountable for student achievement. Because the educational policy of high stakes testing has ended, teachers revealed the consequences of being under a structure in which testing dominated the decision making of education; therefore, the return to a testing policy could result in similar curriculum and instructional consequences. Under high stakes testing, teachers shifted instructional methods due to educational policy pressures (Au, 2009). The consequences included instructional practice that focused on the curriculum that is tested, and regurgitation techniques to promote improved performance on statewide assessments. Grant (2007) argues that testing undermines the pedagogical intent of teachers in reaction to state testing.

Even though high stakes testing no longer exists in secondary schools in Alabama, other forms of testing still exist. The End-of-Course assessments that should have been put into place involving social studies is coming soon. The effects of this examination on instructional practices and curriculum are unknown. The ACT has been introduced, but only the data has been collected. It is unknown how this data will be used by the Alabama Department of Education. When other states introduced their acceptance of the Common Core State Standards, this came with a new governmentality as states delivered new state assessments. The possibility

of a new round of state assessments that incorporate the College and Career Readiness Standards is beyond a possibility, but a definite reality. For teachers, the fear of returning to testing is simply the fear of governmentality exerting itself again, an act which dominated social studies classrooms in Alabama.

### **Implications**

The educational policy of high stakes testing had a noticeable impact on instructional practices and curriculum. The first impact was the daily instructional significance of review for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Despite the differences among schools and teachers, every teacher within this study under the high stakes testing policy of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, implemented some type of daily remediation, review, or preparation activity for the state assessment. This displayed the instructional importance that was placed on the high stakes tests and made the test a part of daily instructional practice. For 12th grade social studies teachers who participated, a daily instructional shift occurred as teachers used review games, flashcards, and drilling techniques in preparation for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, then shifted to using cooperative learning, group discussions, primary documents, and technology imbedded instruction that would fill the remaining portions of the daily lesson. Due to the nature of the state assessment being a high stakes assessment, affecting the graduation rate of schools and the personal graduation of students, teachers had administrative expectations and personal obligations and commitments to have students prepared to take the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. This instructional impact led to an intense change in the daily remediation and preparation of students, especially two weeks before the examination, where test preparation consumed all of classroom instructional time. The instructional impact of the educational policy of high stakes testing had

detrimental effects on instructional practices of the 12th grade social studies teachers who participated in this study. The impact of testing led to daily drills and instructional methods based on the regurgitation of facts that eventually dominated routine classroom instruction - instead of meaningful, relevant, and engaging instructional practices.

The policy of high stakes testing also profoundly impacted the classroom curriculum of the teachers who participated in this study. From August to November, the teachers deviated at times from the Social Studies Alabama Course of Study. Some of this deviation occurred daily, when teachers used drill and practice instructional methods to prepare for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The 12th grade teachers focused on the content that was covered on the state assessment rather than the Alabama Course of Study content for their government and economics courses. As the time approached for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, and the increase of drill and practice instructional methods also increased, the curriculum narrowed to simply the content for the state assessment. As the intensity increased during the two week period before the examination, the curriculum had completely moved away from the normal class curriculum found in the Alabama Course of Study to the testable material found in the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Testing deeply impacted the social studies curriculum from a daily deviation to a complete halt during the preparation period of the high stakes test. The policy of high stakes testing, in regard to this study, manipulated the mandated Alabama Course of Study to fit what was the accountable curriculum of the state examination.

The educational policy of Alabama's Plan 2020 also had an impact on instructional practices and curriculum. One of the most significant implications of Alabama's Plan 2020 was newfound instructional autonomy. Because of the restrictive nature of high stakes testing, the

teachers within the study found more instructional time to incorporate a greater range of instructional strategies, including more project based learning. Without having to commit time to drill and practice instructional methods, teachers could incorporate instructional methods in which student engagement and authentic teaching were promoted. However, with this newfound instructional independence, Alabama's Plan 2020 has not begun to implement the social studies End-of-Course assessments. As for the ACT, which has no social studies component, Alabama's Plan 2020 fails to fully include social studies in comparison to other academic subjects such as mathematics and reading. With the integration of the College and Career Readiness Standards and the literacy expectations placed on social studies, a new established set of pedagogical standards has emerged to address research, writing, primary document analysis, and the development of content rich vocabulary for all secondary social studies courses. Although College and Career Readiness Standards is not a content curriculum compared to that of the Alabama Course of Study, CCRS does promote different instructional outcomes that can only be accomplished by focusing on literacy instructional methods.

Alabama's Plan 2020 also impacted the curriculum of the teachers within this research. With the removal of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, the Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam no longer applied within the classroom because the eligible test curriculum was no longer needed. The remaining curriculum documents are the Social Studies Alabama Course of Study and the College and Career Readiness Standards. From January to May, teachers were able to provide a deeper focus on government and economics without the restrictive nature of reviewing for the graduation exam. Instead of the narrowed curriculum, circumstances that was due to high stakes testing, teachers focused on their class curriculums with the incorporation of literacy and writing standards that

make up the College and Career Readiness Standards. However, with this being the first year of implementing Plan 2020, additional research will need to be conducted to provide a more profound understanding of the impact on the curriculum. With Plan 2020 in place, teachers were able to return to their standards within their content curriculum, instead of the deviating state assessment curriculum that narrowly subjected students to only material that would be on the examination.

### **Future Research**

The intended purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that each educational policy, both high stakes testing and Alabama's Plan 2020, had on instructional practices and curriculum. The educational policy of high stakes testing is still a measurement that the vast majority of states are still using to measure both student achievement and teacher performance as an accountability instrument. Additional research on testing should continue, and specifically measure how each state's policy may be different, and how those policies impact instructional practices and curriculum. To be able to replicate or conduct a similar study, a state that is moving away from high stakes testing and beginning a new educational policy would offer similar insight on how these policies impact instructional practices and curriculum. Perhaps states throughout the southeast would offer regional insight regarding a change in educational policy.

Alabama's Plan 2020 is a new model that was somewhat rushed into implementation with the immediate cancellation of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam in November of 2013; therefore, additional research is needed to provide further understanding regarding how this policy will continue to impact instructional practices and curriculum, especially in social studies. Parts Alabama's Plan 2020 that include the End-of-Course and ACT assessments need

additional research concerning how these individual portions might affect instructional practice and curriculum. Will End-of-Course assessments in social studies have the same impact that the Alabama High School Graduation Exam had on 11th grade teachers and students? Will the ACT, without a social studies portion, cause social studies to become a lost subject in secondary curriculum? What will the impact be as a result of the College and Career Readiness Standards? All of these Plan 2020 issues and further research questions will need to be addressed to determine the overall impact of this educational policy.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated four 12th grade social studies teachers as part of an instrumental case study to determine the impact of high stakes testing and Alabama's Plan 2020 on instructional practices and curriculum. The investigation found that the educational policy of high stakes testing led to a shift of instruction from authentic pedagogy to test preparation and drill and practices activities to prepare for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. The intensity of these remediation activities increased, and the social studies curriculum narrowed as the test approached. The administrative and personal pressures of the state assessment led to a sense of duty and obligation because of the high stakes and results of the assessment. The transition into Alabama's Plan 2020, even with the teachers' limited knowledge concerning the educational policy, allowed for greater instructional autonomy and freedom as the teachers felt released from the restrictive testing environment. Teachers also mentioned the fear that could impact instructional practices and curriculum if testing returned, especially high stakes testing. Additional research on testing should continue as our nation still uses this educational policy as the main instrument of student achievement and teacher performance. Within Alabama,

additional research should be continuous in social studies classrooms on the impact of Plan 2020 as the implementation remains.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent To Participate

The University of Alabama  
Consent to Participate in Research

You are asked to participate in a research study by Russell Hammack, a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Alabama. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the potential impact of standardized testing and Plan 2020 on instructional practice and curriculum in secondary 12th grade Social Studies classrooms in Alabama.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Allow the researcher to interview you three times. The interviews will be digitally recorded and will not exceed sixty minutes.
- Allow the researcher to observe you in your classroom five times teaching, those classes that need the Social Studies portion to receive a standard diploma. Each observation will last approximately ninety minutes and will be videotaped for the purpose of reviewing the observations for biases by the researcher.
- Allow the researcher to collect six lesson plans for document analysis. Three lesson plans will be analyzed and examined from the August to November school year; which was the timeframe in which the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was still used. In addition, three additional lesson plans will be gathered and evaluated from January to May; which was the timeframe of a new educational policy adopted by the Alabama State Department of Education, called Plan 2020.
- Allow the researcher to conduct a focus group interview. The interview will be held one time, with a maximum duration of two hours. This interview will be digitally recorded. You will be asked not to discuss the proceedings outside of the focus group.

Due to the nature of the research, digital and video recording are essential elements of collecting data; thus, please consider this as apart to agree to participate within this study. If you do not wish to be digitally recorded, then you will be excluded as a participant.

Anticipated Benefits to Subjects

As a willing participant in this study you will not be compensated for your participation. Indirectly, you may benefit by understanding your classroom instruction through the lens of the impact of testing.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this research is entirely VOLUNTARY. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

Costs and Compensation for Being in the Study

There is no financial obligation to participate in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All recorded interviews, transcripts, and observational data will be kept by the principal researcher for five years from the end date of the study. The videos will be destroyed after the publication Mr. Hammack’s dissertation. The principal researcher will be the primary viewer of all data. No information about you or the data you have provided will be disclosed to others without your written permission. You will be assigned a pseudonym for all written reporting; no information will be included that could reveal your identity.

Contact Information for the Researcher

If you have any questions about the research, please contact:

Russell Hammack.....rhammack@tusc.k12.al.us.....(205) 759-3720.

- OR -

Dr. Liza Wilson.....[ewilson@bama.ua.edu](mailto:ewilson@bama.ua.edu).....(205) 348-4580.

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Russell Hammack at 205-759-3720. If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Russell Hammack for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

Signature of Research Subject

I have read this form and I understand the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

By signing this form, I [ ] agree [ ] do not agree to participate in this research study, that will include audio recording and video recording.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant    Date

I have explained the research to the subject, and answered all of his or her questions. I believe that he or she understands the information described in this document and freely consents to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher    Date

APPENDIX B

IRB Certification



## APPENDIX C

### IRB Approval

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
R E S E A R C H

November 19, 2013

Russell Hammack  
Dept of Curriculum & Instruction  
College of Education  
Box 870231

Re: IRB#: 13-OR-353 "The Potential Impact of High Stakes Testing: A Social Studies Instrumental Case Study"

Dear Mr. Hammack:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on November 14, 2014. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpentato T. Myles, MSM, CIM  
Director & Research Compliance Officer  
Office of Research Compliance  
The University of Alabama



358 Rose Administration Building  
Box 870127  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127  
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## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol and Questions

## Protocol for Interview Questions

Do you consent to be a research subject as outlined in the consent document I sent you?

### Interview One Questions

#### Interview One Questions

1. Please describe yourself. What you teach and how long have you been teaching? (Experience/participant information)
2. How would you classify your school academically? Did your school struggle with making AYP under the constructs of the Graduation Exam? (Governmentality)
3. While preparing for the AHSGE, what instructional strategies do you use in your class as part of your daily practice? (Pedagogical/Instructional) What documents and policies shaped your curriculum? During the fall, which document was followed more, the AHSGE or the ALCOS? (Curriculum)
4. Do the strategies that you used as part of your daily practice, change as you get closer to the graduation exam? If so, why? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
5. What instructional strategies did you use to prepare for the Social Studies part of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam? (Governmentality)
6. The strategies that you used before the graduation exam? (Governmentality)
7. Has the Social Studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam impacted the way that you teach? (Governmentality)
8. If so, what factors might influence this instructional shift? From having a state mandated assessment to having no assessment? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
10. How did your school help with remediation of graduation exam? Do you believe the instructional strategies are different in remediation classes that in your own personal class that you teach? (Governmentality)

### Interview Two Questions

1. Do you think that No Child Left Behind Act has affected your instructional practices? How? (Governmentality)
2. How is the Alabama High School Graduation Exam apart of NCLB? (Governmentality)
3. What is at stake for a student if they failed the graduation exam? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
4. Were there any administrative expectations concerning the type of instruction delivered in preparation for the graduation exam? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment)
5. Do you feel that the Alabama Graduation Exam has impacted teaching? If so, what way? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
6. If there was no state assessment how might your instruction be different? (Governmentality, Technologies of the Self)
7. Currently, 30 states use state assessment results as apart of teacher evaluation. How would you feel if you were evaluated based on student results from the graduation exam? Would this type

of evaluation change your instruction? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)

8. Since the graduation exam has ended, what documents now drive instruction? What impact does the new College and Career Readiness Standards in your instructional practices? Do these documents affect your curriculum or your instruction or both? How? (Governmentality, Curriculum)

9. Has the state board of education's decision to end the graduation exam changed your instructional practice? If so, how?

10. What would be the benefits of ending the graduation exam? What would be the consequences? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)

### Interview Three Questions

1. Does your school district have walkthrough evaluations or observations? Do you know what the evaluators are looking for regarding Plan 2020 and the College and Career Readiness Standards in your instruction? (Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment)

2. Are the walkthrough evaluations or observations specifically looking for a specific type of instruction, including the College and Career Readiness Standards? Are these beneficial instructional methods? (Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)

3. Could you be given a "poor" evaluation by not using the "recommended" instructional methods? How might this evaluation change your practice or instruction? (Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment)

4. How could this impact pedagogy for new or novice teachers? (Shift of the Self, Technologies of the Self)

5. What are these instructional methods that meet the College and Career Readiness Standards? (Curriculum) Have you had success with these teaching strategies? (Technologies of the Self)

7. Is this your professional decision to use CCRS or do you think other factors impact instruction? What are the other factors? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)

8. Does CCRS make you a more productive and better teacher? How or Why not? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self)

9. Do you think that the new educational policy, Plan 2020, will improve the achievement of students? In what ways? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self)

10. Because there is not test that measures the achievement of students in order to graduate, how do you assess student achievement now? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self)

## APPENDIX E

### Protocol Process for Document Collection

## Protocol Process for Document Collection

For this investigation, the documents analyzed will be the lesson plans from 12th grade Social Studies teachers. Three lesson plans will be analyzed and examined from the August to November school year; which was the timeframe in which the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was still used as an exit document in order to receive a high school diploma. In addition, three additional lesson plans will be gathered and evaluated from January to May; which was the timeframe of a new educational policy adopted by the Alabama State Department of Education, called Plan 2020. After these documents have been collected, they will be examined and analyzed using grounded theory.

The protocol for document analysis is to allow the teacher participants to choose two options for lesson plan collection. The researcher can request and pick up a hard copy of the participant's lesson plans or the participants can submit a digital copy by email.

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Protocol and Questions

### Protocol for Focus Groups

Does everyone consent to be a research subject as outlined in the consent document I sent you for the purpose of a Focus Group Interview?

1. During this research process, we have discussed instructional practice. What impact do you think that the Alabama High School Graduation Exam had on your instructional methods? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
2. What factors and pressures, during the AHSGE, do you think affect your teaching methods? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
3. What appeared to be more important while the graduation exam was ongoing, the Alabama Course of Study or the material covered by the Alabama High School Graduation Exam?  
\*\* Are the activities to prepare for the graduation exam apart of the “hidden curriculum”, activities are not found on lesson plans, or are they strongly encouraged from administrators and part of daily practice?
4. Are student results on standardized tests an accurate measure of teacher performance? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
5. If the Social Studies graduation exam results were a part of teacher evaluations, how might this change your teaching practices and curriculum? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
6. The Graduation Exam ended in November of 2014, how has this change in policy affected your teaching? (Technologies of the Self)
7. Do you use a pre-planned school format for teaching, or is your plan developed by yourself?  
\*\*What about strategic teaching? Planned or mandated or both? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
8. All schools are now using the College and Career Readiness Standards (Curriculum), how does this affect instruction? How would this affect new teachers? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
9. Now that the Graduation Exam is removed, what would be the best way to assess students today? (Technologies of the Self)
10. Do you believe that removing the test is beneficial or harmful to students? Why? (Technologies of the Self)
11. Historically speaking, the federal government has played a huge role in educational policy; especially with No Child Left Behind. What do you think will be the next federal intervention? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)
12. Do you believe that the Common Core has established a more nationalized curriculum? Do you think that a Social Studies content portion incorporated into the Common Core? Do you believe that a national assessment could follow? (Governmentality, Shift of the Self, Discipline and Punishment, Technologies of the Self)