TEACHERS AS GATEKEEPERS: DEVELOPING DEEPER UNDERSTANDINGS TO CULTIVATE PRO-SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

by

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ABSTRACT

AMY FITCHETT: Teachers as gatekeepers: Developing deeper understandings to cultivate pro-social studies learning environments in the elementary grades. (Under the direction of DR.TRACY ROCK)

Teacher instructional decision-making is a multi-dimensional and varied process that affects the learning of students in intermediate elementary social studies classrooms. The researcher used a phenomenological case study approach to further develop understanding of this complex process. Using Opportunity to Learn descriptors and a Policy Analytic framework, the author analyzed the intersection of individual teacher capability and policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level within the unique context of a charter school.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Elementary teachers make a multitude of decisions daily to ensure their students receive appropriate instruction in all content areas. Within the elementary context, most teachers are responsible for the instruction of more than one subject area. As purveyors of the content, they must make key decisions about what to teach, what to emphasize, how to teach content, and how to assess and address student mastery of content. Teachers serve as gatekeepers, the decision makers of content and practices, within their classrooms. This decision-making is defined by a teacher's individual capability, that is her individual sense of and actual ability to make decisions and apply pedagogical skills, as filtered through her lens of beliefs, experiences, and work environment.

In addition to individual capability, teachers must respond to and adhere to policies (programs, rules, and expectations) set forth at the federal, state, local, district, and building level. Within the context of an individual teacher's capability and the policies enacted upon her, teachers must make decisions that directly influence students' opportunities to learn specific content.

In recent years, accountability policies enacted at the federal level have trickled down and influenced state, local, and building level policies. These in turn have forced teachers to adjust their instruction. Specifically, as gatekeepers of the curriculum, teachers have had to adjust their teaching to meet the demands of the policies set forth by legislators and administrators (Van Fossen, 2005). On a daily basis, teachers must make decisions based upon their own individual capability and established policies to instruct students. This paper examines how teachers make decisions in one specific content area, social

studies, and how the demands of policies and the individual teacher's capability interact in this process of decision-making.

Status of Elementary Social Studies

The status, teaching, and student learning of elementary social studies is in trouble. Social studies is losing ground as a valued subject area within the elementary curriculum, being replaced by a hyper focus on English Language Arts (ELA), science, and mathematics (Au, 2007; Hoge, Nickell, & Zhao, 2002). The time currently allotted for elementary social studies in elementary classrooms is limited on average to under thirty minute blocks per day, and in some settings even less (VanFossen, 2005, Heafner, Fitchett, Rock, Norwood, & Fitchett, 2019). There is an apparent mainstream acceptance of this drastic reduction in the amount of time and attention given to one of the core academic subjects of the elementary curriculum. Students are not receiving the opportunity to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the United States at a critical stage in their intellectual development. As Pace (2007) so aptly cautions, "We are in danger of losing a generation of citizens schooled in the foundations of democracy and of producing high school graduates who are not broadly educated human beings" (p. 26). The question we must ask ourselves is, how did we get here?

History of American public schooling. To understand social studies' importance and role in American schooling, it is important to consider why American public schooling exists. As early as the mid-1600s some form of public schooling occurred in the colonies to ensure the transmission of beliefs and norms (History of the Boston Latin School, n.d.). Local districts and parents had primary control over how this schooling existed, and were able to determine what curricula was included therein. After the American Revolution, the

Founding Fathers included taxes as a means to support public schooling (Desnoyer, 2014). Hiatt (1994) explained that Thomas Jefferson strongly advocated for public schooling in order to prepare its citizenry to be participants in a democratic society. Jefferson believed that through public education the people of Virginia (and ultimately the nation) would gain access to a common knowledge. In his *Notes to the State of Virginia*, Jefferson described the purpose of public education as a means of "diffus[ing] knowledge more generally through the mass of the people." He believed that creating a literate society was important to ensure that its citizens would not be easily swayed by irrational or false claims by political activists. Even at the Constitutional Convention, the framers of American society considered making provisions for a legal public education system to ensure common funds of knowledge and understanding about civic responsibilities. Jefferson (1820) argued to his friend William Charles Jarvis, "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society, but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is, not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power."

Social studies education was not specifically addressed as a subject area within the public school curriculum until the early 20th century. However, within the original conception of public education, there was an underlying belief related to the importance of a common set of understandings around raising and educating students to become civically minded adults. It is perhaps through Jefferson's argument that one can see how social studies is so intimately connected with our national beliefs and identity, and how from the start, it was embedded within the curricula provided through public schooling in America.

Although mindsets surrounding the purpose and practices within public education were at times opposing, especially about whom should have access and what the purpose of the education was, at its heart the belief that common knowledge was good for the nation as a whole.

By 1918, compulsory education was required in all states (Hiatt, 1994). With the influx of immigrants from Europe, bringing with them different and complex religious beliefs and social practices, the national leaders recognized a need for a set of nationally agreed upon civically minded practices that went beyond the framing of religion (Saxe, 2004). It is within this context that social studies education was born.

History of social studies in American public schooling. Social studies has played an interesting role in the American school system since its inception. Beliefs about the appropriate content, purpose of the subject area, and the pedagogical practices housed within social studies have been discordant at times. Saxe (2004) explained that at its earliest iteration, social studies was designed to address the human experience and that its content would be driven by the lived experience of humanity. He argued that its ambiguous definition was a contributing factor in its lack of understanding and application within school systems. Lybarger (2004) contended that social studies was actually a form of social inculcation to ensure compliance from African Americans in American society. Passe (2018) presented a different perspective, arguing that the intent of social studies at its inception was to encourage critical thinking, inquiry, discourse and focus on the study of community. These divergent understandings about what defined social studies at its onset, and its role within the curriculum and greater society, perhaps contributed to the confusion about beliefs regarding social studies and its intended purpose. Teachers, who are the final

transmitters of knowledge within the classroom, must interpret and make meaning of the purpose and practices that are best for children within their own classrooms (Thornton, 1989). Because there are many perspectives on the role of social studies, there are also many interpretations or beliefs surrounding the purpose, practices, and pedagogy around social studies instruction. Some believe that the philosophical disagreement about what the social studies was and currently is has contributed to the status of social studies today in that many practitioners remain divided on the purpose and practices of social studies (Evans, 2015).

Common philosophies on the purpose of social studies. Understanding the differences in perspectives surrounding the purpose and practices associated with social studies helps to explain some of the confusion that teachers have felt about this subject area. Stanley (2015) described three common philosophies or approaches towards social studies instruction: those that believe in social studies as a form of social transformation, those who assume progressive perspectives on social studies as a platform for critical thinking and education for citizenship and participation in democracy, and finally, those who view social studies from a democratic realistic perspective which argues that core content should be instructed centering around history and facts. Evans (2015) described these different perspectives or camps of thinking as five distinct groups, all of who approach it from a disciplinary angle or ways of thinking:

(a) The traditional historians who primarily believe in "history as the core of social studies and emphasizes content acquisition, chronology, and the textbook as the backbone of the course." (p 25)

(b) The social science group, who wants instruction to be based in the specific disciplines within social science.

(c) The social efficiency educators who want to use standardization and bring principles of industry to schooling to create a "smoothly controlled and more efficient society" (p. 26) which would prepare students in schools for their functions and roles in life.

(d) The social meliorists who promote Dewey's beliefs that the purpose of schooling is to foster thinking skills and reflective practices, which would in turn lead to the overall improvement of society.

(e) The social reconstructionists who want to use critical pedagogy to transform and enlighten American society.

Both Evans (2015) and Stanley (2015) succinctly described the clear divisions about beliefs regarding the purpose of social studies education, especially within the middle and secondary learning experiences. However, these divisions were also impactful in the elementary grades. Parker (2015) addressed the importance of considering the purpose and role of social studies specifically within elementary grades, as part of the philosophical foundation to the development of civic-minded citizens. He stated, "Social studies needs to be set deeply into the school curriculum from the earliest grades. What results is a snowball effect: knowledge growing each year on its own momentum, empowering students with each passing year" (p. 3). When considering the major differences in the camps, it comes down to how people, especially teachers, perceive the role of social studies. If students do not receive the opportunity to think about critical content and experience social studies instruction in meaningful ways in elementary grades, they will

not be as prepared to meet the demands of middle and secondary instruction in the field. The beliefs elementary school teachers hold about the purpose of social studies directly impact how teachers interpret and make instructional decisions as it relates to social studies. Therefore, it is important to consider the question: is the primary purpose of elementary social studies to teach disciplines, elicit thinking skills, or is it a place of transformation and social action?

In enacting and implementing a curriculum within a classroom, a teacher must consider her positionality within these camps. Her beliefs about the purpose of social studies will greatly influence her practices and instruction as the primary gatekeeper of social studies content (Thornton, 1989). Teachers serve as the conduit between policies and curricula presented at the federal, state, and local level. As the gatekeepers of instruction, it is through the teacher's own lens of understanding of the priorities, the purpose, and the practices, that social studies instruction is enacted within the classroom.

Current beliefs about the purpose of social studies. Despite divergent thinking about the purpose and practices of social studies, the largest professional organization representing the interdisciplinary field of social studies the National Council for the Social Studies (1994) adopted this definition of social studies:

> The integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help

young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. (p.3)

The National Council for the Social Studies (2017) clarified its position even further, stating that the purpose of elementary social studies is "to enable students to understand, participate in, and make informed decisions about their world" (para 7). The authors explained that social studies is intended to provide students a means of critically thinking about and evaluating issues in society with a variety of lenses including civics, economics, geography, history, and social justice. They argued that the instruction and practices held within the social studies are unique and powerful and necessary for a fully engaged citizenry. Within the content and instructional practices of social studies, students are encouraged and taught how to actively participate in their governance and engage in their civic duty. In addition to this, students are taught key vocabulary and concepts not taught or experienced in other subject areas (Harmon, Hedrick, & Wood, 2005). This disciplinary literacy affords students the foundational knowledge that supports student learning in their middle and high school experiences, as well as beyond (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014). This current perspective on social studies education is a reflection of the beliefs of Dewey and the original framers of social studies in 1916, seeking integration and interdisciplinary practice to better understand society as whole (Passe, 2018).

Marginalization of social studies. Sadly, the status of social studies in elementary public schools is questionable at best. The number of hours and time spent on social studies has dramatically dropped in the past 20 years (Heafner et al., 2019). What this reduction in time means for elementary school teachers is a shifting in prioritization of what content is covered (Rock, O'Connor, Passe, Oldendorf, Good, & Byrd, 2006). In some instances,

social studies instruction has been absorbed by other content areas (specifically English and Language Arts) but at a cost (VanFossen, 2005). Although integration of content is theoretically a practice that could offer a solution to the loss of designated instructional time in social studies, some believe that many of the most meaningful practices and beliefs related to social studies are lost in the skills and strategies emphasized for core literacy instruction (Alleman & Brophy, 1993; Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Sierre, & Stewart, 2008; Pace, 2011). Others contended that thoughtfully and carefully planned integration is possible, and a powerful panacea to the trending loss of social studies instructional time (Huck, 2019).

Although there are a variety of factors such as the lack of clear conception of what social studies is and how it should be taught which have contributed to this marginalization, state policies regarding testing appear to be a key lever for time spent on social studies instruction in the elementary grades (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Pace, 2011; Van Fossen, 2005). In addition to concerns about time on subject area, the actual practices within social studies classroom are being watered down to allow more time on core subject areas (Pace, 2011). True discourse and social action, critical perspective taking, and civic justice simply do not have space within the new curricular demands. Although literacy and English Language Arts (ELA) instruction may include discourse and critical thinking about texts, social studies content is unique in its content and disciplines including history, civics, geography, anthropology, political science, and economics. It is within these areas that students make meaning about the world around them, construct understanding about their place within society, civic understanding, and political stances.

In the era of accountability, school administrators and teachers have made instructional decisions to help boost standardized tests scores in the key content areas of reading and math, as well as science, by cutting other subjects including writing and social studies (Hoge, Nickell, & Zhao, 2002). In higher poverty, lower performing schools, social studies is even more at risk for marginalization (Pace, 2011; Wills, 2007). In an effort to increase student scores on standardized tests, the primary forms of instruction in these social studies classrooms often are low-level rote memorization activities (Pace, 2011). Students are denied the opportunity to learn critical content and concepts to help them be successful and effective citizens in these schools. Students in many public schools are not receiving the foundational knowledge in their elementary schools in which to fully participate and understand social studies content, discourse, and practices in later grades.

Status of schooling in America: Assessment nation. In the wake of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), school systems around the nation enacted policies towards a "standards based" approach to education, which were measured by student performance on assessments. These assessments held schools accountable for their performance as a measure of the efficacy of classroom instruction. Schools that did not show mastery faced repercussions including possible shut down and restructuring (Lewis, 2007). Funding at the state and federal level were sometimes tied to these assessments. This pressure and demand for achievement forced schools and educators to approach elementary education in different ways, specifically putting tested topics first (Rock et al., 2006; Au, 2007; Boyle-Baise, 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). While many traditional public schools have narrowed their foci to ensure the big three (math, reading, and science), other approaches to education are raising in popularity and availability, including charter schools.

Alternative education: Charter schools. Policies regarding alternative funding to non-traditional public schools have grown in recent years. Private school vouchers, online education, and homeschooling have become more popular. Funding for charter schools has also risen. According to the National Charter School Resource Center (n.d), "A charter school is a public school that is independently run. It receives greater flexibility over operations in exchange for increased performance accountability. The school is established by a "charter," which is a performance contract describing key elements of the school. The charter contract describes things like the school's mission, instructional program, governance, personnel, finance, plans for student enrollment, and how all these are measured." Charter schools are publicly funded schools that offer alternatives to traditional public school environments. They have more freedom to make instructional decisions. Legislators supported this autonomy to practice and instruct beyond the guidelines and bureaucracy of traditional public. Many consider charter schools to be an innovative new approach to education (Bulkey & Fisler, 2002). According to Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs (1995) charter schools "offer a radical approach in decentralizing management in education that allows individual schools to be self-governing" (p. 332). According to the authors, policies at the state and federal level have fostered and encouraging these schools as a means to free up bureaucracy and allow for innovative approaches to instruction. Although still held accountable for achievement and standards set forth at the state level, charter schools offer flexibility in their practices. Within the autonomy of the charter school, teachers serve as conduits or gatekeepers of time, structures, policies, student learning, and information without the demands set forth in traditional public schooling. In a charter school, the policies set forth at the state and federal level including standards and

testing expectations are potentially less filtered. Specifically, in a charter school policies are interpreted and responded to only by the demands of the charter board, administration, and the teachers within the building.

Teachers as Gatekeepers of the Curriculum

The notion of a teacher as a gatekeeper of the implemented curriculum within the classroom is long standing. Thornton (1989) explained that curricular instructional gatekeeping is "a decision-making process governed by the elements of the teacher's frame of reference" (p. 3). He argued that understanding how and why teachers make decisions and serve as gatekeepers, "determines both what content and experiences students have access to and the nature of that content and those experiences" (p. 4).

Teachers enter into their teaching with distinctive beliefs, experiences, and training which all coincide to generate a specific lens through which they interpret the standards and enact the curriculum (White & Chant, 2014). It is through this lens that teachers make decisions or interpret their students' actions, behaviors, and ability or capability to learn and participate in the classroom.

Teachers as gatekeepers of the curriculum must also consider administrative beliefs and goals. When interpreting policies set forth by federal and state government agencies, teachers must consider the policies set forth at the building level by their administration. Anderson (2014) found that the administration of a school was the most influential lever for teacher time on the instruction of the social studies. In charter schools, the principal has a great deal of autonomy and influence over the curricula (Gawlik, 2008). His or her decisions regarding the prioritization of social studies influences the practices of the teachers within the charter school. Even in traditional public school settings, the

administrative support of social studies was found to be highly influential in teacher prioritization of elementary social studies. VanFossen (2005) explained that teachers' instructional decision-making and perceived support of social studies by the administration within the school environment was critical. He stated, "The greater the perceived administrative support for social studies, the greater the amount of instructional time allocated by teachers to social studies instruction at the primary and intermediate levels" (p. 387). Understanding how teachers perceive administrative support of social studies within a charter school context helps better understand the instructional decision-making of teachers with less interference from outside forces. As traditional public school teachers are forced to make cuts to their instructional time in social studies, charter school teachers have an opportunity to emphasize best practices in social studies education as well as increase time on social studies, but do they, and if so, how and why?

Thus, in this study I examine how teachers made decisions within the context of a charter school, focusing on the intersection of individual teacher characteristics (capability) and policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level. Analyzing the different demands and dynamics presented within this system can inform how teachers make decisions within an environment with purportedly less bureaucratic interference. Within this environment, how did teachers interpret and implement the elementary social studies curriculum, how did their capability or own set of beliefs influence this interpretation and implementation, and what policies at the federal, state, and building level drove their decision-making?

Understanding the decisions teacher make regarding the instruction of intermediate elementary social studies may be a first step in addressing the

marginalization of this critical subject area. Ensuring that students have strong foundation of social studies content specific knowledge ultimately ensures an actively engaged citizenry. When students meaningfully interact with and develop understandings related to their roles within society and the workings of government, as well as methods of civic justice and social action, they are better prepared to fully participate in their civic duties (National Council for the Social Studies, Creating Effective Citizens position statement, n.d).

Statement of the Problem

The notion of teachers as gatekeepers of the curriculum has been described by researchers as the practices, curricula, and pedagogy that teachers ultimately make decisions and enact instruction within their classrooms (McKenney, Nieveen, & van den Akker, 2006; Thornton, 1989, 2005). Bishop (1976) described how teachers make decisions regarding instruction in mathematics. His work on teacher instructional decision-making in math was used by later researchers to make sense of the teacher actions (Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008), However, there is little to describe how teachers make these decisions in social studies. Thornton (2005) explained that, "the role of teacher curricular-instructional gatekeeping in three important elements of the educational process: (1) aims, (2) subject matter and instructional methods, and (3) student interest and effort" (p. 11). Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, and Thiede (2000) investigated the learning opportunities and instruction in social studies classrooms in grades 8-10 in Chicago. They explained, "There is an enormous need to undertake qualitative assessments of the classroom practices, the motivations that drive them, and the ways they are experienced by teachers and students" (p. 332). Elementary teachers face a multitude of demands that

force them to make key decisions on what content is presented and how it is presented. Unlike high school teachers who focus on only one content area, elementary teachers are responsible for all content areas. As such, elementary teachers face a different set of challenges than middle or high school teachers, and are forced to prioritize or privilege some subject and content areas over others (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Van Fossen, 2005). When prioritizing what is and is not taught, elementary teachers must respond to policies set forth by legislators, as well as those set forth by their building leadership. In addition to this, teachers' preferences and beliefs, their experiences and trainings, even their attitudes interplay with this decision-making as a function of their individual capability.

Even though elementary social studies provides students critical content vocabulary, exposure to key concepts related to civic understanding, government procedures, development of financial literacy, a deeper understanding of human differences and why they exist, a foundational knowledge of where we are in the world, not to mention basic foundations for social emotional learning, it is consistently deprioritized in relation to other subject areas (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017). Social studies remains near the bottom rung of importance as related to other curricular areas including reading, math, and science (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Rock et al., 2006). Despite multiple studies showing the decline in time on elementary social studies instruction (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Pace; 2011; Rock et al., 2006; Van Fossen, 2005) the trajectory remains. Thus, the call from Kahne, et al. (2000) to understand what influences teachers' instructional decision-making in social studies classrooms is even more relevant in elementary schools.

Elementary social studies is a vital subject area because it sets the foundation for students' civic-mindedness and civic understanding later in life. It also provides a lens for students to develop understanding of their place in the world. It fosters critical thinking and moral reasoning, which is what the original founders of our nation hoped for in our schools. It establishes a set of societal rules, even in kindergarten, as students learn what rules are. It provides the backbone for a working society. Yet, teachers are experiencing demands that require them to cut short this vital curricular area. How teachers continue to meet the standards required by the state (including social studies) is of key importance when considering what students will eventually be able to know and do.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

In this study, I use the constructs and descriptors associated with Opportunity to Learn (OTL) and the framework of policy analytics to describe how policies and OTL descriptors interact within the instructional gatekeeping of intermediate elementary school teachers in the context of a specific charter school in the southeastern United States.

Instructional Gatekeeping and Opportunity to Learn

First, this study acknowledges the necessity that students have opportunities to learn content and practices housed within the arena of elementary social studies. Opportunity to learn (OTL) is a construct that describes the factors including time, content coverage, and depth and quality of instruction, which contribute to the overall learning of the students within a classroom. According to Wang (1998), OTL encompassed the following variables:

- Content Coverage Variables: These variables measure whether or not students cover the core curriculum for a particular grade level or subject matter.

• Content Exposure Variables: These are variables that take into consideration the time allowed for and devoted to instruction (time-on-task) and the depth of the teaching provided.

• Content Emphasis Variables: These are variables that influence which topics within the curriculum are selected for emphasis and which students are selected to receive instruction emphasizing lower order skills (i.e., rote memorization) or higher order skills (i.e., critical problem solving).

• Quality of Instructional Delivery Variables: These variables reveal how classroom teaching practices (i.e., presentation of lessons) affect students' academic achievement (p. 140).

In essence, OTL has been used as a research tool for measurement of input variables including time and content. Qualitatively, these variables have been used as indicators or descriptors of students' opportunities to learn (Heafner & Plaisance, 2016). OTL descriptors serve as a means for considering what and how students learn, and the quality of that instruction (as a construct).

Despite federal, state, local, and building level policies which frame and direct teacher instruction, teachers ultimately serve as the gatekeepers of what occurs within their own classrooms. As gatekeepers of the curriculum, it is important to understand how policies and teacher capability interact to direct teacher instructional decision-making or gatekeeping. Thornton (1989) explained that curricular instructional gatekeeping "determines both what content and experiences students have access to and the nature of that content and those experiences" (p. 6). He further explained that because of the ambiguous understanding of social studies, the role of the teacher is especially important

as a gatekeeper. How teachers make sense of their role within social studies can deeply affect the meaning presented and the practices applied to it. He specified that how teachers plan for social studies is conflated with their greater understanding of social studies stating, "Teachers' planning for social studies interacts, for example, with their beliefs about social studies classrooms and student motivation, socialization goals, and the preparation of students for the next grade-level" (p. 7). In considering the push-and-pull demands of planning for and implementing the social studies curriculum, teachers must consider a multitude of factors including time, testing pressures, student behavior, personal and professional beliefs, parental pressures, and standards (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Pace, 2011; Rock, et al. 2006). In addition to this, teachers bring their own capability to the classroom through the training, experiences, beliefs, and a sense of autonomy and control. Teacher interpretation of the policies set forth, the climate he/she teaches in, and the needs of his/her students, all drive the decisions he/she makes (Ogawa, 2003). Others have noted that their direct administrators (i.e., those who are directly in charge of the school in which they teach) influence teachers' instructional decision-making (Goddard, Skrla, & Salloum, 2017). Whether external policies or building level initiatives drive teacher instructional decision-making, as well as how teachers interpret policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level are important for understanding teacher instructional decision-making. Understanding how and why teachers make instructional decisions regarding elementary social studies and what this means for student experiences within the classroom is of vital importance for understanding how our future generations are being prepared to engage in practices housed within social studies as well as ensuring that we are fostering the development of civic minded citizens.

Policy Analytics

Policies are rules, structures, norms, or expectations set forth by institutions to guide the practices of its groups. In relation to the construct of OTL, when considering policies supported by federal and state legislative bodies, such as charter schools, one must consider how these policies directly affect and evolve within various settings. How do policies interact with the primary gatekeepers of the curricula, the teachers? What are the subsequent learning experiences and opportunities to learn social studies within these teachers' classrooms? Policy analytics provide a unique framework in which to consider the interaction or intersection between policy and practice (Cohen & Hill, 1998). Weimer (2009) explained that policy analytics is a unique way in which to look at policies, and provide specific alternatives in a systematic cycle of reflection and research. Policies enacted by the government come to fruition through political venues based upon social constructs or values agreed upon by the society as a whole. In using policy analytics, Weimer clarified that policy analysis, "systematically assesses" the alternative ways that government can address problems of public concern" (p. 93). He also explained that policy analytics is different from policy research because it provides explicit and specific advice on problems to a specific context. It considers the multiple and varied values or capabilities of the people within the setting in which the policy is enacted and recognizes that stakeholders carry their own set of beliefs. Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin (2007) explained how these values impact policy by arguing that, "values influence capability by enhancing or weakening the will to implement policy or by impeding or enhancing acquisition of the skills and knowledge needed to implement" (p. 537).

On a macro level, one can better understand the concept of policy analytics when looking at public schooling. Access to education is a socially accepted value that has transformed into public policy. As a nation our Founding Fathers valued intellect; therefore, the government established public schools through policies to ensure the transmission of these beliefs and afford its member this opportunity (Hiatt, 1994). Additional policies and practices set forth through federal and state government have created rules or policies surrounding what constitutes equitable schooling and practices. The courts have used these policies, and their interpretation of the Constitution, to judge and assess the policies. These policies help determine what is taught, how it is taught, what schools will be held accountable for, and the equity of instruction. A prime example of the interaction between policy and values was the seminal case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954). The justices unanimously agreed that the segregation policies set forth by the school systems were not equitable. Students were not receiving the same opportunities to learn in these separate settings. The court examined a value (equity), and made a ruling (policy) which changed how schooling was implemented.

Within educational settings such as schools, policies are enacted at a variety of levels. Policies can come from the federal government, such as the case with accountability measures and funding practices seen in policies like No Child Left Behind. They occur at the state level in policies regarding curriculum standards. District and local level policies may influence time spent on content or curricular programs used. Policies happen at the building level as well, such as administrative policies regarding expected pedagogical practices and scheduling of school day. All policies ultimately are interpreted and enacted upon by teachers as instructional gatekeepers within their own classrooms. Cohen, Moffitt,

and Goldin (2007) explained the relationship that practitioners (in education this would be teachers) and policy have on one another and posit that policy depends on practice, and for policies to be effective, the stakeholders (i.e. the students and teachers) must have the actions and resources to make policy successful. Specifically, they point to the realistic nature of the policies set forth, the instruments used to enact the policies, the environment in which the policy and practice occur, and the capability of the practitioners. With the demands of accountability and testing, policies enacted at the federal and state level have forced teachers to cut short some curricular areas that are untested in an effort to address the growth goals and demands in other curricular areas (Rock et al., 2006). These accountability policies interact with teachers' individual capabilities (the individual teacher's experiences, preparation, resources and beliefs) to influence the instructional decision-making of the teachers within classrooms.

In consideration of federal and state policies that support charter schools as alternatives to traditional public education, the capability and capacity of the teachers within these charter schools as well as the resources that practitioners bring to policy through the individual and social sources are important to consider. Because each teacher within a classroom brings "values, interests, dispositions, and skill and knowledge to their encounters with policy" (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007, p. 537), the practices and beliefs of the practitioners are vitally important to understand. This capability of teachers defines teacher practices through their instructional decision-making. Teacher capability reflects the knowledge and interests, as well as the values teachers have. This instructional decision-making ultimately affects the pedagogical practices and curriculum enacted by the teachers within a building (Schmidt & Maier, 2009).

Researchers have examined the documented marginalization of social studies in the elementary classroom across the nation (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Pace, 2011, VanFossen, 2005) and in North Carolina (Rock et al., 2006). Trends surrounding the loss of instructional time continue to emerge. This is concerning. Social studies as a subject area is uniquely responsible for developing civic understanding, and intended to promote effective citizens. Traditional public schools appear to be giving in to accountability demands to teach math and reading by minimizing social studies instructional time. However, in non-traditional settings, less bureaucratic demands may provide relief and extend time to this critical subject area. Federal policies supporting the enactment and funding of charter schools have afforded a new opportunity for innovative practices in education. These sites have the unique opportunity to alter or change this marginalization trend by providing teachers the autonomy to designate time and allow for meaningful interactions within the elementary social studies classroom. How teachers' capabilities inform their instructional decision-making in this environment is important for understanding the effectiveness of these policies (Cohen, Moffet, & Goldin, 2007). Because charter schools are purportedly innovative places where administrators and teachers have more autonomy to make instructional decisions, it is imperative to consider how teacher capability, teacher autonomy, and policies influence teachers' instructional decision-making, specifically as it relates to the instruction of social studies.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the policies enacted at the federal and state level which support charter schools, as well as the documented marginalization of elementary social studies in most American schools, the purpose of this study is to describe how teachers as gatekeepers of

the curriculum make instructional decisions regarding elementary social studies in a charter school. Due to the less bureaucratic nature of a charter school (Gawlik, 2008), it is expected that this location could afford a clearer view into how teachers interpret policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level with less interference from "middle managers." Using OTL descriptors including content coverage, content exposure, content emphasis, and quality of instructional delivery to guide my analysis, I describe how instructional decisions were made and enacted within this unique setting. I also examine how teachers, as gatekeepers of the curriculum made instructional decisions. I use a policy analytics framework to describe the interaction of policies implemented at the federal, state, and school level on teacher instructional decision-making. In so doing, I begin to explain teacher instructional decision-making as it related to social studies by looking at the intersection of teacher individual capability and policies within this unique environment.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

In what ways, do intermediate level teachers enact gatekeeping, as it relates to elementary social studies in a charter school?

(a) How does teacher capability (identity, beliefs, values and sense of autonomy) influence teacher instructional decision-making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

(b) How do teachers interpret and make sense of policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level? How do policies set forth by leadership influence teacher's

instructional decision-making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

Significance of the Study

This study begins to explain how teachers make instructional decisions regarding social studies instruction in a charter school setting. This is important to understand as a means to help describe and clarify further how teachers decide what is included and not included in the curriculum, and what practices teachers used to develop understanding and meet current standards in the field. Although these results are not generalizable, as is the nature of case studies, it does help illustrate how these teachers thought about and made sense of social studies curricula and what considerations drove their enactment of the curricula. It is acknowledged that there is a lot of variance within schools and between school of student achievement in social studies (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand what teachers do differently in schools and how this affects students' opportunities to learn social studies. This research illustrates how teachers respond differently to policies set forth at all levels. It highlights teacher similarities and differences based upon their sense of autonomy and identity as defined by their capability. It describes how teacher capability intersects with social studies teaching and learning. As advocates continue to seek ways to support the teaching and learning of social studies in elementary schools, this research provides important insights related to individual teacher characteristics that influence the enactment of policies that drive the teaching and learning of social studies.

Delimitations

This study is bound by its location and timeframe. The study occurred between February 2019 and May of 2019 in a for-profit charter school located on the outskirts of a large metropolitan city in the southeastern United States of America. The sample of the study only includes elementary teachers within the unique setting who were responsible for the instruction of and planning for social studies.

Organization of the Study

As is recommended practice (Roberts, 2010), the rest of this study is organized into five chapters with a references list and necessary appendices. In Chapter II, I present a review of the literature describing the current trends and understandings about social studies marginalization, teachers as gatekeepers of students' OTL, charter schools as innovation centers less encumbered by bureaucracy, and Policy Analytics as a framework. In Chapter III, I describe my methodology and research design for the study. I explain the instruments used to gather my data, as well as the procedures I followed, and clearly define my content and sample. Chapter IV presents a discussion and analysis of the data found in the study, and explains my findings from the study. Chapter V summarizes all that was entailed in the study, conclusions made because the study, and future recommendations based upon the study. Afterwards the study ends with a reference list and appendices.

Definition of Terms

Opportunity to Learn (OTL): A construct which describes the factors including time, content coverage, and depth and quality of instruction which contribute to the overall learning of the students within a classroom.

opportunity to learn: descriptors used by the researcher to guide and define teacher instructional practices

Instructional Gatekeeping: A term used to describe the instructional decisions and practices that teachers make within a classroom daily as filtered through the lens of federal, state, local, and school wide expectations and policies.

Charter School: Publicly funded schools in which a group of like-minded people with similar beliefs about education create a charter or promise for the set goals, plan for education within a school, and run the school outside **of** the purview of the local public schools.

Policy Analytics: A unique theoretical framework in which to consider the interaction or intersection between policy and practice

Capability: An individual teacher's sense of ability to make decisions and apply skills, as well as her personal values and sense of ability to make decisions for her classroom.

Policy: A course of action adopted or proposed by an organization such as the government to guide practices.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In light of the policies enacted at the federal and state level that support charter schools, as well as the documented marginalization of elementary social studies in most American schools, the purpose of this study is to describe how teachers make instructional decisions regarding elementary social studies in a uniquely situated environment of a charter school. I used OTL descriptors including content coverage, content exposure, content emphasis, and quality of instructional delivery to describe how social studies was implemented within this unique setting. I used three "fence posts" in which to frame my research: the problem of the marginalization of social studies, the role of teachers as gatekeepers and ultimately levers in students' opportunities to learn, and the framework of Policy Analytics to describe how teachers interpret and enact policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level. Each of these "fence posts" is critical in understanding the unique phenomenon of teacher instructional decision-making as it relates to intermediate elementary social studies instruction within the context of a charter school. These fence posts help me closely examine how and why the teacher makes instructional decisions by looking at the intersection of teacher capability and teacher interpretation of policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level.

Social Studies Marginalization

The purpose of public education is to indoctrinate and create a common set of understandings and morals that are representative of the society as a whole (Mendez, Yoo, & Rury, 2017). Within public schooling there are established standards that were identified as critical for students to be college and career ready (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). These standards

were prepared to ensure our students would be competitive in the worldwide market. Interestingly, within the Common Core State Standards, there are no designated social studies standards for elementary aged children. This omission is indicative of the structural beliefs of the school system as a whole about the importance of civic education and instruction on the democratic process. Institutionally sanctioned omission of information related to civic education is part of a greater issue in American society; the loss of critical thinking and understanding about civic justice and civic rights within a democratic society.

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (2017), the purpose of social studies education is to help students develop the necessary thinking skills to make informed decisions about their world. Social studies instruction is critical even at a young age because "Social studies content allows young learners to explain relationships with other people, to institutions, and to the environment, and equips them with knowledge and understanding of the past" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017, para. 7). Social studies is important because within its content and pedagogy, students learn how to critically evaluate past and current events with firm knowledge of the rules and structures within our democratic system.

Sadly, the intentional and systematic instruction of elementary social studies has been in peril for decades (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Gross, 1977; Hahn, 1985; Rock et al., 2006; Shaver, 1989; Weiss, 1978). Shaver (1989) described the decline of social studies education over the decades and described how as early as the 1970s many researchers in the field were concerned with instructional time and practices associated with elementary social studies. Shaver (1989) proceeded to question if the reporting was missing some of the related instruction, and argued that we needed more qualitative studies

to describe beyond numbers what is actually happening in elementary classrooms as it relates to social studies instruction.

Van Fossen (2005) attempted to explain further the prioritization or lack thereof in elementary social studies. He used a questionnaire and survey to analyze both time on content and teacher understanding of social studies instruction through the lens of prioritization and marginalization. He found that teachers' confusion surrounding the purpose of social studies influenced their instruction of social studies. He also found that teachers in Indiana were indeed not teaching social studies due to testing constraints He described how teacher perceptions of administrative prioritization (or lack thereof) of social studies influenced the teacher decision-making to this allotment of time. In his recommendations, he suggested that "further research is needed to determine the relationship between elementary teachers' beliefs about, and rationales for, the social studies and classroom practice" (p 400).

Heafner & Fitchett (2010) used longitudinal data on social studies instruction in elementary grades and found a marked trend in the decline of time on instruction. The authors observed that these results were concurrent with policies including No Child Left Behind. The researchers stated, "The most substantial decreases occurred within the last decade, as testing policies and curriculum standardization have become more common" (p. 69). Their research confirmed what many had feared in the field for years, that social studies continues to decline in elementary public school classrooms across the nation. Unfortunately, due to increased pressure set forth by the federal government to show achievement through standardized testing results, this critical subject area is being left

behind in lieu of reading and math instruction (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; National Council for the Social Studies, 2017; Rock et al., 2006).

Perhaps even more alarming, students in lower performing schools were most vulnerable to this narrowing of the curriculum in their misguided attempts at narrowing the achievement gap (Pace, 2011). Linda Darling-Hammond (2017) addressed the unequal schooling experienced by minority children and showed that these funds of knowledge were privileged to the affluent white students due to either school segregation or tracking systems. Citing the negative climate of racism and hate spread surrounding the elections Darling-Hammond explained that now more than ever it is important to prepare students mentally, emotionally, and academically to face the challenges of our nation.

Pace (2011) explained that teachers used only surface level instruction while teaching social studies to meet the demands of the standards while also having less instructional time. Using a qualitative comparative research design, Pace examined the teaching practices of several fourth and fifth grade teachers in California. She discovered that every single one of these teachers experienced some pressure from NCLB demands and accountability testing. Although the schools she studied were less crunched by testing demands due to their affluence and performance she wrote, "Accountability intensifies pre-existing curricular trends that marginalize social studies, and second, it contributes to educational inequality by imposing greater constraints on social studies teaching in lower performing schools" (p. 57). Au (2007) used qualitative meta-analysis to further illustrate this point, and found that "high stakes testing exerts significant amounts of control over the content, knowledge forms, and pedagogies at the classroom level" (p. 264).

This narrowing of the curriculum, especially in low performing, high minority, high poverty schools is concerning for a variety of reasons. The students who most need to know their rights in order to be able to actively and effectively push back against the hegemonic practices of the system are the ones least likely to receive this critical instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

In addition to concerns about civic knowledge, lower performing schools not receiving the same equitable instruction in social studies education are contributing to their own achievement failure. Social studies vocabulary and content are unique in their design and interpretation, therefore, when students are asked to read and understand in the content area for state tests, they have not had the opportunity to learn these critical concepts (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017). OTL as a construct encompasses the measure of time on content as well as the depth of coverage, the emphasis of content coverage, and the quality of instruction in delivering the content (Wang, 1998). Research around the construct of OTL showed that students who had not had the same instructional time on a concept were less likely to perform well on tested material about the subject (McDonnell, 1995). Because achievement tests were used to track students and determine readiness for advanced coursework and gifted education, lack of exposure to content not only hurts a child ability to become an effective citizen, it also harms a child's academic experience (Oakes, 1985). Students in lower tracked classrooms received less critical thinking and inquiry experiences, and were more likely to have time spent completing worksheets and practicing adherence to school rules and behaviors (Goodlad, 2004). In reducing the amount of exposure to social studies content in the elementary classroom, we

are affecting the overall schema students bring with them into the middle and high school grades.

Beyond the pressures of testing and accountability, social studies instruction is influenced by teacher capability. Charter schools being unique instructional settings that were intended to have less bureaucracy (Gawlik, 2008), required researchers to consider the unique building level effects and the specific influence of its administration. Fitchett, Heafner, and Lambert (2014) found that intermediate elementary teachers in charter schools tended to spend more time than traditional schoolteachers on social studies. They also pointed to the context of the school and described the differences between these two types of schools. They wrote, "Charter school organization offered a building-level independence unique from teachers' personal sense of professional autonomy" (p. 17). This means, it is important to consider the specific context in which teachers make decisions. Interestingly, in the same study the authors noted that teachers' perceptions of autonomy also seemed to positively influence teacher instructional time on social studies. Therefore, it is important to understand what teachers do differently in charter schools and how this affects students' opportunity to learn social studies.

Teacher autonomy and teacher beliefs are critical factors that explain how and what components of social studies are instructed (Thornton, 1989). Because there are many beliefs about the purpose and practices of social studies instruction, the field has often struggled with its identity, thus contributing even further to the marginalization of elementary social studies (Van Fossen, 2005). With a less than clear definition, teachers must make instructional decisions about what to teach in social studies and how to teach it. In states where social studies was tested, teachers made instructional decisions that

helped prepare students for the assessment, sometimes sacrificing best practices for test preparation and testing strategies. Gerwin and Visone (2006) found that when testing was not required teachers employed higher leverage and engaging activities for student learning. According to McCray, Kamman, Brownell, and Robinson (2017) high leverage practices are "critical set of practices that are essential to improving student learning and behavior" (p.1). Within the realm of social studies, practitioners should provide meaningful, integrative learning experiences, which foster discourse and social action (NCSS, 2017). The National Council for the Social Studies (2017) specifies that these practices should include, "Processes such as problem solving, debates, simulations, project-based learning, and role-playing are active strategies that can lead to new opportunities for student discovery and engagement" (para. 19). Yet sadly, when Wills and Sandholtz (2009) examined how teachers practiced and implemented social studies instruction, the demands of testing influenced teachers' instructional decision-making, leading to a sense of constrained professionalism or lack of autonomy.

Current Beliefs About Best Practices In Social Studies

The 2017 position statement entitled "Powerful, Purposeful Pedagogy in Elementary School Social Studies" released by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2017) asserted that "Social studies at the elementary level should provide students with purposeful and meaningful learning experiences that are challenging, of high quality, developmentally appropriate, and reflective of contemporary social and diverse global realities" (para. 1). According to NCSS, to ensure that students are receiving this form of education, social studies education should be meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active. The emphasis in each of these standards is doing. For social

studies education to meet its goals, it requires discourse, engagement, and action. To do this, teachers should engage in high leverage activities including simulations, debates, and service projects. The National Council for the Social Studies (2017) explained that, "Teachers should provide students opportunities for in-depth investigation of concepts that challenge and engage them. Challenging social studies instruction includes research, debates, discussions, projects of all varieties including the arts, and simulations that require application of critical thinking skills" (Position statement, section D, Challenging). Bollinger and Warren (2007) explained how these practices help children, stating that these practices, "Allow the students to grow in their understanding of the content and, perhaps more importantly, in their development of decision-making skills and adaptive learning techniques which prepare them for the roles of productive citizenry" (p. 74). Sadly, it has been found that due to testing demands in other content areas, the practices of teachers in social studies does not always reflect these best practices (Heafner, Lipscomb, & Fitchett, 2014; Wills, 2007).

Along with its position and purpose of elementary social studies, the NCSS statement (2017) gave specific recommendations for the implementation of powerful and purposeful pedagogy. They recommended better teacher educator preparation for the instruction of social studies. They also encouraged more time and resources devoted to instruct social studies. They argued that establishing and using effective standards such as National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment and the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards could help ensure that social studies was powerful and purposeful. Finally,

they advocated for social studies as a subject with meaningful time and content, supported with and by teachers.

It is with this call to action that I seek to better understand current instructional decision-making and practices by looking at the intersection of teacher capability and policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level. By conducting this study in a charter school setting, I was able to examine how teachers interpreted policies through their own lens and not through watered down channels of bureaucratic red tape. In this unique charter school environment, teachers had space to potentially enact and practice social studies in more powerful and meaningful way.

Teachers as Gatekeepers

Thornton (1989) made the call to understand teacher instructional decision-making as a contributing component of what was or was not taught, specifically in social studies. Thornton (2005) believed that in the subject area of social studies, teacher interpretation of the standards, teacher beliefs, and the directed curriculum were a confluence of forces that ultimately determined the enacted curriculum. He stated, "Whereas the proper subject matters of school algebra courses are relatively circumscribed, for instance, the proper scope and sequence of social studies is less apparent" (Thornton, 2005, p. 5). In considering the descriptors that construct OTL, the teacher served as a vital lever within the learning experiences of children. Thornton (1989) explained, "Planning social studies curriculum is far from the value-neutral and technical undertaking often portrayed in the teacher education literature. Rather, how teachers plan is a product of their frame of reference" (p. 8).

Due to issues with testing demands, and the prioritization of the core subjects of reading and math, teachers have been forced to make instructional decisions which impacted the time and teaching practices used in social studies (Heafner, Lipscomb, & Rock, 2006; Wills, 2007). National data trends have shown that in states where there was required social studies testing, teachers reported more time spent on social studies instruction. Interestingly, they also reported less instructional autonomy than teachers without a test (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014). Gerwin and Visone (2006) used qualitative methods to examine the practices of two social studies teachers with courses that did and did not have testing demands. What the researchers found was that in courses where the high stakes of testing were removed, the teacher used a variety of best practices with their students, whereas in the tested courses the teachers used more traditional lecture and rote learning methods. This study demonstrated the impact policies such as high stakes testing have had on teacher instructional decision-making because it showed how teachers reacted to the push-and-pull demands of federal and state policies in their planning and design of courses. Au (2007) conducted a meta-synthesis of the research on social studies marginalization and found that the overarching results indicated that testing demands constricted the curriculum and pedagogical practices of the teachers. However, he also noted that in rare circumstances, with testing demands teachers actually enacted more content expansion and higher-level instructional practices. The author observed that it was the policies as interpreted and acted upon at the institutional level which seemed to influence this process.

Anderson (2014) observed that within state variance of time on social studies instruction was an unexplored area that needed further review. He stated, “Variation in the

time spent on elementary social studies within a particular state cannot be explained by testing mandates" (p. 92). The author used a mixed methods approach to examine teacher outliers; those who taught more social studies than colleagues around the state with the same testing policies. He described what fostered and encouraged some teachers to spend more time on this generally marginalized subject. He found that directives from administration about what to teach and how often to teach seemed to be a driving force behind the extended time that the teacher outliers spent on social studies. He wrote, "Teachers in this study taught social studies significantly more than their peers across the state because of bureaucratic pressures, not because they were given autonomy or because they were maverick teachers who rebelled against the status quo" (p. 96). This was a significant finding because of the six teachers in the study, only one appeared to choose to give social studies additional time. The rest of the teachers appeared driven by expectations set forth by their administration or their colleagues. He also explained that teachers did not seem to mind these directives as long as it did not reach the point of prescribing how to teach. Anderson wrote, "Teachers are not independent actors. They play roles in bureaucratic organizations" (p. 97). Anderson's findings point to key questions about teacher autonomy and instructional decision-making within the realm of social studies. Previous quantitative research surrounding teacher autonomy suggested that teachers with more autonomy appeared to spend more time instructing social studies (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014), yet Anderson's mixed methods design found that teachers did not have actual autonomy to determine how much time was spent on social studies. Anderson posited that, "Teachers are often willing to accept being told what and how they should teach. Curricular prescription gives teachers clear and predictable expectations. It is only

where curricular prescription crosses over into unwelcome control that the curricular mandates are perceived as constraining" (p. 97). Understanding then how and why teachers make instructional decisions when considering policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level are important in understanding student opportunities to learn critical content in the social studies. If administrative directives are all it takes to shift the prioritization of social studies instruction, then more research should be done to further explore this possible solution.

Teachers themselves are the final line of interpretation and action of the intended curriculum, and how they react and respond to federal, state, and institution goals in their planning of social studies at the intermediate elementary level is an area that needs more qualitative and robust description of why and how teachers do this. They serve as the final gatekeepers of the content, practices, and emphasis of said content. It is with this assertion that I approach my research. It is vital that as educational researchers we understand how teachers make instructional decisions as they relate to the social studies, and what gatekeeping factors influence students' opportunities to learn social studies in a purposeful and powerful way.

Capability and Gatekeeping

Teacher capability is the combination of a teacher's own sense of autonomy, efficacy, and identity as the teacher interacts with the context of the school and its policies. Ogawa (2003) posited that when considering the context of teaching, teachers served as a direct conduit between the institution and organization. Their role was to "Stand at the boundary between the social order, as defined by institutions and reflected in the structures of school organization, and the potential chaos, or uncertainty, that would result if they

failed in their mission" (p. 27). He later explained that teachers must "deploy a multidimensional knowledge base" (p. 27). In so making this claim, Ogawa (2003) clearly demonstrated the important and complex role teachers play in the interpretation of the intended and implemented curriculum through the lens of the teacher's own capability.

Ogawa (2003) also argued that social institutions such as schools are the primary provider of knowledge-transmission. Thus, they serve as places in which students learn not only knowledge, but also are places to maintain "Social cohesion, or order, by morally and technically socializing people who are not integrated into existing cultural, political and economic structures" (p. 29). Hence, teachers as gatekeepers not only are responsible for the knowledge transmitted to students, but must also serve as instructors of societal expectations and social integration. This belief aligns with the ultimate goal of social studies as a subject area, to create effective citizens. It is with this in mind that one must consider a teacher's identity and beliefs in the complex role she plays as gatekeeper.

Because schools as institutions are supposed to mirror society's values, policy makers create directives developed at the federal, state, local, and school level, including curriculum and teaching practices to "Shape both what is taught and how it is taught" (Ogawa, 2003, p. 29). Teachers must interpret these policies and make decisions on how to implement them within their classrooms. As gatekeepers, teachers bring with them their own sets of beliefs, understandings, and capabilities about the world, which are used as a lens in which to interpret the policies and structures set forth by the government, community, and the school in which they work. Ogawa (2003) argued that teachers are not beholden to policies; rather they are critical interpreters of the policies. In reference to teachers, he stated, "They are knowledgeable: They act in ways that they know or believe

will produce a particular outcome. Moreover they are capable: They can and do select from among alternative acts" (p. 30). Explaining that teachers made decisions from a variety of positions and contexts, Ogawa (2003) asserted, "They must take stock of themselves, their purpose, their students or particular student, the context, the curriculum, subject matter and pedagogy, and the mix of these elements" (p 33).

Day (2002) further elaborated on the critical role teachers played in the enactment of policies. She wrote, "Teachers' ability to understand and interpret events in their classroom requires situational knowledge which itself will be based upon experiences in similar situations. Societal knowledge relates to the responsibility of teachers to 'look beyond the specific to the more general purposes of education' vital in order to relate what the student is learning to the broader context which gives it meaning" (p 53).

Grant and Gradwell (2009) describe how teachers who have a strong sense of capability are able to shift the course of social studies instruction within their own classrooms. They refer to these teachers as ambitious teachers. The authors explain:

> Ambitious teachers, then, a) know their subject matter well and see within it the potential to enrich their students' lives; b) know their students well, which includes understanding the kinds of lives their students lead, how these youngsters think about and perceive the world, and that they are far more capable than they and most others believe them to be; and c) know how to create the necessary space for themselves and their students in environments in which others (e.g., administrators, other teachers) may not appreciate either of their efforts (p. 2).

Understanding how ambitious teachers enact their capability to make instructional decisions can help inform the field about what can be done to reduce the marginalization of social studies.

The National Council for the Social Studies (2014) explained that social studies is integral in this part of the curriculum by stating, " The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world." Part of the role of social studies education is to help students foster a civic mindset that is based upon the societal structures that our communities have developed. Thus, understanding a teacher's many roles and lenses and considering how a teacher operates and implements the curriculum, can inform us better about her instructional decision-making.

Teachers as Levers of Opportunity to Learn

The construct of OTL is one way in which researchers can describe the learning experiences of students in classrooms. Teachers serve as the gatekeepers of students' opportunities to learn, in that they must interpret policies at a variety of levels and then enact them through their own capability (Thornton, 1989). OTL has been used as a measure in quantitative research to measure time on a subject as well as additional inputs (Scheerens, 2016; Schmidt & Maier, 2009; Wang, 1998). In more recent years, the construct of OTL has evolved (Carroll, 1989). What was once a rudimentary measure of time and content coverage has transformed to include descriptors regarding the quality of instruction, depth of instruction, as well as the practices and pedagogy surrounding instruction. Wang (1998) explained that "Opportunity to Learn concept embodies two

basic dimensions: the amount and the quality of exposure to new knowledge" (p.140). This concept has been broken down further into constructs of learning and instruction. Kerlinger (1973) explained that, "A construct is a concept. It has the added meaning, however, of having been deliberately and consciously invented or adopted for a specific scientific purpose" (p. 29). Opportunity to Learn as a construct that is used to describe student learning experiences and educational opportunities have included the following variables as defined by Wang (1998):

- Content Coverage Variables: variables measure whether or not students cover the core curriculum for a particular grade level or subject matter.
- Content Exposure Variables: variables that take into consideration the time allowed for and devoted to instruction (time-on-task) and the depth of the teaching provided.
- Content Emphasis Variables: variables that influence which topics within the curriculum are selected for emphasis and which students are selected to receive instruction emphasizing lower order skills (i.e., rote memorization) or higher order skills (i.e., critical problem solving).
- Quality of Instructional Delivery Variables: variables reveal how classroom teaching practices (i.e., presentation of lessons) affect students' academic achievement (p. 140).

Heafner & Plaisance (2016) used OTL as a theoretical framework in a qualitative study that described student opportunities to receive quality of instruction and depth of content. Thus, what was once a quantitative measure alone, has also been used to describe teacher instructional practices in a qualitative manner. Considering the impact of teachers

as gatekeepers of the curriculum can ultimately help in understanding what opportunities are afforded students in the learning of elementary social decision-making through the teacher's instructional decision-making.

Policy Analytics

Policy analytics provides a distinct framework in which to consider the intersection between policies and practice (Cohen & Hill, 1998). Foundationally, policies are enacted through political venues based upon social constructs or values (Weimer, 2009). For instance, in response to societal shifts in values and greater understanding of equity, policies regarding the desegregation of schools were included in the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Teaching Tolerance, 2004). Goddard, Skrla, and Salloum (2017) explained that "Contemporary education policy itself is multi-dimensional and dynamic and that its impact (on equity or anything else) is highly variable and depends on a long and complex chain of implementation efforts between the State, House, and the classroom" (p.222). Therefore, it is important to understand how policies instituted at the federal and state level are implemented at the building level and within the classroom.

Daniell, Morton, and Insua (2016) explained that at its simplest form "Policy analysis may be viewed as a framework for thinking about policy problems and making choices, which could comprise typical stages in decision support" (p. 3). This process often results in a cyclical evaluation period that follows as such: agenda setting, analysis, policy decision, policy implementation, and monitoring. It is within the last portion of the cycle in which my research on instructional decision-making of intermediate elementary social studies instruction is relevant. Specifically, Daniell et al. (2016) explained that monitoring of a public policy is crucial part of policy analytics. This stage is "aimed at evaluating, on

an ongoing basis, whether the implemented policy is producing the expected results, to identify whether the policy should be changed or new issues need to be considered in the agenda" (p. 3). How and why teachers interpret policies and enact them within their classroom can help guide future research on the practices of teachers.

In recent years, standards-based reforms and accountability measures policies have encouraged states and school districts to provide rigorous standards (such as the Common Core State Standards) that align to, and are measured by, achievement tests. Practice entails the actual enactment of policies within the classroom (Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007; Thornton, 1989). In consideration of policies regarding the instruction of social studies, each state sets its own standards that are taught within the social studies classroom. How teachers make sense of the standards through their own capability and beliefs may directly influence what opportunities students have to learn.

Capability entails the resources that practitioners bring to policy through the individual and social sources of teachers. Each teacher within a classroom brings "values, interests, dispositions, and skill and knowledge to their encounters with policy" (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007, p. 537). Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin (2007) argued that it is within teacher capabilities that many policies thrive or fail. Teacher capability is observed in teacher practices through teachers' instructional decision-making. Teacher capability reflects the knowledge and interests, as well as the values teachers have. In addition to this, capability reflects a teacher's beliefs about her autonomy within the context of the school and classroom. How teachers enact a curriculum or standard, the time they allow for it, and the depth in which they cover the content are all a part of their instructional decision-making (Costigan & Crocco, 2007). One component of policy analytics is looking at how

practitioners enact policies through their instructional decision-making. It is with this understanding of capability as an enactment of practice that drives this research.

Finally, it is widely acknowledged that school leadership greatly influences a teacher's sense of efficacy and autonomy (Anderson, 2014; Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller, 2015). School leadership at a charter school is especially important to understand, as the bureaucratic roadblocks that exist in traditional public education are supposedly reduced (Corey, Phelps, Ball, Desmonte, & Harrison, 2012). Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) explained, "Leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organisation and on pupil learning" (p. 29). It is therefore important to understand how the policies set forth by federal and state legislators are understood and enacted by the leadership of a charter school and perceived by teachers when considering how teachers make instructional decisions.

Current Research about the Planning and Decision-Making of Intermediate Elementary Social Studies in Charter Schools

Research on Teacher Instructional Decision-Making

The first piece of writing which guides this research is the synthesis on teacher instructional decision making done by Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008). The authors of this piece produced a chronological descriptive article regarding the research around teacher instructional decision-making. The authors described how this research has evolved, especially with the advent of cognitive psychology. They began with the work of Alan J. Bishop as one of the most highly influential researchers on this subject, and then present the similarities and differences between other researchers who have investigated teacher instructional decision making. The lens in which the authors framed

this research was mathematics, although they also presented research done to investigate instructional decision making in reading. In looking at the findings, the authors noted that several of the researchers had similar findings surrounding teacher instructional decision making, specifically that it was a complex process of action and thought, that involves the experiences of teachers, the preparation and training of teachers, and the practice of teachers as framed through the teacher's individual values, beliefs and schema.

The authors shared a visual representation of how instructional decision-making occurs, and then further explained and shared how others have approached the decision-making of teachers. This representation depicts how teacher capability and context interact to guide teacher instructional decision-making within the context of the moment.

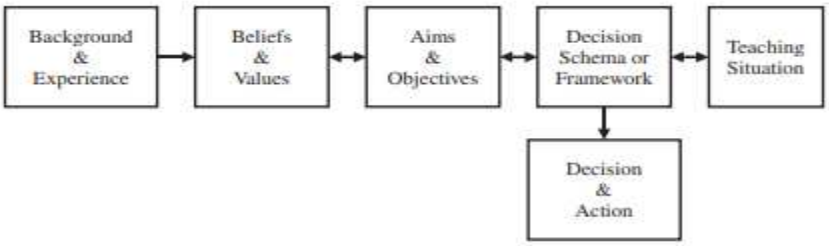

Fig. 4.1 Bishop and Whitfield's teacher decision-making framework (adapted from Bishop & Whitfield, 1972, p. 6)

p.40

Figure 1. Chart of Bishop and Whitfield's Teacher Decision-Making Framework. Reprinted from Borko, Roberts, & Shavelson, 2008,p. 40 retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Philip_Clarkson/publication/227222789_Developing_a_Festschrift_with_a_Difference/links/00b7d52c159c83663d000000.pdf#page=46

The authors described the research surrounding the differences in teacher instructional decision-making between novice and expert teachers, and described the thinking by Bishop and Whitfield (1972) and later Bishop alone (1976) wrote that experienced teachers recognized events from prior schema, and therefore were better equipped to

make instructional decisions. The authors synthesized Bishop's findings into six key points:

- Experienced teachers classified and recognized situations from precious experiences as "types of incidents."
- Teacher strategies for dealing with situations were representative of positive or negative strategies they had employed previously.
- Teachers tended to use the same strategy or response to in the moment decision making regarding student feedback.
- Teachers were consistent in their responses to student errors, following path of familiarity once a chosen response had worked previously.
- Teachers were cognizant of student abilities and often use their analysis of a single child to determine readiness/understanding of other students within the class.
- Experienced teachers were less aware that they are making decisions because it has become ingrained into their schema. (Paraphrased from Borko, Roberts, Shavelson, 2008, p. 43)

The authors asserted that Bishop's work was firmly built around teacher practice over theory, comparing his work to that of others who were more theoretical in nature and then practice based. The authors stated, "One substantial contribution of this early work was its firm recognition of the importance of teaching situations or contexts and how they shape decisions and teaching actions." (p 43).

The authors then presented the work of other scholars in the field, and compared their findings to the work of Bishop. They presented frameworks of thinking about

instructional decision-making by Shavelson and Stern (1981). This work grew from a cognitivist perspective. Borko, Roberts, & Shavelson (2008) explain that unlike Bishop who approached decision-making from practice to theory, Shavelson and colleagues began their analysis from a theory and then used it to make sense of practice. They added cognitive theory to Bishop's findings and add more to the concept of teacher decision-making by describing heuristics- a means in which teacher make decisions/judgements related to the students within their classroom.

The authors explained that between 1980-1990, researchers were primarily focused on how teachers planned for instruction and teachers' in-the-moment decision-making (referred to as interactive decision-making). The authors described how teachers within the moment reacted to students stating, "The cues or events that typically prompted teachers' interactive decisions were student cues such as disruptive behavior, unsatisfactory responses or work, and apparent lack of understanding. Teachers reported making real-time decisions about aspects of the instructional process such as questioning strategies, selection of student respondents, and selection of appropriate instructional representations and examples" (p 51). The researchers synthesized Bishop and others research to illustrate how researchers began to examine the intersection of policy and teacher instructional decision-making. Citing research done by others, the authors explained how researchers described the impact different components of teacher capability had on teachers' decision-making. They explained that within the context of school level or district level demands, instructional decision making was influential on teachers' decisions. They also found that teachers' decision-making lead to huge variance

between classrooms even with policy guidelines. Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008) wrote:

> Certain policies influenced teachers' interactive decisions, such as policies that required students to complete all textbooks, workbooks, and worksheets supplied by the required basal reading programs. Other policies influenced planning decisions such as administrative policies on class size, scheduling, grouping, and promotion and retention. For example, county and school guidelines specified when reading, language arts, and mathematics instruction would occur during the school day and how much time was allotted to each subject. Building administrators further influenced planning by assigning all students to reading groups within classrooms. Despite the clear influence of external forces, however, the teachers found opportunities for planning and interactive decision making within these constraints, which resulted in instructional programs that varied greatly across classrooms. (pp. 51-52)

These findings described by Borko, Richards, and Shavelson (2008) are key to guiding my research as a means of describing teacher instructional decision-making in social studies. Although the authors synthesized the research in math and reading, there were no explicit connections drawn to social studies. This presents itself as a hole in the research, and as such, I chose to further investigate how teachers made decisions related to social studies. What influences teachers' planning for social studies and interactive decision-making in social studies instruction?

Charter Schools Provide Reduced Bureaucracy

Charter schools are federally and state supported public institutions that operate outside of the established public schools. Described by researchers Wohlstetter, Wenning, and Briggs (1995) as places in which bureaucracy was lessened by the nature of its autonomy, charter schools offered an alternative to traditional public schools (Corey, Phelps, Ball, Demonte & Harrison, 2012; Gawlik, 2007; Wohlstetter, Wenning & Briggs, 1995). In reducing the large system overhead, charter schools were purportedly able to tailor instruction to best meet their particular cohort of students' needs. In 1994 the Federal Charter School Program became an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, this program provides grants and additional monies to help the development and growth of successful charter schools. Thus, charter schools are an enacted federal policy that can be considered through the lens of policy analytics. When considering the research on social studies marginalization in public schools as an OTL issue, the federal and state policies that foster and encourage charter schools are a unique place in which to consider how social studies instruction is planned for and implemented, as it is a policy that is intended to encourage innovation and slash bureaucracy. In a charter school setting, researchers are able to see how teachers interpret and interact with policies, as there is purportedly less bureaucracy or middle managers between the policies and the teachers in a charter school

Research Regarding Teacher Perceptions of Administrative Policies

The administration of a school can be highly influential in teacher practices within the school. Administrators also enact policies that teachers must respond to and interpret when making instructional decisions. Gawlik (2018) investigated how instructional

leadership of the principal and instructional leadership within a charter school was established and the barriers these principals and leaders face. Using a case study design, the researcher conducted interviews, observations, took field notes, and analyzed a variety of documents to better understand how charter school principals engaged in instructional leadership. Although bounded by the context of the schools in which the researcher worked, the emerging themes that explained how instructional leadership was enacted within a charter school were: the development of a school mission, managing curriculum and instruction, and promoting school climate and culture. It is the second finding, how principals are engaged in curriculum and instruction, which is a starting point in considering my second research sub-question: (b) How do teachers interpret and make sense of policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level? How do policies set forth by leadership influence teacher's instructional decision-making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction? Gawlik (2018) posited that:

> In theory, charter school principals should be more effective school leaders because they have more autonomy to provide the necessary capacity and support. With this greater autonomy, as well as a lower level of bureaucracy (relative to traditional schools), charter school leaders might be able to spend more time attending to instructional leadership than their counterparts in traditional schools. (p. 560)

In looking at the instructional and curricular decisions, the author found the principals to be highly engaged in these processes. The major influence in how the principals made instructional decisions were the state testing standards and data on their student population. How teachers then respond to perceived priorities or policies set forth by their administration is important in understanding their overall instructional decision-making.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented a review of the literature currently surrounding the marginalization of social studies, the role of teachers as gatekeepers, described OTL as a construct in both quantitative and qualitative research, and discussed the framework of policy analytics.

I began by describing the trend of social studies marginalization in elementary schools and discussed the contributing factors, mainly focusing on testing demands but also identifying the confusion surrounding what the purpose and practices surrounding socials studies are. I presented the current literature surrounding what is best practice in social studies and how the current purpose and pedagogy surrounding social studies in intermediate elementary classrooms is described through the National Council of Social Studies.

After explaining the current crisis in the field identified as the marginalization of social studies, I then presented the current understanding on the role of teachers as gatekeepers and how this can be examined through descriptors used with the construct of OTL. I explained how this nuanced concept has grown into a construct used in the field of educational research to define and describe the learning experiences of students based upon exposure to content, quality of content, and practices to ensure mastery of content. I identified how students' opportunity to learn social studies may be a contributing factor to the continuing achievement gap, and explained how the marginalization of social studies in traditional public schools is an opportunity gap for many minority and low-income students. I also described how teachers serve as the primary gatekeepers of the

implemented curriculum, and thus are critical levers in a students' opportunity to learn social studies.

After discussing the role of teachers as gatekeepers, I introduced the framework of policy analytics, in which researchers consider how policies created at the state and federal level were enacted within the general population. I explained that education is a socially accepted value, and thus policies surrounding education have been fostered to transmit this belief. I then connected the policies related to charter schools formation and implementation and described how charter schools were intended to be centers of innovation through less bureaucracy. I described the current research surrounding how policies are enacted, and how leadership plays a seminal role in charter schools.

Finally, I presented several research studies that have led to the call to the need for a thicker and richer description of how teachers as gatekeepers of the curriculum in charter schools make instructional decisions as they relate to social studies using a lens of OTL descriptors and policy analytics framework. In so doing, I have built a solid and logical case for how this study will help build on the literature currently out there and help further explain the phenomenon of intermediate elementary social studies teachers' instructional decision-making in a unique non-traditional school context.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The previous chapters described and defined the status of social studies education in elementary classrooms in public schools. They also explained the role of charter schools as an alternative to public schools as a means to reduce bureaucracy and put the instructional decision-making more firmly in the hands of the direct school building and teachers within it. These chapters addressed the role of teachers as gatekeepers and the final purveyors of the curriculum. In the literature review, I discussed OTL as both a construct and concept, and finally as a qualitative descriptor. I made the case that OTL can also serve as a means in which to describe and explain students' opportunities within the classroom to learn.

In this chapter, I describe and explain the methodological approach to my study, and supply a rationale for the chosen methodology. First, I review the key questions and form the rationale for my approach to this research. Then, I describe the site and participants connected with this research. After that, I describe what data I collected, how it was collected, and how this ensures both the reliability and validity of the study. I proceed to explain how this data was analyzed, and provide evidences for my procedural trustworthiness and my own positionality within the research. Finally, I define and describe the limitations of my study and summarize the overall approach to methodology I used in the study.

As indicated previously, time on social studies instruction in elementary classrooms is waning. Students are not receiving the same opportunities to learn this core subject area. Policies enacted at the federal and state levels are encouraging innovation in education through the implementation of charter schools. In these unique environments, it is believed

that school level administrators and teachers may have more autonomy to make instructional decisions. It is within this unique context that I sought to examine teacher instructional decision-making in regards to social studies. In response to Pace's (2007) call to continue to investigate teacher instructional decision-making in social studies classrooms in a variety of contexts, and using a lens of teachers as gatekeepers responsible for students opportunity to learn social studies, I examined the following questions:

In what ways, do intermediate elementary level teachers enact gatekeeping, as it relates to elementary social studies in a charter school?

(a) How does teacher identity and sense of autonomy influence teacher instructional decision-making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

(b) How do teachers interpret and make sense of policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level? How do policies set forth by leadership influence teacher's instructional decision-making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

Research Design

Yin (2018) explained, "The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomenon" (p. 5). In this instance, it was my desire to understand the intersection of teacher capability and policies. Specifically I looked at how teachers made instructional decisions in a unique and innovative environment of a charter school, and described the subtle nuances of teacher instructional decision-making as it related to elementary social studies. Using the construct of OTL to guide my description of teacher instructional decision-making, I attempted to explain how intermediate

elementary school teachers served as gatekeepers within a specific complex environment. I described how intermediate elementary teachers in grades 3, 4, and 5 interacted with policies at a variety of levels including federal, state, and building levels and through their own capability determined what and how it should be instructed within the social studies classroom. I described how planning of instruction was enacted within the classroom. In the following sections, I fully describe my methodology. For now, I provide an overview of my methods. By selecting a descriptive case study design, I was better able to address the scope of the study because a descriptive case study requires me to:

- Investigate a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident (p. 15).

The features of a case study also drove the decision to use this form of methodology in that they allow me to address the "technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points" (p. 15). The study itself "benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis" (p. 15) and finally the study "relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (p. 15). Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that "Triangulation of data sources, data types or researchers is a primary strategy that can be used and would support the principle in case study research that the phenomena be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives" (p. 556). Using observations, interviews, document analysis and additional sources of data, I was able to provide a "thick description" and "thick interpretation" of the phenomenon as defined by Ponterotto (2006):

> Thick description refers to the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behavior) within its particular context. The context can be within a smaller unit (such as a couple, a family, a work environment) or within a larger unit (such as one's village, a community, or general culture). Thick description accurately describes observed social actions and assigns purpose and intentionality to these actions, by way of the researcher's understanding and clear description of the context under which the social actions took place. Thick description captures the thoughts and feelings of participants as well as the often complex web of relationships among them. Thick description leads to thick interpretation, which in turns leads to thick meaning of the research findings for the researchers and participants themselves, and for the report's intended readership. Thick meaning of findings leads readers to a sense of versimilitude, wherein they can cognitively and emotively "place" themselves within the research context. (p. 543)

The case under study in this instance is the instructional decision-making and gatekeeping of intermediate elementary school teachers in a unique educational environment (a charter school) using the descriptors of OTL to examine the planning and practices of said teachers. Because this study involves multiple sources of data and multiple cases within the context of a charter school, the study was a single case embedded case design in which the teacher instructional decision-making of teachers in this charter school served as the phenomenon and grade level teams (grades 3, 4, and 5) served as embedded units of analysis. Yin (2018) explained that cases "can be some event or entity other than a single person. Case studies have been done about a broad variety of topics, including small groups" (p. 29). In

designing my study to include embedded sub-units of study (the teachers by grade level), I present a thicker description of the context, and thus arrived at thicker interpretation and meaning from the analysis and study.

Baxter and Jack (2008) clarified this further by explaining that the case is what is being analyzed. In this instance, the phenomenon of teacher instructional decision-making as gatekeepers within a charter school becomes the unique and overall case. Within this case, the grade levels serve as embedded units of study because of their unique grade level standards and roles. Having multiple embedded units provided me the opportunity to compare between sub-units (or within) and better confirm or refute theory. Baxter and Jack stated:

> The ability to look at sub-units that are situated within a larger case is powerful when you consider that data can be analyzed within the subunits separately (within case analysis), between the different subunits (between case analysis), or across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis). The ability to engage in such rich analysis only serves to better illuminate the case. (2008, p. 550)

In addition to defining my case, it is important that I provided the bounds of my case (Yin, 2018). Thus, my study was bounded by the group (intermediate elementary school teachers who teach social studies), the sub units (the embedded within case study by grade level), the context (one specific charter school in a unique setting on the outskirts of a major metropolitan city in the southeastern United States), and time (this study was conducted during the spring semester in the 2018-2019 school year at the charter school with a specific group of teachers). Bounding my study in this manner "help[ed] determine the scope of [my] data collection and, in particular , how [I] will distinguish data about the

subject of [my] case study (the "phenomenon") from data external to the case (the "context")" (Yin, 2018, p. 31).

Site Selection

The site of this study was important to the context of the study. Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007) explained that "case study research studies an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting or a context)" (p. 245). The selection of my site was driven by a desire to better understand how teachers make sense of policies enacted at the federal, state, and building levels without the same levels of institutional guidance or bureaucracy that could be evident in more traditional public school settings. As established in the literature review, charter schools are places where some middle management is removed, therefore it was a cleaner and clearer line of interpretation from policies to teacher practices. Teachers within the selected charter school reported high levels of autonomy in their instructional decision making, and therefore were better able to describe how the policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level interacted with their decision making.

Charter in North Carolina is a charter school located in the southeastern United States. Under the tutelage of a for-profit management education group, Charter in North Carolina operates as a K- 12 tuition-free educational institution available to all school aged residents of North Carolina. To be admitted to the school, families submitted an application for enrollment. The school mission statement focused on helping students reach their fullest academic and to become effective and prepared citizens for the 21st century (School Website, "Mission Statement," 2018). In its official mission statement, the school addressed the desire to develop students to become "responsible citizens" and provide an

environment that focused on “citizenship” and “community engagement.” As the purpose of this study is to describe teacher instructional decision-making as it relates to social studies instruction, the mission of the school appeared to indicate a pro-social studies environment, thus a ripe environment to study.

In addition to the overall mission of the school as positive reason for choosing this particular site, the positionality of the administration within this building created a unique environment in which to examine teacher instructional decision-making. The school had recently hired new leaders that had shown previous interest in the instruction and instructional practices of social studies. Finally, the school had already opened itself up for a variety of collaborations with faculty, and thus had well-established relationships with the university and clear understanding about the research process.

It is acknowledged that school leadership is vitally important to the policies and culture of the school. This is even more so in a charter school setting, as leadership serves in a variety of roles. Within many charter schools, administrators have more autonomy in setting priorities and goals for the school as a whole (Gawlik, 2008, 2018; Goddard et al., 2015).

The selection of this site was ultimately driven by a desire to better understand how teachers make sense of policies enacted at the federal, state, and building levels without the same levels of institutional guidance or bureaucracy that could be evident in more traditional public school settings. Charter schools are places where some of this middle management is often lessened, therefore it afforded a cleaner and clearer line of interpretation from policies to teacher practices (Gawlik, 2008). Teachers within this selected charter school reported high levels of autonomy in their instructional decision-

making, and therefore were better able to demonstrate the relationship between policies and individual teacher capability.

Finally, the location of the site afforded me convenience of access. Proximity to the site allowed multiple visits, which allowed for greater opportunities for data collection. I was able to meet with teachers, observe classes, collect artifacts, and communicate with administration easily. This proximity made the gathering of rich and meaningful data possible. It helped develop the overall validity of my findings.

It is because of the previously listed reasons, including the mission, leadership, and proximity of the school, as well as the lessened bureaucracy implicit in many charter schools, that made this site the best fit for this study. North Carolina's recent policies in support of school choice and documented expansion in this type of educational setting (Hinchcliffe, 2018) require us to take a closer look at charter school practices. This charter school served as one example of how teachers make instructional decisions as gatekeepers. It provided a distinctive and unmatched setting in which to consider the possibilities for teacher decision-making. It served as an answer to the call by Pace (2007) to look at the instructional practices of the teachers within a variety of settings, so that we can better understand intermediate elementary teacher instructional decision-making as it relates to social studies instruction, planning, and practices.

Participants

The criteria for participation in this study was (1) intermediate elementary school teachers who (2) worked in this unique setting and (3) were responsible for the instruction of social studies. Although the school had a total of five third grade teachers, four fourth grade teachers, and four fifth grade teachers, only six teachers were actually used in the

study. This was due to the availably and willingness of the teachers to participate in the study, as well as the content areas that the teachers actually taught. With that said, all members of the intermediate instructional team were important in understanding the full context of teaching and learning social studies within this unique setting.

Other informants to the study were the administration and support staff who worked directly and indirectly with the faculty to instruct social studies. Their perspectives helped me better understand the positionality and perspectives on social studies at a school level, and were critical in understanding and describing the overall gestalt of the school. Although no formal interviews or observations were directly used within the study, the insights of these people was greatly appreciated.

Data Collection

Yin (2018) explained that for data collection to be maximized it is important to follow certain principles of data collection. They include the use of multiple source, creating a case a study database, maintaining a chain of evidence, and being careful with data sources. It is important to have multiple data sources so that one can triangulate data so that the researcher can present an in depth picture of the study. Yin (2018) argued that by doing so, the researcher will be able "to develop *converging lines of inquiry"* (p. 127). With multiple lines of inquiry, the researcher is better able to see where themes overlap and be able to present a fuller case. Because I sought to understand teacher instructional decision-making, I used guiding questions surrounding the teacher's individual capability (identity and autonomy) and practices using the contributing factors of OTL descriptors. I asked teachers questions related to their beliefs about the purpose of social studies, their background and experiences related to social studies, and their perceptions of

administrative priorities within the school. Within the context of data collection, I used opportunity to learn descriptors to make sense of how teacher instructional decision-making occurred within this unique context. It is with this understanding of the need to bring lines of converging inquiry that I used the following forms of data to help better answer and describe the questions set forth in this study.

Documents. Bowen (2009) explained that document analysis "is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (p. 27).This form of data is especially helpful in triangulating data found with other sources (including interviews and observations). Yin (2018) further clarified that when documents combined with other forms of data are used to discover findings, the overall construct validity is increased. Patton (1999) explained how documents can help confirm or validate information gleaned in other methods including observation and interview, and provide a fuller picture.

Yin (2018) outlined the benefits and pitfalls of documents, specifically as they relate to case study research. Because documents can be reviewed frequently they are considered "stable" (p. 114) as a piece of data. Also, because documents exist outside of the confines of the study, they are not created due to the study. They do not require additional effort on the part of the participants, as they exist beyond the needs or scope of the research. Documents can provide specifics surrounding a situation and give clear indicators and measures of time, events, and people. Finally, documents can cover a broad range of information and show changes over time from an unbiased viewpoint. Yin (2018) cautioned that documents may be difficult to acquire or only be selective in their nature if what is collected is only partially available. The documents provided may also be biased

by the documents' authors, who may no longer be available for comment or reflection on the artifact. Finally, sources may be withheld or access denied due to a desire by the participants or the site administrators. Overall, it is apparent that documents do provide valuable information, but it is important that the researcher is diligent in collection and management of the materials, and pays close attention to what is said and unsaid within those documents.

Using documents such as lesson plans helped me look at the intended curriculum as described in the plans, and provided insight into the teachers thinking about social studies instruction. Lesson plans also provided information on the intended standards to be addressed and the practices and resources the teacher and students used to teach and learn. The School Improvement Plan provided information on the priorities of the school community as a whole, and helped me better understand what was or was not emphasized as a priority or goal for the school. This information helped me better understand how administrators and school policy may have directly or indirectly influenced teacher instructional decision-making as it related to intermediate elementary social studies instruction. Weekly calendars, schedules, and planning schedules also provided evidences for designated activities, time allotted for instruction, and additional information that helped me better understand the instructional decision-making of the teacher participants in the study. The school charter was another document that served to describe the intended purpose of the school, and clarified what the school's intentions were to innovate and serve its community. These documents as well as additional artifacts helped me corroborate and clarify what was learned through observation and interviews.

Interviews. Because the intention of my study was to describe teacher instructional decision-making and the environment in which these decisions were made, interviews served as a critical tool in my research design. Yin (2018) asserted that, "Interviews can especially help by suggesting explanations (i.e., the "hows" and whys") of key events, as well as the insights reflecting participants' relativist perspectives" (p. 118). Yin (2018) also claimed that interviews can help shed light on the history of a phenomenon and help guide the researcher towards other data sources that might help elucidate and better describe the phenomenon.

It is vitally important that the researcher considers her line of questioning within the interviews, and leaves room for discovery. This type of interview, also known as a semi-structured interview, required the researcher to consider the intended research questions, but also make room for discovery and build rapport. Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) clarified the levels of interviews one can conduct, and the nuances of each. The structured interview borders on a read-aloud questionnaire, in that it only allows for specific questions, and very little follow up. The unstructured interview on the other hand is at times can be time consuming without much clarity towards the goals or intended questions. Instead, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) explained that "Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail" (p.291). The use of semi-structured interviews helped guide me in gaining an understanding of the instructional decision-making and gatekeeping of intermediate elementary school teachers as it related to social studies. It also left room for places of discovery, which certainly did occur. By using the semi-structured interview

I was able to refine my overall understanding of the intersection of teacher capability and policies and narrow the lens of my research to best answer the overall questions of the study. By using guiding questions and also leaving room for discourse and following a path of inquiry, I was able to find themes and add to the converging lines of inquiry that Yin (2018) suggested. I designed a set of semi-structured interview questions to guide this line of inquiry, which was checked by teachers in the field and trusted colleagues for their clarity and ability to access key knowledge (See Appendix A: Semi-Formal Interview Protocol Questions—Teachers).

Observations. A third piece of data used in the study was direct observation of the participants. Yin (2018) explained that observations could be both formal as well as casual, depending on the range of needs for your case study. By conducting observations, the researcher learns more about the topic being studied. He recommended the development of observation instruments as part of the study protocol, "to assess the occurrence of certain types of behaviors during certain periods of time in the field" (pp. 121-122). Teacher observation using field notes and then extended notes gave me a greater understanding of the whole gestalt of the instructional planning and context in which teachers make decisions within this unique setting, and provided insights into the teachers' day to day practices. By getting to know the participants and seeing them in operation, I became a part of the phenomenon. The interpreted experiences and lived phenomenon help me better understand and make meaning of the phenomenon of teacher instructional decision-making as a whole. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) explained that this type of data collection "enables the fieldworker to directly and forcibly experience for herself both the ordinary

routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject" (p. 3).

I observed the participants as they planned for social studies instruction both in team planning and on their own. This provided me insights into the participants intended curriculum and how they arrived at their plans for instruction beyond the scope of interviews. I also observed instruction, so that I could observe how the intended and implemented curriculum aligned. Finally, I met with additional school staff both formally and informally to better understand the context of the school as a whole and the push-pull factors which may have enacted upon the teachers' instructional decision-making as it related to intermediate social studies instruction.

Field notes. As I was collecting data and observing the participants within the context of the unique setting, I also documented thoughts and impressions as I went along, in an effort to develop a greater sense of what I was seeing. Eisenhardt (1989) stated that, "Field notes are an ongoing stream-of-consciousness commentary about what is happening in the research, involving both observation and analysis-preferably separated from one another" (p. 539). In using field notes, I observed, but also considered how I was interpreting what I was seeing. This too added to the overall strength of my study, as I was both gathering data and reflecting on what I noticing and observing over time. These field notes were critical in my development of themes and patterns later in the study.

Data Analysis

Because I was attempting to describe a specific phenomenon, the instructional decision-making of teachers within a unique and innovative setting, it was important that multiple forms of data were collected to help create multiple lines of inquiry and

convergence. These data were used to develop understanding through lines of inquiry, eventually arrived at specific themes about the phenomenon of teacher instructional decision-making as it relates to social studies instruction in intermediate elementary grades in a unique setting. As the data were collected, I used a system of organization and a database to represent all the different forms of data to increase the reliability of the study as a whole. Yin (2018) states that "the creation of a case study database markedly increases the reliability of your entire case study" (p. 131). Beyond the organizational aspects of the database, a clear chain of evidence was developed to support the findings of the study, which will also add to the overall construct validity of the study (Yin, 2018).

The data and research were clearly grounded within the boundaries of the study and rooted in the data presented within this specific context. Corbin and Strauss (1990) clarified these theoretical beliefs when they stated, "Grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions but also to determine how the actors under investigation actively respond to those conditions and to the consequences of their actions" (p. 419). It is vitally important that as the researcher, the data collection and analysis happen concurrently, and that as data is gathered it is evaluated and synthesized to guide future data collection and analysis. This occurred throughout the course of the study and is evidenced in the field notes, coding, and analysis of the data.

I used a constant comparative method of data analysis to make meaning of the phenomenon of teacher instructional decision-making. Interviews were carefully read first to get a general gist of the experiences of teachers as they made instructional decisions regarding social studies education, and then several times over until I arrived at codes to describe the phenomenon. The use of constant comparative methods made the most sense

because it was "concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (not provisionally testing) many properties and hypotheses about a general phenomenon (Glaser, 1965, p. 438). The process of constant comparative analysis included:

(1) comparing incidents applicable to each category

(2) integrating categories and their properties

(3) delimiting the theory

(4) writing the theory (From Glaser, 1965, p. 439)

Much like a kaleidoscope brings together many pieces to create a new view or picture of the world (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000), the same iterative process occurred using observation notes, photographic evidences, documents, and field notes. This process of triangulation ensured greater construct validity and that the findings were the result of converging themes (Yin, 2018).

These codes were analyzed even further until the themes eventually evolved to theory that was grounded in the evidence gleaned from the data regarding teacher instructional decision-making. Glaser (1965) explained that constant comparative analysis "is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (not provisionally testing) many properties and hypotheses about a general phenomenon" (p. 438). The themes and findings presented in Chapter IV, with a referenced and clearly defined line of reasoning and rationale, supported with specific links to the raw evidence through the database of collected materials, ensured the trustworthiness and overall reliability of the study.

Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

As the researcher, I ensured that the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of all participants of the study were carefully protected. All participants in the study attained

informed consent, and anonymity of participants occurred with pseudonyms and care with transcription and analysis information. All data collected and any forms related to subjects were kept in locked files in my faculty advisor's office or in a password protected computer. Post transcription, all recordings of interviews were destroyed to ensure the privacy of the participants.

Risks that could be associated with this research were minimal, although teacher confidentiality was strictly adhered to so that participants felt safe in disclosing sensitive information. Because the information did not include students' perceptions of instructional decision-making, they were not affected by the research in this study, and therefore the risk for harm was minimal. Ethical considerations thus were teacher anonymity and student privacy.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness of the study was established through the careful application of the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as member checking and collaboration and discussion with trusted peers. By using Glaser's four stages of the Constant Comparative method, I helped develop credibility and trustworthiness of her theory. Glaser (1965) explained, "The constant comparative method raises the probability of achieving a complex theory which corresponds closely to the data, since the constant comparisons force consideration of much diversity in the data" (p. 444).

To develop validity as defined by Creswell (2000) as "how accurately the account represents participants realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (pp. 124-125), I made certain the data was fully explored and saturated, so that the themes presented were done so in a clear narrative with a logical pathway. Maintaining a database of raw

data that was carefully organized and could be referenced by other helped develop the trustworthiness and chain of evidence necessary to support these themes (Yin, 2018). I gathered multiple forms of data to build a robust understanding of the whole phenomenon of teacher instructional decision-making in intermediate elementary social studies classrooms in this unique setting, thus triangulating the data and increasing its overall validity (Suter, 2012).

Researcher Positionality

Milner (2007) argued, "Researchers in the process of conducting research pose racially and culturally grounded questions about themselves. Engaging in these questions can bring to researchers' awareness and consciousness known (seen), unknown (unseen), and unanticipated (unforeseen) issues, perspectives, epistemologies, and positions" (p. 395). In addition to this, he charged the researchers " to reflect about themselves in relation to others—in this case, the communities and people involved in their research studies—and to acknowledge the multiple roles, identities, and positions that researchers and research participants bring to the research process" (p. 395).

It is with this mindset that I acknowledge my own place and space within the context of the study. I am a middle class, white female. My views on life are largely constructivist in nature, and thus I believe that reality is composed of human schema and experiences, which is constructed through our experiences (Von Glaserfeld, 1998). I have taught in public and charter schools for over 15 years. My race and gender are important in my positionality and view of the world and interactions among and within the participants, as is my experiences as a teacher. The potential bias I may have brought to the study could include both my perspectives on public school education and my

positionality as a researcher. To address these biases I frequently sought out the perspectives and understanding of the participants as I interpreted the data through the process of member checking. I also sought out non-participants and trusted colleagues, such as external intermediate elementary teachers and university faculty to ensure external validity. Checking these different lenses of the research, that of the researcher, the participants and external reviewers increased the overall validity of the study (Creswell, 2000).

Limitations

The limitations of the study were those that are inherent to qualitative research. Although I was able to develop theory, which was grounded in data and which explains the phenomenon that these teachers experienced, it cannot be applied to the greater population. The theory only explains what these particular teachers experienced in this particular school at this particular time. Because the context and site in which I conducted my study were unique, there would not be transferability from this context to another setting.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to describe the instructional decision-making of intermediate elementary school teachers as it relates to social studies instruction using descriptive case study design. Data collection includes documents and artifacts, interviews, and observations. The multiple sources of data was analyzed using constant comparative methods firmly entrenched in grounded theory beliefs. Using the lens of OTL descriptors, I describe how teachers as gatekeepers in this unique setting planned for and carried out social studies instruction, and what influenced their decision-making process.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the major findings of this study. In analyzing how teacher instructional decision-making occurs as it relates to elementary social studies instruction within the context of this charter school, I identified several patterns that emerged from the data. These patterns were within and across grade level, and were key determinants in how teachers made decisions and what that translated to in typical social studies instruction. In the first part of this chapter, I describe how teacher capability influenced the gatekeeping and instructional decisions teachers made as it related to social studies. I begin by describing how teachers explain their beliefs about the purpose of social studies education in intermediate elementary grades. I unpack and explain how teachers experiences, interests, and comfort with the content and standards appeared to be a key lever in how teachers made decisions. In addition to this, I show how teacher colleagues' experiences often influenced how the individual teacher enacted the curriculum. Finally, I demonstrate how teacher perceptions of student behavior and their own sense of capability to manage students was a key lever in teacher's instructional decision-making.

A second pattern which emerged in the data is the influence that policies at the federal, state and building level appeared to influence teacher instructional decision-making. Federal policies such as Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind appeared to influence teacher instructional decision-making as a byproduct of testing demands. State level policies including the curricular standards influenced what content was taught to some extent. Finally, administration and administrative policies as perceived by teachers influenced teachers' day-to-day instructional decision-making as it related to social studies. I describe how the administration set a clear goal and tone with the faculty that fostered a

positive culture and climate within the school, and how new initiatives guided day-to-day practices of the teachers. I also examined how the sense of teacher autonomy and instructional decision-making played out as it related to social studies instruction in the intermediate elementary grades. By using the key theoretical frameworks and understandings of teachers as gatekeepers and OTL as descriptors, we are able to gain insight into how teachers within this unique setting made instructional decisions and begin to answer the call by Pace (2011) to examine the learning experiences of students in social studies classrooms in different settings and contexts.

The Context

The unique context and setting in which this study took place was at a charter school in the southeastern United States. The school had recently been through several transitions with administration, and the new administration made the school wide goal to develop a positive culture for students, staff, and faculty. Until second semester, teachers were not required to turn in lesson plans, so teachers had a variety of ways of representing and sharing their plans for instruction. The teachers interviewed and observed for the study came from a variety of backgrounds and settings, and with a unique set of experiences, beliefs, and training, also known as capabilities.

The classrooms were organized with heterogeneous groups, although students within the Cambridge program had to meet certain criteria to participate in the program and were grouped together as one group. The Cambridge Program is an international program developed by the University of Cambridge. The program's informational page claims it provided its students "deep subject knowledge, conceptual understanding and higher order thinking skills" (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2019). The

aim of the program was to develop student learner attributes such as confidence and innovation, using metacognition and active learning processes. The brochure states:

> Schools can shape a Cambridge curriculum around how they want students to learn, with a wide choice of subjects and flexible ways to offer them. Cambridge programmes inspire students to love learning, helping them discover new abilities and a wider world. And we help students develop the skills they need for life, and to achieve at school, university and work. (p.1)

The program brochure asserted that, "education works best when curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment are closely aligned" (p. 1). The belief was that through a deep focus on subject's key concepts and could "transform a student's grasp of their subject, and open up new ways of thinking about, understanding or interpreting the important things to be learned" (p. 2). In each grade level at Charter in NC one classroom was designated as the Cambridge Program classroom. Other classrooms only followed the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

Over the course of the study, teachers experienced a shift in scheduling due to administrative policies in which students were homogenously grouped according to student ability and needs. Using NWEA data, students were clustered according to their performance in math and reading. In grades three and four, teachers continued to instruct the original heterogeneous groups during social studies time, but at other times in the day students met by ability groups for math and reading. In grade five this change led to a restructuring of the classrooms even in social studies. This transition became a unique element of the overall context of the school and had a direct impact on the instructional choices made by teachers. Each individual within the team who participated in the study

provided a unique lens through which to better understand teacher instructional decision-making in social studies education within this specific context and confines of location (Charter in NC) and time (the second semester of the 2018- 2019 school year).

The Participants

3rd Grade

The third grade team at Charter in NC consisted of five team members. The team had one identified Cambridge teacher who had the responsibility of teaching a cohort of students identified to work towards the Cambridge Program. Other teachers had heterogeneously grouped classes. Class size ranged between 15-20 students. On the third grade team all the teachers were responsible for teaching social studies. Over the course of the study, I interviewed all five teachers, observed a team planning session for an upcoming unit of study in social studies lead by the CRT (Curriculum Resource Teacher) and observed instruction of social studies in all of the teacher participants' classes.

Although all five third grade teachers were interviewed and gave consent to participate in the program, only three teachers were used for the final data analysis. Due to teacher and time constraints, two of the teachers were unable to be observed and therefore were not used in the study.

Teachers on the team shared a common schedule. Social studies and/or science instruction occurred in the afternoon, prior to afternoon dismissal. The teachers blocked content so that for several weeks students would receive social studies instruction, then several weeks students would receive science instruction. The designated time on the schedule for this content area block was from 2:15-3:00pm, but with the demands of dismissal, it usually ended at 2:45pm. Overall, the typical amount of time spent weekly on

social studies was between 100 and 150 minutes, but this was dependent on whether the grade level was teaching social studies or science in that period.

Ms. Force. Ms. Force was a third grade teacher working at Charter in NC. Her passion for teaching was evident in her rationale for becoming a teacher. She stated, "I've always been one that wanted to shape the future." Her classroom walls held student work, themes of superheroes, and an overall warm and welcoming environment. Student desks were grouped together to allow for collaboration, and the teacher table desk/table was nestled so Ms. Force could interact and observe students as well as meet with small groups. Ms. Force had taught a total of four years in all, the past two of which have been at Charter in NC. Ms. Force had also taught in public schools both here and in Florida, both of which she identified as Title I. Her pathway to teaching started in a traditional licensure and elementary education program but due to life circumstances, Ms. Force completed her program of study online through an accredited online university.

Ms. Brave. Ms. Brave was also a third grade teacher at Charter in NC. She was a veteran teacher having taught over nine years in first through sixth grades in several school systems in North Carolina. Ms. Brave was licensed through a traditional teaching program within the UNC system and was a teaching fellow. She was a first year teacher at Charter in NC. Ms. Brave had recently been inspired by the works of Brené Brown who has written the following books: *The Gifts of Imperfection*, *Daring Greatly*, *Rising Strong*, *Braving the Wilderness*, and *Dare to Lead.* Ms. Brave used a lot of the work of Brown in her classroom, setting a climate of positivity and honest and caring communication. Her classroom was arranged for student comfort and mobility. There were designated spaces in the room to meet and reflect when students were feeling emotionally challenged or having discomfort.

The walls were decorated with terms like "BRAVING," an acronym coined by Brown to describe the key elements of trust.

Ms. Matters. Ms. Matters was the designated teacher for Cambridge identified students in third grade. Students in Ms. Matter's classroom were identified through a process to determine their aptitude and willingness to participate in the program. Ms. Matters received her degree and was licensed through a traditional teacher education preparation program within the UNC system. Ms. Matters taught fifth grade for one year in a school system in the area before switching to teaching preschool and raising her child. Although Ms. Matters has taught preschool for 14 years, she identified herself as a beginning teacher, with this year at Charter in NC as her first year as a designated elementary classroom teacher (she did serve as a substitute in the previous year) in over a decade.

Fourth Grade

The fourth grade team at Charter in NC consisted of four team members, all of whom were responsible for the teaching of social studies. All of the team members were new to the fourth grade team at Charter in NC. There were a total of 76 students in the grade. One classroom was designated for the Cambridge Program, and the rest were heterogeneously grouped. At the start of the year, the team conducted whole team long term planning and weekly planning, but as the year progressed, they chose a different path. At the time of the study, the team did not do traditional group planning, so group observation of planning was not possible. The teachers who were willing to participate in the study indicated that they planned and communicated through conversations, phone calls, and texts at a variety of times and generally only with one another.

Although there were four members on the fourth grade team, only three agreed to participate in the study, and of those three, only two were available to be observed and interviewed. The teachers participating in the study reported that they switched between social studies and science throughout the week, some weeks have a heavier social studies emphasis while others science, depending on the needs of the unit of study. Both teachers reported approximately a 45 minute block of time for teaching. On a week in which the content area was social studies, the average amount of time spent per week was 225 minutes.

Ms. Driver. Ms. Driver is what Grant and Gradwell (2009) would describe as an "ambitious teacher". During the course of the study, Ms. Driver was eager and willing to take on challenges and excite students with inquiry based learning, despite the challenges and demands it presented. In describing why she became a teacher, Ms. Driver stated, "I think every child is capable of having some, some sort of [Aha] moment like that. And if I can facilitate that, then it kind of makes things, I guess worthwhile." Her passion for teaching and learning were clearly seen in her practices as evidenced by classroom observations and will be presented within the subsequent chapter. One would expect that Ms. Driver would be an experienced teacher, yet as an elementary school teacher this was only her first year in fourth grade, and last year was her first year teaching elementary grades. Prior to her work at Charter in NC she prepared to become a teacher, first in a traditional program, and later using online programs to complete her degree. Ms. Driver spent several years working in Early Childhood and attributes her comfort with inquiry and students to that experience.

Ms. Traverse. Ms. Traverse is in her second year teaching and this was her first year at Charter in NC. She received traditional certification through a program in the UNC system, and worked one year at a Title 1 school in a public school system in the area. Ms. Traverse cared deeply for her students and recognizes that trauma has a strong influence on a student's ability to "do school." Her first year teaching involved many high needs students and she conveyed that this almost pushed her out of the teaching profession. Her year at Charter in NC has given her new interest in the profession, especially because of her relationship with Ms. Driver whom she said had helped her grow as a teacher. Specifically in talking about her own experiences with teacher preparation she described how Ms. Driver had influenced her practices stating, "I wish they had taught us to like incorporate. I've learned what I've learned about project based learning from her." Ms. Traverse attributed much of her instructional decision-making on her colleague and felt she had greatly benefited from the relationship.

Fifth Grade

Although there were four fifth grade teachers, the classes were organized by content area. Only one teacher taught the entire fifth grade social studies. Therefore, for the purposes of the study, only one teacher from fifth grade was observed and interviewed. The students in the grade were heterogeneously grouped for the first half of the year, but had recently been regrouped based upon ability determined by data gleaned from NWEA measures (Measures of Academic Progress).

Ms. Solo. Ms. Solo was a first year teacher at Charter in NC, although she served in the school in a variety of functions the previous years. Unlike the other participants in the study, Ms. Solo has a degree in political science with a minor in sociology. She was a

lateral entry teacher. She had already taken the required exams and was working on course work through an online program provided through the UNC system. Ms. Solo was extremely knowledgeable about history and felt that understanding the past is vital to making sense of the present. Ms. Solo served as the only instructor of social studies in fifth grade. Each day students rotated to her classroom for their social studies block that lasted over an hour. Because the class was part of the core rotation, students received over an hour of daily instruction in social studies, adding up to over 300 minutes per week. Her classes were homogeneously grouped and her first block of the day was spent with students performing below grade level. Her classroom included clustered desks in small learning pods with a table at the back of the room that Ms. Solo kept her materials. Bulletin boards around the room displayed student work. Ms. Solo used technology and online news programs to bring current events to life, and encouraged student discussion and making connections to content they were learning and what was happening in the world today.

Analysis

Analysis of the data was thoroughly conducted using the constant comparative methods of analysis. As themes emerged, they were triangulated with multiple data points. This process was used to ensure trustworthiness of findings. As indicated previously, the major themes were split within two distinct yet intersecting realms, teacher capability and policies.

Teacher Capability

Teacher capability is comprised of the experiences and understandings a teacher brings into her classroom daily (Ogawa, 2003). It becomes a driving force in a teacher's instructional gatekeeping, and as such should be considered closely when thinking about

instructional decision-making. In the course of this study, teacher capability was observed in four dimensions: teacher beliefs, teacher experiences, teaching colleagues, and teacher perceptions of student ability and behavior.

Teacher beliefs and practices. One key component of capability is beliefs (Thornton, 1989). In considering how a teacher makes a decision about what is taught in social studies, the beliefs about the purpose behind a curricular area can give insights into how the teacher enacts the curriculum as seen through the content emphasis, content exposure, content coverage, and quality of instructional deliverables. What the teachers believed about the purpose of social studies appeared to influence what was included and emphasized within the curriculum, yet it did not always translate into the teacher instructional practices.

The teachers participating in this study across all grade levels most frequently identified the purpose of social studies as a subject area that prepared children to think beyond their own scope and experiences, and as a means to break down silos of thinking. Ms. Force explained that many students relied on their parents beliefs and political views to form opinions rather than thinking critically for themselves. This desire to help children become critical thinkers outside of what may be the traditional norms at home was repeated several times. Ms. Brave commented that the purpose was to, “create an awareness of community and the outside world, because a lot of students don't get outside of home and school and grocery store or wherever they go in their little world” while another stated that “they have no comprehension of the world and that their bubbles are so small.”

Another identified common purpose of social studies identified was learning from the past to avoid mistakes in the present and future. Ms. Solo explained, “I'm conscious

they have to understand the past to know what the present is" Ms. Force stated, "I think a big chunk of that is learning from those mistakes that we've made in history and try not to make those again." Ms. Matters elaborated about her belief in the purpose of social studies stating that, "in order to learn from those mistakes. We can't learn from them if we don't know about them."

Finally, many of the teachers in the study alluded to the importance or purpose of social studies is to prepare students for life. Ms. Matters explained that, "I see it as preparing the children for the world. Because with economics, they need to learn how money works, how supply and demand works. If they're going into the business world, those are things they're going to need to know. They need to know that products have an origin. They don't just grow at Walmart." Ms. Driver expressed this idea and connected it with civic engagement by saying "So I think social studies helps us understand the world and ourselves and how we can interact and what our responsibilities are as global citizens." In addition to interview data, many of the student work samples on the walls reflected that instruction and reflection about understanding multiple perspectives and breaking down silos was discussed within the classrooms.

Teachers self-reports about their beliefs about the purpose of social studies align with the National Council for the Social Studies definition of social studies which states "The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world." When considering the practices within the classroom through observation, interviews, and artifacts, intentional planning for challenging bias of one's perspective and experiences, learning from past errors, I observed lessons related to

cultural awareness and differences and practices such as the implementation of thinking maps which identified student's individual bias. The within grade level differences in instructional decision-making regarding this notion of bias breaking and perspective taking appeared to be a product of the interpretation of the standards assigned to each grade level, and the teachers' interpretation of what the standards meant students needed to know and do.

During observations, interviews, and with classroom artifacts it became evident that teachers' beliefs influence their decision-making, but not always the implemented practices within the classroom. Teachers at times reflected the purpose of social studies, but at other times let other content area needs such as English Language Arts standards supersede the authentic practices and learning that social studies content requires. Other push and pull factors that appeared to push teachers away from their stated beliefs about social studies included time demands, student behaviors and teachers perceptions of students capability to do activities, as well as access to resources as will be discussed later in this chapter.

A particularly illuminating experience in understanding teacher instructional decision as it relates to the purpose of social studies was the observation of the third grade team planning. The third grade team felt the standards required students to have exposure to culture and used their collaborative planning time to share ideas about how to meet the standard. In the discussion (Team planning, March 28, 2019) the third grade team with the support of the administrative staff (the CRT) began by looking at the standard for third grade. The essential standard found on the DPI website (NC Public Schools Unpacking Document, n.d), "3.C.1 Understand how diverse cultures are visible in local and regional communities" is broken down into smaller units of understanding. 3. C.1.1 states that

students will "Compare languages, foods and traditions of various groups living in local and regional communities" and 3.C.1.2 specifies that students should be able to "Exemplify how various groups show artistic expression within the local and regional communities." Finally, the third substandard clarifies, "3.C1.3 Use non-fiction texts to explore how cultures borrow and share from each other (foods, languages, rules, traditions and behaviors)." Each of these standards calls for the teachers to consider how local and regional cultures can be observed within the world around them, thus supporting the teachers' description of their understanding of the purpose of social studies.

The Curriculum Resource Teacher (CRT) opened the conversation by quickly looking at the standard and sharing a resource provided by the assistant principal that included primary sources and inquiry practices. The teachers had not had previous exposure to this resource and expressed a desire to have known about it sooner. The discussion among the teachers focused on how this would look within their own students' lives. The teachers made suggestions about asking parents about their own cultures (the student body is comprised of a diverse group of students from multiple cultures and places in the world). Another teacher suggested a parent speaker to share about his or her culture. Teachers discussed the term empathy, specifically to describe how by listening to other people's experiences the students might gain cultural empathy for others. Although a brief conversation, this conversation demonstrates that the teachers' continued to believe that the purpose of social studies is to develop understanding and respect for other cultures.

Shortly after the standards and perspective taking conversation, the teachers transitioned into the logistics of instruction. The CRT and all teachers provided possible activities that could help students share their individual cultures and learn about

differences. Teachers discussed using previous activities including making a family tree. Leaning on previous and familiar experiences that they had done in the past, the teachers attempted to make sense of how to move forward with the standard by using a variety of activities that could be engaging and meet the needs of their students.

During planning, one teacher shared a resource she had found online that she felt could help "cover the standard." This resource came from Teachers Pay Teachers that used picture books to describe different elements related to differences and components of culture. Teachers discussed the logistics of the resource and ease of implementation. Although the CRT had provided a resource that was inquiry based and contained resources for implementation ultimately the teachers used the TpT resource instead, which was based upon literature and terms related to culture. I wondered if that could be because the demands of the standards presented in combination with the time constraints of the day, prohibited teachers from doing this complex critical thinking and perspective taking. While observing the teachers go through this planning, there was very little debate over which resource to use. Ms. Matters had the necessary materials and packet prepared, and although the Inquiry was presented it was not heavily considered. In considering the overall decision-making, the teachers had an opportunity and had discussed how they could bring the content to life through inquiry, yet ultimately decided upon a premade resource with worksheets. In later follow up questions via personal email, it was confirmed by two of the teachers that the ease of implementation and the comfort in using the TpT as a resource was the driving force behind selecting the packet over the Inquiry.

After deciding on how the content would reach the children, the discussion then centered around a final culminating project which would examine places around the world

and logistics about whether switching classes so each class would have one country. Due to the amount of switching occurring during the day, the teachers expressed a desire to keep students within their own classes. Teachers referred to the school assigned calendar for standards (the pacing guide) and collaborated as a group how much time they thought the project would take. They discussed how the final goal should represent different cultures. In this process, the purpose of social studies that teachers identified as seeing beyond their own worlds and breaking down biases rarely emerged. Instead, the standards and timing demands seemed to guide the teachers to cover a topic (culture). The teachers then used their understandings of culture and the resource from TpT to guide how students would get exposure and understanding of the terms related to culture.

The agreed upon culminating final project required students to research a country/culture in a cooperative learning group. Students would research and report on the food, traditional holidays, geography, clothing, entertainment, and fun facts about the culture. Although most of the required information was to simply report and share what the students had learned, one component required students to use critical thinking to identify common biases. The rubric asked students to directly address "specific examples of Traditional and Modern clothing options." In so doing, the rubric was requiring students to challenge potential biases they may have or stereotypes regarding countries and cultures. This again is an example of breaking down student biases and aligns with the teacher beliefs about the purpose of social studies. On the other hand, the depth in which children examined the other cultures was at a recall level, and therefore did not require much higher level thinking skills or critical evaluation. It gave students exposure to other countries and cultures, but it did not ask children to synthesize what they had learned or how it might be

used to break down silos or biases. It also did not explicitly teach children about how cultures may influence or change other cultures, which was part of the indicated standard. The teachers' previous experiences with creating a culture fair seemed to drive the decision-making function, with several referring to foods they liked to eat from different cultures and recalling their own experiences with reporting on countries or previous school year participation in a culture fair.

Although the team agreed upon planned activities and resources from Teachers Pay Teachers (TpT) provided students with key vocabulary and ideas about cultures and appropriate behaviors, the learning activities that went with the literature did not necessarily foster instruction that would align with the purpose of social studies. Some activities asked children to use their imagination or set goals, both meaningful activities yet not necessarily aligned with the goals and standards set forth by the teachers, NCSS, or the state standards. The standards called for meaningful analysis of regional differences in culture, based upon the geography and patterns of migration to the area, yet the packet offered more a smattering of different big ideas surrounding acceptance, not at all related to the identified NCSCOS. Other tasks within the packet asked children to identify more ELA type standards, including determining the number of syllables in each of their classmates' names. The books suggested by the TpT addressed experiences of immigrants (*Islandborn*), differences in names (*The Name Jar*), wants and needs as well as student bullying (*Those Shoes*), the power of words (*The Word Collector*), setting goals and innovation (*The Most Magnificent Thing*), using one's imagination (*What If*), meeting people who are different than you (as well as how they can be the same) and addressing how that can be both scary and exciting (*The Day You Begin*), celebrating diversity and

differences (*All Are Welcome*), and asking permission and understanding boundaries (*Don't Touch My Hair*). Many of these books had the potential to afford teachers the opportunity to break down cultural biases and develop empathy and understanding regarding individual differences and boundaries through rich discussion and problem based learning. In selecting this resource, the teachers again demonstrated their beliefs about the purpose of social studies as a means of developing empathy and understanding. Yet, when faced with in class practices, the time and depth in which these critical conversations and learning experiences were not always evident.

During observations of the implementation of these lessons, the teachers approached and guided students into discussions and activities that reinforced key concepts in the books. Lesson plans for the week in social studies used the title of the book, the standard that was listed as culture, and a to-do list format. First, the teacher planned to read the book, then conducting an activity from the TpT text, and finally working on the culminating project.

After reading the text, Ms. Matters had students practice setting boundaries about hugs, handshakes, and high fives as a means of greeting one another. As she read the text, students asked questions and responded to inquiries by the teacher such as "Do you like it when someone touches you?" The children reacted to and responded to different parts of the text and the teacher at times allowed it while other times redirected to focus on the text and her reading. After completing the text, she asked the students to identify the main idea of the text. One child responded that it had to do with a girl who did not want people to touch her hair. The teacher then redirected and asked, "But what was the main idea?" After identifying that the main idea was that it is important to ask for consent the teacher

explained the activity. The teacher made a connection to other cultures and asked which cultures bow instead of shake hands, and why they would do this. Then, students practiced greeting one another and asking for permission and giving assent or declining forms of greeting. After a few minutes of the activity, the teacher then asked students to transition into their research groups and continue work in their research packets. While the students worked, the teacher passed out foods from different countries for the students to try.

Although Ms. Matters did talk about differences and boundaries, as well as exposing children to foods from a variety of countries, the depth and time were not as strongly presented as one would expect when considering the teacher's beliefs about the purpose of social studies. The lesson, although a powerful story about boundaries, required students to consider the main idea of the text, a reading standard, versus the social studies standard related to culture. In the Third Grade Social Studies Standards Unpacked Curriculum Document (2013), the student should know that, "Sharing cultural differences encourages self-awareness and respect for others. Not all people speak the same language, eat the same foods or have the same values and traditions," and "sharing, cultural empathy and an atmosphere of respect allow people in a community to get along." The activity reflected a desire to demonstrate respect for boundaries, yet the overall discussion had more to do with ELA content.

In another third grade classroom, Ms. Force began the lesson by having students refer to and consider why they would study other countries and cultures. This discussion further supports the idea that teachers believe that social studies is a place in which students are able to learn about the lives and cultures of people outside of themselves. The teacher asked the students why the state standards wanted students to learn about this. As she

elicited student responses she continued to guide the conversation to greater understanding of how other cultures can change students' own cultures, asking questions like "What has happened because a new culture has moved in?" and then sharing anecdotes about how different cultures approach different experiences. By eliciting responses and discussing the ways in which cultures can influence and change another, the teacher's beliefs about social studies as a place to foster understanding of differences is evident.

Once Ms. Force had held this 15-minute conversation, she began reading the book *What If* (a book from the TpT resource packet). As she began she explained that she was about to read a story about different cultures. The story is about a young girl who finds creative ways to express herself using a variety of materials. This book, as well as the TpT resource required students to think about alternative solutions for a problem or lack of resources. As she read the teacher paused and posed the question, "What do you think this has to do with other cultures?" One student responded, "Maybe they use different resources?" At the end of the book, the teacher posed the same question. Students presented their ideas and the teacher reinforced the concept that different cultures use different things and have different ways of telling a story. She then told students to work on their culture project posters in groups, cautioning that they did not have computers that day so they would only be able to work on their posters. Although the teacher was able to tie in the concept of culture, and students were able to identify that different cultures may use different resources and means to express themselves, the book itself was not a resource that necessarily taught about different cultures. The teacher however used the book and asked guiding questions that helped the resource better fit the standard and her beliefs about social studies instruction.

Another instance in which teacher instructional decision-making was influenced by the teacher beliefs about social studies was during an observation of a fourth grade lesson. Students were reading an article about Egypt and the teacher probed the students with critical questions about who provided the source and whether the source was a primary or secondary source. After identifying the perspective in which the source was written, the Ms. Driver posed the question "Can a secondary source still have bias?" This reflects the teacher's beliefs that understanding bias and perspective taking are important, as they were included both in the lesson and also further evidenced by artifacts found around the room including thinking maps which asked students to identify not only author biases but also their own. Ms. Driver explained how she makes it possible to fit in social studies into other content stating, "I like to steal time from the rest of the day to teach it." This teacher used a problem solving inquiry approach with her students to make sense of the resources, to practice both ELA standards AND social studies thinking.

Ms. Brave, a third grade teacher, expressed in her interview a reluctance to use TpT resources because she believed that it needed to be more authentic. She and her students approached the lesson quite differently. Students were working and then she called them to the carpet to share with them resources and responses she had received from a friend who lived in Indonesia. Ms. Brave had students send her questions about life in Indonesia. Prior to sharing her friend's responses she cautioned about respectful listening and reminded them that her friend would have a different accent. In so doing, she modeled how to think about the differences between people and cultures, and also prepared students to culturally responsive to others within their own lives who might speak with an accent. As they listened to the responses of the teacher's friend, students made connections and asked

questions. One student observed that he also fasted in his faith, and then shared about how he celebrated Ramadan. Students in the group listened and made connections between their faiths and his. The teacher asked questions and made observations, but a large part of the conversation was driven by the students. She then captured the essence of the conversation by stating, "Sometimes different religions have things in common" and then posed the question "What thinking map would be helpful here to represent our understanding?" This teacher's actions showed how beliefs and practices could be aligned. As a more experienced teacher who had attempted problem based learning, she clearly seemed comfortable letting the children drive the conversation, used authentic resources with connections and interviews, and still returned to the essential standard of their own community and experiences.

In considering how teacher beliefs about social studies were reflected in teacher instructional decision-making as described through OTL descriptors, teachers received standards to teach but their beliefs about social studies clearly influenced their decision-making on what content was covered and emphasized. As gatekeepers of the curriculum, teachers in this study made decisions that reflected their personal beliefs about the purpose of social studies. For instance, the standards set forth by the state in third grade clearly ask to look at local and regional cultures, yet the final project was an exploration of outside cultures beyond the scope of local and regional experiences. The discussion questions and chosen resources clearly encouraged students to think beyond their own experiences. Through intentional and unintentional discussions and selection of resources, students were encouraged to identify bias and their own lenses, and to think beyond their own viewpoint.

At times, despite teacher-expressed beliefs, the teachers' practices did not always reflect their beliefs. When considering the teachers' self-identified importance and purpose of social studies one would expect that a considerable chunk of time would be allocated to the subject area, yet in grade three, lessons were generally under thirty minutes and did not occur daily. According to teacher self-reporting on time spent on social studies, as well as lesson plan templates and posted daily schedules, the maximum amount of time possible in weekly minutes would not exceed 150 minutes, and that was if it was taught daily. In interviews with teachers of third grade, the time allotted to social studies was identified from 2:15- 2:45pm, yet this was to also be used for science time. Teachers explained that with transitions and need to pack up for the end of the day, this block of time was even less than the designated time as indicated by the master schedule. The depth of instruction and the practices within the lessons were often times more ELA standards based than social studies. This could have been an unintentional decision made by teachers due to outside demands. One teacher explained, "If I think I can come up with something hands on or more involved, I do. But, it does not get the same amount of my time when it comes to planning as my core subjects do." When asked to elaborate about why she prioritizes math and ELA she explained, "Because they are tested." Another explained, "we kind of get big things done in the morning" This statement further shows that prioritization wise, social studies despite its critical purpose, is not prioritized nor is it practiced as frequently as other content areas.

In grade four, the teachers allotted slightly more time to the instructional material, but had to balance it with science content as well. Teacher schedules in lesson plans and posted on walls reflected a 45-minute block that would be filled with social studies or

science depending on the unit of study. This could accumulate up to a maximum of 225 minutes of social studies instruction during the week if it was taught daily, but according to teacher reports, this was rarely the case. In fifth grade, due to blocking schedule, every child received an hour of instruction in social studies daily or at least 300 minutes of social studies instruction per week. Ms. Solo, the fifth grade teacher, even observed how this was a major change in the students' learning experiences stating "They have never been exposed to social studies an hour every day. They may have gotten 30 minutes, 2 days a week. So they've never really had this content." This sentiment affirms the belief that students in lower elementary receive very little content emphasis or coverage in social studies, and it is only when designated blocks or periods of time are allocated to the subject matter that they appear to receive equitable amounts of time in social studies.

Even when teachers acknowledged the importance of social studies, and understood the depth and purpose of social studies, their instructional practices were not always in alignment with those practices. The standards presented by the state require teachers to think deeply about student learning as evidenced by their unpacking guides, yet many of the practices and decision-making of teachers were limited to topics. When teachers discussed a standard, they often narrowed it to a single term, e.g., culture, economics, financial literacy. Many teachers made decisions about the resources they used using the phrase "this covers/ed the standard." Teachers' decisions to pick resources that were easy to implement on key topics or standards, often times in ELA standards, did not show that their beliefs were necessarily the driving force behind their instructional decision-making. Although beliefs are certainly an important component of teacher instructional decision-making, teachers appeared to put aside their beliefs when faced with

pragmatic choices regarding time and ease of implementation. This raises the question, beyond belief, what else drives teachers' instructional decision-making as gatekeepers of the social studies content and curriculum?

Teacher experiences and interests. Beyond teacher beliefs, teacher educational experiences and interests appear to be a driving force in how the teachers in this study made instructional decisions. When considering the capability of the teacher and her subsequent instructional decision-making, one must consider how teachers themselves learned social studies both in preparation for being a teacher as well as well as their traditional schooling prior to higher education.

It is widely accepted that teachers have a tendency to teach the way they were taught (Oleson & Hora, 2014). These experiences help form teacher understanding of how to teach. In discussing what they remember about their own learning experiences in teacher preparation, many of the participants expressed that their memories of social studies methods was minimal at best. Ms. Matters recalled conducting and then making a Webquest, but otherwise stated, "That's the only thing she could remember." Ms. Brave stated, "I don't remember the social studies class from college, but it must have been pretty similar to science I guess." Ms. Traverse remembered wishing for a different professor (in fact she was unable to even recall the name of the professor she did have for the course) stating, "His name, I honestly don't remember. But I remember feeling, I love social studies. I was a history minor so I'm really interested in teaching social studies, I don't know if the things that I learned while I was at [a nearby university] were the most relevant to actually teaching." Ms. Solo, the fifth grade teacher who had a degree in political science and had taken several courses in U.S. and world history, had not yet taken a social studies

methods course because she was a lateral entry teacher. In each of these cases, the traditional model of teacher preparation and pedagogy as it related to elementary social studies did not appear to be driving force in how the teachers chose to instruct students. Instead, many of the teachers referred to their childhood experiences in learning social studies, or alternative work experiences that helped develop their own capabilities and understanding of how to teach social studies.

Ms. Solo described how she realized she loved social studies in middle school. She explained, "I just loved it immediately. I think it was seventh grade though, because then you got it every day for 45 minutes and my teacher was real good." She described how the teacher brought the curriculum to life by taking the students on field trips. When asked to describe her elementary learning experiences she recalled content in fourth grade because it was state specific. Other teachers recalled projects or countries they studied as children, and the feelings they associated with them. When asked why Ms. Traverse chose to teach about Egypt which is not a designated standard in the curriculum, she explained, "When I was in elementary school each year social studies was states and countries. Fourth grade was ancient Egypt. And I could tell you I wasn't always the most incredible student, I was very kind of middle of the road. But I can tell you every single thing that we did for Egypt." Her interest was supported by her work colleague Ms. Driver who explained, "I remember all of the interactive experiences that we had. I do remember living in [a Midwestern state] and taking [its] history in fourth grade and making like a little book about the symbols and the important people and things like that. But I think the things that stuck out were always the interactive experiences like pioneer day or reenacting the civil war or learning about ancient Egypt." These two teachers collaborated and made the decision to teach an

integrated social studies and English Language Arts unit on Egypt because of their own positive experiences, interests, and memories from their childhoods. In so doing, the Ms. Driver acknowledged that Egypt was not a designated standard by the state, but justified it by explaining that its "social studies learning" and explained that they wanted "students to delve into a particular topic related to culture." In this instance, the teachers made decisions that afforded the students opportunities to learn practices and ways of thinking related to social studies, but not necessarily the content required by the state.

The practices and quality of instructional deliverables (as interpreted by the teacher practices)as well as the content emphasis (levels and layers of thinking) were based on best practices in social studies including inquiry and critical thinking, yet the content coverage (standards) were not necessarily met. Specifically, the students had the opportunity to think about how different civilizations and cultures lived and have been studied. The students read primary and secondary sources and deeply reflected in their understanding and discussed how bias of the author might influence what information was shared, all of which are very much social studies practices. The emphasis on the practices and the time were observable, yet the actual content coverage of fourth grade social studies was not. The teachers did express that they had covered most of the curriculum already, but made a choice to explore civilization in Egypt over going further in depth into history and culture and unique features of North Carolina (which is a fourth grade expectation).

Beyond traditional educational experiences as students in a classroom, some teachers' capability appeared to be influenced by previous work experiences. Ms. Driver, a particularly ambitious teacher, had worked previously in early childhood in a setting which used project based learning and inquiry as methods of instruction and assessment.

She described how her early childhood experiences were very influential. She felt they had prepared her for classroom management as well as the curriculum. During an interview she stated, "During the time I was in school, I wanted to gain experience and so that's when I kind of started early childhood, and got a remarkable amount of experience. I think it helped tremendously with classroom management, behavior management, as well as the curriculum component."

When explaining why teachers did not do certain activities, or learning strategies, it appeared to have to do with lack of comfort or familiarity. For instance, the resources required to conduct a true inquiry about culture was made available to the third grade team, yet, because they had little experience with it the third grade team chose to use a more familiar Teacher Pay Teacher packet that used worksheets. In the same vein, when asked how they practice their craft, many spoke to their comfort and knowledge related to the pedagogical practices. Ms. Matters referred to her own inexperience as why she contributed less to group planning. Ms. Brave who had taught for over nine years was new to this grade level and school so when asked about the curriculum and practices she responded, "Since this is my first year in third grade, I don't know if it so I'm just trying to plug stuff in." This shows that even an experienced teacher can struggle with finding and using quality resources when she does not have the time or familiarity with the content.

Teaching experiences, work experiences, and educational experiences all appeared to drive teacher instructional decision making. Teacher comfort with practices appeared to drive their comfort in doing an activity, or instead having students complete a worksheet. Most of the teachers in this study reported very few memories of their social studies methods courses, but recalled vividly life experiences, their own childhood social studies

experiences. Teachers, who had previous positive experiences with inquiry, were more likely to use inquiry within their classrooms. It appears just as students benefit from hands on and meaningful experiences, so do their teachers.

Teaching colleagues. Teachers' instructional decision-making as it related to OTL descriptors at all grade levels seemed to be influenced at least partially by the people with whom they worked. The third grade team collaborated as a whole and shared resources, but then would oftentimes pair off with a colleague within their team to further plan. Teachers on this team appeared to defer to those who have more experience than they had, but also saw how they could add to the group as a whole. Ms. Matters explained, "We share a lot of materials, and we still end up doing the same things because some have a lot more experience than I do. I rely a lot on them." She later explained, "Being the newbies we get to bring a fresh look to it and you know, different methods and resources." The sense of capability or comfort with teaching and grade level experience appeared to make certain teachers defer to practices and work that more experienced teachers had. This in turn shows how one's colleagues as well as one's own confidence or sense of capability can influence teacher decisions about content coverage, emphasis, and exposure.

The relationship between the fourth grade team demonstrated the role teacher colleagues can have on teacher practices. Although both teachers would be considered relatively new to the field, Ms. Driver was very committed to doing inquiry based hands on learning. Her previous experiences with early childhood made her confident in her students' ability to participate and engage in this style of learning. Her colleague, Ms. Traverse, who had taught one year prior to this year, was leery of many of the inquiry based and hands on learning experiences her colleague suggested. She was convinced to try it

because her colleague was so certain it would work. She stated, "I feel like she was so adamant because she's seen it and experienced it … I was kinda like, okay, I'll get on board and we'll try it."

During an observation of the launch of an Inquiry unit on Egypt, I observed how the two teachers collaborated and supported one another during instruction. Ms. Driver presented the information and explained the lesson while Ms. Traverse circled through the classroom monitoring behavior and helping redirect students. Ms. Traverse spoke to the importance of the relationship, and how they complimented one another she said, "So it really worked out that we're kind of like, you know [indicating passionate about teaching], but we also I think are both very capable. And like can have ideas in all the subject areas so that when we come together planning is really effective." She later explained how Ms. Driver influenced her to do things, acknowledging that her own instincts would be to do a simpler less time-consuming activity (such as a room transformation). She stated, "I don't want to stay for two hours after school to set up a bunker. I know that sounds terrible. And Ms. Driver is very gung ho about all of it and I adore her and would do anything for her, and so …interviewer: "She pushes you to keep going?" A hundred percent." Both her care and respect for her colleague and her observations of the success of Ms. Driver influenced her instructional decision-making in what was taught and how much time was given to the content in addition to the total investment in time. It also appeared to influence how it was taught (what practices) and to what depth it was taught.

In fifth grade, Ms. Solo was solely responsible for teaching social studies content, yet she still collaborated closely with her colleagues. She described learning how to use new resources from her colleagues who are more tech savvy than she is, and also how she

implements practices such as highlighting evidence because it is an expectation of the ELA teacher. She even recognizes how math plays a role in social studies explaining, "it ties into math with sequential chronological order and talking about government, you bring in fractions because you need two- thirds for appointment and approvals and declare war." This clearly shows how Opportunity to Learn descriptors including content coverage (referencing math and ELA in social studies), and content emphasis (in regards to practices teachers use to teach and interact with the curriculum) are influenced by work colleagues.

In this study, the influence of work colleagues was evident within and across grade levels. Techers deferred to one another in an understanding of hierarchical norms in third grade, those with less teaching experience deferred to the thinking and suggestions of the more experienced team members. In fourth grade, the two participants in the study relied heavily on each other to guide and develop practice. Ms. Driver served as a mentor and coach to Ms. Traverse, and helped her take on new instructional challenges for the benefit of the children in her class. In fifth grade as the sole instructor of social studies, Ms. Solo intentionally emphasized content needs from other classes within her own instruction.

Teacher perceptions of student ability. Many teachers have heard the urban legend about the teacher who mistook her students' locker numbers for IQ scores, and thus treated them as if they were gifted and advanced, thus changing the culture of the class and its achievement. It is a lesson in how teacher perceptions of student ability can drive teacher actions and practices. Researchers have spent years examining this phenomenon and have had mixed results in actual studies. Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008) reported that Shavelson and Shulman believed that in the process of teacher instructional decision-making, that teacher's perception of student ability and behavior were a distinct part of the

process. They explained that " Shavelson and Shulman also found that, not only do beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning influence teachers' planning and subsequent interactive teaching, but teachers' judgements about students' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior expectations of students' performance on class activities do as well" (p. 46). Brophy (1983) described the data on the research surrounding teacher expectations and explained that teacher expectations do a have a minimal impact on student performance. He stated, "The existence of a teacher expectation for a particular student's performance increases the probability that the student's performance will move in the direction expected, and not in the opposite direction" (p. 663). In this particular case, teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities (both academic and behavioral) seemed to drive teacher instructional decision-making and subsequently students' learning experiences.

The students were assigned to heterogeneous classrooms by grade level at the start of the year with the exception of students who applied for and were received into the Cambridge Program. The school website did not provide specific guidelines for what participation in the program entailed, but according to the teachers participating in the study, the Cambridge program and Cambridge class were comprised of students identified with a special aptitude for learning in alternative ways, or who demonstrated strong positive behavior (personal communication, Ms. Matters, September 28, 2019). In considering how placement with this program influenced the instructional decision-making of the teachers of those classes, as well as how this influenced the decision-making of teachers who did not teach those classes, it became apparent that students in this program were afforded more opportunities for project based learning and critical thinking skills.

Ms. Matters was the third grade teacher of the Cambridge classroom. She explained how her students' behaviors and needs were different from other classrooms. "I do teach Cambridge and they come with different needs. They have anxiety, very bad anxiety, and the parents do a lot of hand holding." She explained that the parents have high expectations of their children and were very present in their children's academic preparation. When discussing how she determined if students had reached mastery of a concept (instructional delivery variables) she explained how for her students she did not always use the same resources for assessment. She compared her teammates' assessments as "pencil and paper" but stated, "With being in the Cambridge classroom, I have been known to do a project instead." She explained that her teammates could also do projects (which some did) but that because of the classroom dynamics it was more difficult. She clarified, "It's just easier with the group of students that I have. I don't have the behavior issues that other classrooms have…. I can go at a much faster pace, because the other classrooms they can barely get through the core subjects because they have to go at such a slow pace because they are constantly redirecting and managing the classroom." In discussing planning, she was not primarily responsible for a subject area but would "throw in those Cambridge ideas wherever I can." When asked to elaborate on that she explained, "I step it up...I try to keep it as project based as possible, so we do end up with an end product instead of a test." These decisions were based upon her perceptions of students' ability to participate and master the content, as well as her beliefs about her students' own capability to engage in these projects.

Ms. Driver was responsible for the fourth grade Cambridge class, and used inquiry and project based learning in most of her instruction. Ms. Driver's belief that all children

could engage in this style learning was clear. She stated that, " I think that you could be three, thirteen, or ten, you know, it doesn't matter the age but I think every child is capable of having some sort of moment like that." She believed that high expectations of her students and creating a culture in which all students within the classroom believe that they are capable of doing the work is critical. She explained how at the start of the year she lead children to believe that they were a special group of students and must be leaders in the school. This set a tone of positivity and positive behaviors, which the students helped determine. Throughout the year students held themselves and each other accountable for this behavior. She commented, " The students in my classroom believe they're like the best kids in the world and that they're the leaders in the school," She later affirmed this belief about creating positive perceptions when she stated, " They understand what their expectations are and they rise to the occasion every single time. I think if they know that you believe in them, they can do it. And they've demonstrated that." When speaking directly about teaching the Cambridge students it was only in identifying their ability to read more complex texts. She recognized the limitations that other students may have, as well as her own students. Ms. Driver used primary sources such as the North Carolina Constitution to teach core social studies content. She stated, "Even with my rock star Cambridge kids that have a Lexile through the roof, they're not fully able to comprehend all of these things." Yet, due to her ambitious teaching style instead of saying her students could not do it, she just used more time to teach it.

It is actually with her colleague Ms. Traverse that one can see how the perceptions about student behavior and ability due to placement in the Cambridge program came forth. Ms. Traverse acknowledged that Ms. Driver's class was very high academically. In talking

about inquiry and learning, Ms. Traverse compared her class to Ms. Driver's stating, "I think that [Ms. Driver's] class you can give them questions and they're really truly going to do them by themselves and really give their best effort and really think things through. And mine don't do that." Later she elaborated, "If I'm being totally transparent, there are days where it's really hard to be in my room because the basic skills are lacking and you should be able to cut something out and glue it down and it not be a meltdown." She compared her experience and classroom to Ms. Driver's stating, "It's hard because I naturally sort of compare myself to Ms. Driver's class, and I can't compare our results. It's not fair to me to do that." In describing how the class dynamics influenced her decisions regarding project based learning Ms. Traverse explained, "I don't know if everyone would agree with me having the class I have. I feel like there has to be a level of independence and academic ability to also make this work…. Sometimes [Ms. Driver] is like, I'm going to do a project and I'm like, no way. I'm going to give them a worksheet and call it a day because like, my kids don't do the work."

In fifth grade, Ms. Solo taught all the students within the grade. In the weeks just prior to my observation of her, the students had been regrouped to travel by ability groups, so students in her blocks were sorted as low, medium, medium high, and high performing students. Her high group had been grouped together previously because they were the Cambridge program. In each block, Ms. Solo modified the assignment to meet the needs of her students, and discussed how and why she did this. Her lowest group was more often than not using cutting and pasting with notes, whereas her medium-high groups were expected to write out answers. This was a shift from her previous instruction when the students were heterogeneously grouped, when her lesson was the same for all the groups.

Ms. Solo explained that after the change in the grouping of classes she realized quickly she was going to need to change her instruction. She had to modify her instruction in the "lower level group" by providing more scaffolds and simpler text. She discussed needing to change her plans because when heterogeneously grouped she just taught to the middle. When homogenously grouped, her lower performing students clearly could not do the tasks so she picked simpler ones. During observations of her "high block and low block," I observed the students had similar tasks and structure to the class but with less complexity in the first block ("lower level") class. Interestingly, Ms. Solo also reported that she did believe her "lower block" students were capable of higher level thinking but that she felt they did not have the confidence at the beginning of the new grouping structures. I overheard Ms. Solo tell one of her students from the first block to "believe in yourself, you're pretty smart." In her "high block" class, one student simply refused to do the work that included copying information from the board in a fill in the blank format. Ms. Solo explained that she did not always require him to do the work because "He always scores highest on the test." Ms. Solo was clearly responsive and aware of her students' needs in both groups. She explained that her first block class was reviewing a concept that they had not shown mastery on, but that the other three classes were moving on. With the intentional grouping by ability, Ms. Solo clearly made instructional decisions, which influenced the content emphasis of key content through the depth of skills required to complete a learning assignment.

Beyond the teachers directly responsible for the instruction of the Cambridge students, teacher perceptions of students' capability both academically and behaviorally influenced what teachers' instructional decisions were. In third grade both Ms. Brave and

Ms. Force had the non- Cambridge classrooms. In Ms. Brave's class, students were taught from day one to apply principles of BRAVING, an acronym to describe how to interact and develop positive relationships with one another, which was based upon the work of Brené Brown. Ms. Brave's classroom is one, which fosters discussions and collaboration, and uses these principles to solve problems and interact with the curriculum. In her classroom Ms. Brave explained that no one is in trouble, rather when something happens the students understand that there is a problem, and it is the responsibility of the parties involved to solve that problem. Ms. Brave expressed concern and sadness over changing the classrooms to homogenous grouping for core subjects of math and reading, because, "It's taken so long just to not undo but just to, for my class to get comfortable understanding." During the observation of Ms. Brave's class, the expectation of respectful sharing was observed in how students reacted to and shared about their different experiences with religion after listening to the responses of a woman they had interviewed from Indonesia. Because Ms. Brave believed her students were capable of interacting with a less structured format and took risks like having students conduct interviews, her student had different opportunities to learn the curriculum. Students in Ms. Brave's class were given higher level and critical thinking opportunities despite not being in the Cambridge classroom.

Ms. Force's classroom had clearly established rules and expectations, yet her students struggled at times to participate in higher-level discussions. During a discussion on the text *What If*, Ms. Force sent the students back to their seats due to disrespectful behavior including interrupting one another. She let them return to the rug after a moment of settling. Ms. Force described how her classroom management style was perceived by

her students, stating, "They say I roast them," meaning that the students recognized that she used humor and sarcasm as well as redirection to help students return to the classroom norms. In describing her classroom she acknowledged that "there are a lot of personalities in my classroom," as well as stating, " I mean, I've had interesting classes every year, but this year especially has shown me that a lot of students don't have that foundational, like coping skills to deal with life in general." Ms. Force's perception of student behaviors influenced her instructional decision-making in a variety of ways. Students in Ms. Force's class interrupted her during the read aloud of *What If* and were off task frequently. Although Ms. Force redirected, the students' behavior eventually lead Ms. Force to stop the discussion portion of the lesson short. During her interview, she also discussed how student behavior often times was a driving force on the decisions about what activities to choose and what content to cover. In considering OTL descriptors, the teacher chose to cut the lesson short because of her perceptions of student behavior. In addition to this, when planning for lessons Ms. Driver made instructional decisions about how to teach the curriculum based upon her perceptions of what students could "handle." In describing how she decided what resources to use and activities to do she explained, "I guess I kind of look at [the resource] and see if it covers the standard and then, will my kids participate and cooperate with it." She further elaborated, "My kids don't like writing a lot, so if it's a whole lot of writing then I try to avoid it."

Ms. Solo, the fifth grade teacher, described how student ability and behaviors influenced what activities she used to teach the content. "Because my first group being low, they're not as independent. Some don't have a work ethic because we have a low group, a medium group, a high group, and a medium high group. So there you can

definitely tell the importance of education at home for these kids. Like if I give them two days to do something, they're not doing it." This statement illustrated that instructional decisions such as content coverage (time) and content emphasis (depth of content) were influenced by teacher perceptions of student behavior and ability. Yet, when observing Ms. Solo's first block (the low group) and then her second block group (the high group) there was very little difference in the presentation of material or depth of learning. Students were expected to highlight answers in the first block, whereas in the second block students filled in the blank. The questions were primarily designed to teach key terms. Students in both blocks asked clarifying questions and received positive praise when answering questions and participating. Students in both groups were given opportunities to collaborate with peers, ask questions, and receive feedback. In Ms. Solo's case, it appeared that although students were identified as having different abilities, her practices and depth of instruction did not appear to alter significantly.

As evidenced by the observations, artifacts and interviews, teacher perceptions of student ability to participate and do assignments did appear to drive teacher instructional decision-making. Higher level thinking assignments and work that required discourse and critical thinking were more frequently reserved for students identified as higher achieving. Anticipated student behaviors also seemed to drive teacher instructional decision-making especially in classroom discussions and group projects. This was somewhat true across grade levels and between grade levels, with two notable exceptions. Both Ms. Driver in fourth grade and Ms. Brave in third grade held beliefs that all children were capable of participating in inquiry and discourse, and thus their practices reflected this belief.

Policies

Policies are the initiatives, rules, and expectations that are set forth by a governing body, a leadership team, or even an individual. They are used to set the course of action, and intended to bring about positive results. Policies are enacted at a variety of levels within the context of education. Federal policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act and its predecessor No Child Left Behind are examples of policies intended to address a social value or norm, equity and achievement. The parameters around the policy include directives that requires accountability with evidences of achievement and growth for all populations (U. S Department of Education, n.d). At the state level, policies surrounding education include the selection and implementation of the state standards, additional guidance about testing (because of federal policies), and teacher certification. In traditional public school settings, district level policies may include the adoption of curricula, initiatives regarding practices, school staffing, management of resources, expectations of performance and evaluation, and guidance to what happens at the building level within schools. Ultimately, through this chain of policies starting at the federal level, moving to the state level, then filtered through the district level, the principal and leadership team of a school is the front line of determining and enforcing policies. In a charter school setting, district management is removed, but the leadership must respond to its board of directors and the stakeholders involved with the charter. In addition to this, many charters rely on management organizations that also help guide the policies of the school. Ultimately, the message of the school and the policies enforced at the building level are most apparent in the directives and policies prioritized and valued by the leadership team.

Administration Policies and Autonomy

Within the context of this study, teachers were keenly aware of the federal and state policies that guided their practices. They understood that they were accountable for their students' growth, and they needed to adhere to state standards. This awareness of these external forces did drive teacher decision-making, yet ultimately that which was prioritized or made policy by administration was what appeared to have the greatest influence on teacher instructional decision-making as it related to social studies.

Autonomy and school climate. The leadership of a school can have a keen influence on the everyday practices of the teachers within it (Van Fossen, 2005). The administration at Charter School in NC was brand new. The previous administration had changed over at the start of the academic school year. The new principal and assistant principal had previously worked in a large school district located nearby. Teachers in the school were adjusting to new leadership styles and were consistent in the message about the priorities of the school. When asked what the main focus of the administration was for the school year teachers consistently reported that the number one goal was to develop a positive culture among staff, administration, and students. Ms. Force stated, "So this year is really awesome. They've pushed big on developing relationships with our students. Which is really amazing. We didn't even talk about curriculum really until second semester… because a kid's not going to learn from somebody they don't connect with." This policy set forth by the administration fostered an overall sense of autonomy and goodwill among the teachers. It also created a culture where teachers felt they had the opportunity to make instructional decisions and do what they viewed was best for their students. Ms. Driver explained how the culture of support and autonomy had made the

experience teaching at Charter in NC positive, "I think a lot of it does boil down to the administration and having a group of administrators that are supportive of creativity and the autonomy to make decisions that are best for students… it's definitely a place that fosters that desire to teach in different ways."

In creating a safe and supportive climate not only for students, but also for teachers, the teachers had a strong sense of autonomy to make decisions for their students. Every teacher interviewed confirmed this sense of autonomy. When asked to rank their autonomy, one being very weak and five being very high, all participants ranked it as high or very high (4-5). The teachers in this study felt positively towards this freedom, but recognized that it came with additional demands. With the freedom to choose, also came the demands of time and money to select resources. Several teachers recognized that the freedom to select resources was a result of not having access to resources that traditional school districts might have. Some teachers expressed frustration that they felt unclear about expectations, but also appreciated that they had the opportunity to determine their own climate and procedures within the classroom.

Autonomy and time. Although the teachers who participated in the study all expressed a belief that they had autonomy, there were expectations and structures in place that provided a format. Every grade level had pacing guides that were general guidelines for the teaching standards and the time to allot for each standard or topic. The administration did give suggested times for social studies instruction—in grades three and four this was approximately a thirty minute block which was shared with science. This was confirmed by interviews, master schedules, as well as teacher lesson plans that indicated that the chunk of time was labeled sci/ss. During interviews, teachers expressed that they

did have the freedom to move things around, take more time for a topic or standard if necessary, and certainly had the freedom to choose how this content was instructed. Interestingly, many teachers acknowledged that they did not have enough time to teach social studies. So although they felt they had autonomy, and most reported it as very high, teachers did not choose to allocate more time towards social studies despite believing that they had the autonomy to do so. Consistently the response for what the roadblocks were to teaching social studies given their perceived autonomy were resources and time.

In describing their experiences and feelings about the autonomy, overall the third grade teachers appreciated the freedom to choose how to teach a topic and have flexibility in timing. Ms. Brave compared her experiences in a school district to the charter as it related to autonomy and said, "I have been speaking up more and making suggestions and requesting things. And it feels really nice to be able to do that. To have more autonomy. I really feel like that in the county [a previous public school district Ms. Brave had worked in] because everything was handed to you." At the same time, Ms. Brave also expressed longing for a more specific curriculum because of the resources that went with them. She explained that the autonomy felt confusing because she was unsure of her duties and responsibilities, as well as the expectations of the school. She explained, "I'm still trying to figure out the systems here. I like to know [what is expected], and I feel very uncomfortable if I don't know. But it doesn't mean l I don't mind stepping out of them once you know what the edge is." Ms. Matters expressed similar sentiments stating that she felt her level of autonomy was a seven and then followed up by saying, "We have no set curriculum. [The principal] came in and said you decide what you want to use to teach your children." When asked to clarify her feeling of autonomy she expressed they had

complete autonomy "and that's hard." She explained that when planning for social studies and deciding what to teach, "We're told about the standard, and then we're told to go find something." Ms. Force described her sense of autonomy in the following way, "I'd say a four and a half because I mean obviously they have to give some sort of kind of what we have to do...I mean, they give us the guideline but even within that we can say I think this would work better." All of the teachers recognized that the autonomy afforded them by the administration gave them freedom to make instructional decisions, including how to choose materials, select effective pedagogical practices, and develop relationships with their students. They all also recognized the parameters of this autonomy, specifically the confines of allotted time and schedules for both pacing and daily instruction.

In fourth grade, the teachers who participated in the study also expressed a belief that they had strong autonomy. Much like third grade, they had pacing guides and standards to follow and the freedom to determine how they wanted to teach the curriculum. Both teachers explained that they had a forty-five minute block daily, which they would rotate with science. Ms. Driver expressed that she "likes to steal time from the rest of the day to teach it" and later elaborated that "it (social studies instructional time) kind of just fluctuates based on the needs of the particular unit or the particular topic that we're trying to cover." Her actions confirmed that she had a sense of autonomy to make decisions regarding the levels of content coverage she provided and the content emphasis. Her sense of autonomy allowed her to take additional time from the school day to teach social studies. Ms. Traverse, who had previously taught in a traditional public school in the area, compared her experiences between the two contexts. "I was a robot last year doing what I was told. There was no freedom whatsoever. So, that is so exciting [in reference to having

autonomy at the school]. I have the ability to be creative." Although she appreciated her freedom, she also expressed concern that with that much autonomy one could feel overwhelmed. Again pointing at her colleague Ms. Traverse explained, "I think I would have been more overwhelmed if it hadn't been for her." By having a colleague who felt confident and comfortable with the autonomy, Ms. Traverse was able to embrace it.

Ms. Solo, the fifth grade teacher, responded that she felt her autonomy level was at a five. As the sole provider of social studies instruction in fifth grade, with a designated block of time of over an hour, Ms. Solo did not express a need for more time for instruction with students, but felt she did need more time for planning her instruction. She described the demands of planning stating, "It's just a lack of planning time during the school day. I come in at 6:30 a.m. Sometimes I don't leave till 4:30 p.m. I do a lot of planning before school, after school, and on the weekends. So it's just the time, and finding the balance between work and home." Much like the previous grade levels, Ms. Solo had a pacing guide and standards provided by the state, a daily schedule she followed with her four blocks of students, and then designated planning time within the day. Although she received 45 minutes daily for planning, of the daily planning periods, one day was taken for team planning, and the other was used to go over student data. That left Ms. Solo with three days of planning to look for, evaluate, and prepare for lessons during her dedicated planning time.

Autonomy and teacher selection of resources. In all the intermediate grade levels, teachers felt they had autonomy to determine how they were going to teach a standard. They had to provide their own resources to teach said standard. Generally, when selecting resources, teachers chose resources that were easy to implement, were all in one

packet or document, and that they felt "covered" the standard or topic. Several teachers mentioned that they did not have social studies textbooks. Almost all teachers reported using resources from Teachers Pay Teachers (TpT). In having the autonomy to select resources, teachers explained why TpT was their "go to" source. Ms. Solo stated, "I do a lot of Teachers Pay Teachers. Sometimes you can get a really good bundle like with the causes of the Revolutionary War. I found a really great bundle and it's pretty self-explanatory." Ms. Traverse explained why she chose TpT resources over other sources stating, "What I love is that obviously teachers are people that have taught. They are the ones creating it. So they get it. I think the resources. It's not just one standard or one thing. It's like incorporated [standards] because teachers that actually teach, realize it would be a waste to just focus on one thing when you can incorporate different things. I really feel like they understand and provide an ease of implementation. It's really easy to download and get what you need versus gathering a million resources." The third grade team shared resources when they planned together, and chose to select the TpT packet brought by Ms. Matters. The team modified the final project and added a rubric with the help of their Curriculum Resource Teacher.

Teachers did not always use the entire resource presented from TpT or other teacher created packets. Instead, they modified the content to fit their desired goals for the lesson. When selecting TpT resources Ms. Matters explained, "I like to look at their materials and if something strikes a chord, I might be able to come up with my own activity."

When using these resources teachers considered the activity and the time it would take to complete the activity. When describing how they selected a resource, the teachers within the study often used the phrase, "covers the standard." Ms. Force described the

process the following way, “I guess I just see how many days we have and then find assignments or PowerPoints or different things and break those up between the days kind of and how long I think the activity will last… and have we covered everything in that standard or do we need to add to that.”

Another factor that appeared to influence some teachers’ decisions for the use or non-use of resources was cost. Ms. Solo explained how she selected certain TpT resources saying, “I try to find free stuff first and then less than five dollars.” Ms. Brave expressed concern with using packets as the primary form of instruction but also acknowledged that for her it was cost prohibitive at times. She explained, “I think they get a lot of resources from TpT, those packets. I don’t really like them a whole lot. One thing, I’m kind of cheap and don’t want to pay for it. I’ll get a couple of free things from there, but I don’t like the idea of just doing packets all the time and I like to do like real projects that will be meaningful….A lot of those packets just feel like busy work.”

In describing other resources that teachers used, many relied on websites and premade teacher instructional texts. Again, ease of implementation, cost, and coverage of standards appeared to be the driving force behind the selection of those resources. Teacher beliefs also played into the valuing and use of resources. Ms. Solo chose to use the History Channel as a resource because, “It does not have a lot of bias.” Many teachers used premade “interactive texts” made on sites like TpT. Many expressed the need for time to plan and find resources. Ms. Solo described the demands, stating, “Well we don’t have a whole lot of planning time. We only have 45 minutes a day. One day we meet as a team, go over things. The other day we meet with our curriculum resources teacher and instructional facilitator and go over data.” Although the teachers have the autonomy to

make instructional decisions they did not have the time or autonomy to determine how best to use their planning time throughout the week. Teachers within this study were encouraged to make decisions regarding what materials to use to teach a concept, but did not always have the autonomy to use their planning times or actual time during planning to select sources and review and deeply think about the materials they selected.

Ms. Driver was the only teacher who specifically brought up primary source documents and resources. She described using Newsela and Readworks, as well as documents such as the North Carolina Constitution. Newsela and Readworks are educational platforms with articles and passages that can be tailored to student reading levels. Ms. Driver supported her students through the reading of primary source documents in this manner. Ms. Driver did express that looking for resources could be time consuming. She lamented, "It's been a lot of time. It's been very time consuming to try to find what we need in order to teach what we're trying to deliver." Ms. Driver appreciated the autonomy she received and discussed how privileged she felt to teach at Charter in NC. Although the demands and needs for resources were at times frustrating, her freedom to make instructional decisions was more important to her.

Teacher autonomy presented itself as a double-edged sword in many ways. The teachers who participated in the study felt strongly that they had autonomy to make instructional decisions. Teachers appreciated that they had the power to determine what resources to use, but also expressed the concerns about the time it took to find resources. Due to time constraints, comfort with materials, and cost, many teachers chose resources that came from Teachers Pay Teachers. Although some of the resources available from this site are rich in inquiry and problem based learning, many require only surface level

thinking. When reviewing the resources from TpT during the duration of this study from the lens of OTL, these resources did not necessarily afford the breadth and depth that The National Council for the Social Studies recommended. In its statement on the civic mission of elementary social studies, the Council explained, "Since social studies has as its primary goal the development of a democratic citizenry, the experiences students have in their social studies classrooms should enable learners to engage in civic discourse and problem-solving, and to take informed civic action." Although teachers within this study were passionate about their students and understood the purpose of social studies, these practices were not observed during the course of this study. The use of TpT resources seemed to be a result of ease of implementation and time constraints. Ms. Driver and Ms. Brave both taught beyond the packet, but the conversations did not align with the primary goals established by NCSS.

Finally, teacher perceptions of autonomy appeared limited to how they implemented the curriculum. Teachers indicated that pacing guides were provided to them, the schedule was determined by the administration, and teachers recognized that they did not have enough time to fully teach the content of social studies. With the reported levels of autonomy, one would expect that teachers would also feel comfortable making time in the school day for social studies, yet many of the teachers in this study did not choose to do this. With the exception of Ms. Driver and Ms. Brave, who both described making additional time throughout the day to teach social studies, the majority of the teachers in this study chose to instruct social studies only during their scheduled blocks of instructional time.

Administrative initiatives: Thinking maps. Although the administration at Charter in NC gave their teachers autonomy to determine which instructional materials to use, there was one notable exception. One administrative initiative that appeared to influence teacher instructional decision-making was the implementation of Thinking Maps. These graphic representations of student thinking were used in all content areas consistently throughout the building. The faculty were trained at the start of the second semester, and encouraged to implement them into their instruction. Throughout the school, evidence of this instructional tool was observed in displays of student work. Ms. Brave explained that the school had recently adopted the practice and was strongly encouraging it stating, "They're hitting it hard now… I like the thinking maps and so I try to integrate them when they are necessary in a lesson. I don't just try to shove them in… it is cool to see how they worked so well in different subjects and the kids are starting to pick up on it and they want to use them." Teachers in the study used thinking maps in social studies to show the sequence of events, to compare historical figures, to organize ideas and concepts, and to brainstorm. The teachers' consistent use within and across grade levels of thinking maps shows how the priorities of the administration appeared to influence the instructional decision-making of the teachers within the study.

State Policies

Teacher licensure. Beyond the administrative policies established within the building, state level policies also influenced teacher instructional decision-making. Teacher licensure and certification was carried out through the state governing agencies, and as such, all teachers within the study had to comply to the standards set forth there. All teachers within this study, with the exception of Ms. Solo, were fully certified. The

requirements for initial licensure in NC require teachers to complete either a teacher education program or alternative route to licensure with a bachelor's degree. Initially certified teachers were required to take the Pearson Testing for North Carolina: Foundations of Reading and General Curriculum. Teachers from other states are and who want to receive a continuing license may "Enroll in NCDPI's Reading Research to Classroom Practice and Foundations of Mathematics courses. Candidates who successfully complete these courses along with the associated learning tasks and assessments may be eligible for a Continuing License" (NCDPI, Professional Educator's License, n.d.)

State standards. Within the context of this study, the most influential policy on teacher instructional decision-making established by the state were the teaching standards set forth by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. When planning for instruction, teachers relied on the state standards to inform their decision making regarding social studies instruction. In the preamble of the standards, the state outlines its vision of the purpose of social studies, stating:

> There are two primary purposes of social studies. The first is to develop young people who are knowledgeable, critical, and capable of making informed d ecisions about the world and their place in it. The second purpose is to prepare young people to participate actively and responsibly in a culturally diverse, democratic, and increasingly interdependent world. (para. 1)

The authors of the preamble explain that social studies entails:

> a coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science,

> psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural science. (para. 1)

In establishing both the purpose and the content that is included in social studies, the state sets forth a framework in which to guide teacher instructional decision-making. The authors of the preamble argue that the standards "Offer a sound, thoughtful, and defensible curricular framework that is designed to enable all students at all grade levels to acquire the essential knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to be informed, active citizens in the 21st century" (preamble, para. 4). Teachers in this study consistently referred to and sought out the standards as an initial form of guidance in making instructional decisions.

Essentializing standards—the intersection between policy and beliefs. Beyond the immediate scope and purview of the administration and school, the statewide policies related to standards and testing appeared to drive many of the decisions made by the teacher participants. Teachers in the study consistently mentioned the standards and also referenced the need to "cover the standards" provided by the state. After determining what the standards were, many teachers' own beliefs and interests appeared to drive the actual content that was taught. Ms. Traverse, a fourth grade teacher, explained her process saying, " At the beginning of the year I printed off all of the standards and sort of looked them over and went like, okay, these are the things we need to cover and then these are the things that I feel are fun and I want to do." Ms. Traverse's description aligned with other teacher descriptions on content selection. Ms. Brave explained that the third grade team were given the standards as well as the scope and sequence, and they were expected to implement

them. In fifth grade, Ms. Solo confirmed that she also used the standards to plan for instruction. Across and between all grade levels, standards drove the selection of content.

After looking at the standards, and perhaps the Unpacking Documents to help understand the key vocabulary and ideas within the standards, the teachers appeared to essentialize the standard to a key term or phrase. During the third grade team planning the teachers essentialized the standards related to their unit on culture to "culture." Other standards were essentialized to terms like historical figures and economics. Ms. Matters explained her process as a series of questions within the team, "We sit together and we start brainstorming. How do we want to teach this? What exactly does the standard mean? You know, how deep do we have to go into this topic?" The teachers in third grade planned for a unit on "culture." The understanding of the term and the particular nuances of the objective were not addressed beyond the initial discussion of the standard. The materials that were ultimately selected to teach the concept of culture reflected instead the teachers' beliefs about understanding of differences and thinking outside of one's own perspective. The standard was not addressed fully.

In fourth grade, Ms. Driver described her lesson planning process as first dissecting the standard and then finding primary sources and documents, "on that particular topic." Again, the standard was reduced to a word or phrase, rather than a series of big ideas. This finding was seen in fifth grade as well. Ms. Solo described here planning for a standard regarding the structures of the American government. She explained, "So today and tomorrow, get through the judicial branch, find an activity for them on all three branches. After break, I'm going to go into the classifying one where they can do the three branches and classify them that way." Within and across grade levels, teachers referred to the

standards to guide what content was taught, but then essentialized these standards to basic terms.

In considering the process in which teachers made instructional decisions, understanding that teachers essentialized topics helped explain the choices they made in the selection of materials they used, and the content they emphasized. Specifically, by essentializing a standard into a topic, the parameters set forth in the standard were at times lost. Looking at the selection of materials and the content ultimately taught in third grade regarding the standard 3.C.1: Understand how diverse cultures are visible in local and regional communities, the standard was reduced to one term: culture. The subsequent planning of the unit and the selection of materials related to culture evolved into a study of countries around the world and a book study related to being respectful of different people (and at times different cultures). Once the standard was essentialized to a key term, the teachers' collective and individual beliefs and understandings regarding culture as well as their capability (their personal experiences, knowledge, perceptions of student ability, and educational experiences) drove the content that was selected and the methods for instructing it.

In fourth grade, Ms. Driver and Ms. Traverse used inquiry and essential questions to plan for and teach the standards. Ms. Driver described dissecting the standards prior to her selection of resources. When conducting an inquiry, Ms. Driver explained the process she and Ms. Traverse used:

> I kind of like to find a lot of primary source data or a primary source documents on that particular topic that can loop in with that particular topic. From there, I kind of give them to my students and have them just make observations based off of that.

When asked how the process worked so that the students were getting to the key content Ms. Driver explained:

> It kind of depends. So at the beginning of the year, we were secretly, we had them in our pocket. We were doing a very guided inquiry, where we pretty much had the reins on the situation. We wanted to ensure that the students would get to the right questions. So we kind of guided them into asking those questions just by probing with certain observations. When we're looking at primary source documents or asking a student to delve deeper when they make a comment about a particular topic that we know is important to a particular standard.

Ms. Driver and Ms. Traverse clearly considered the standards when they were planning for and implementing instruction, yet they also took liberties to teach content not included in the standards, but rather based upon their own interests and experiences, as was the case with the inquiry unit they conducted on Egypt. In addition to this, at times they let their own beliefs about social studies allow for unintended lessons in social studies. In a conversation with Ms. Traverse regarding her instruction of social studies, she discussed serendipitous social studies moments as some of the most important lessons. She described a critical conversation her class had about race after a reading about Egypt:

> We're reading this book and we ended up kind of getting off topic and having this conversation about racism. I was so proud [of them]. It happens organically. I was so proud of the way that they rose to the occasion and just were able to express it. In the past… They feel like they haven't been able to ask questions or talk to us. They're so scared of offending people. We live in a culture, in a society, where everybody is really on edge and scared to offend people. But if we don't ask these

> questions, then we aren't going to know. They were so curious about one another and each other's different backgrounds and it ended up being just such a powerful moment that isn't technically a social studies lesson, but are in my head kind of social studies. You know, like understanding different cultures. If you look at fourth grade social studies, [it does describe] understanding different cultures, granted it's in like the terms of like North Carolina standards.

In this instance, Ms. Traverse's beliefs influenced her instruction beyond the confines of the established state standards, yet the lesson certainly aligned with the purpose and vision of social studies as described in the preamble.

Ms. Solo, the fifth grade teach, also appeared to align her teaching to essentialized standards as well as her personal beliefs. When asked about the content she taught in social studies she explained, "For me, it's US history from early Native Americans through reconstruction and includes the government and economics." Although the focus in fifth grade is on America, she used CNN Ten (a ten minute news segment about key events in the world geared towards upper elementary and middle school students) daily. Her rationale for this was:

> You get them thinking about the world and current events with CNN 10. It's current events and a lot of it last week they were talking about, for example, Great Britain is going to exit the EU. They were talking about the government here. So it, it does relate and today they're talking about the burning of Notre Dame. I mean this is more US history, but they'll learn more about that next year because they will get introduced to world history. So it gets them thinking, not just what's going on at home, at school, [but also] in the world. I'm conscious that they have to

understand the past, to know what the present is. Like how did our government, our country come about.

In this instance, Ms. Solo connected the world and current events to the designated curricular standards and her beliefs about the purpose of social studies as a portion of her instruction.

Within and across grade levels, it appeared during the course of this study that teachers did rely on standards as a jumping off point, but then their individual or collective capability guided the interpretation and implementation of the standards.

Trickle Down Policies—Federal Mandates and State Testing

According to the U.S Department of Education (2017), "Education is primarily a State and local responsibility in the United States. It is States and communities, as well as public and private organizations of all kinds, that establish schools and colleges, develop curricula, and determine requirements for enrollment and graduation." Although the federal government is not technically in charge of state policies, it certainly influenced and guided state laws and policies related to equity, charter schools, accountability, and funding. In the Every Student Succeeds Act, established by the federal government to ensure equal opportunities for all students, the following provisions were made:

- Advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students.
- Requires—for the first time—that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.

- Ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards.
- Helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators—consistent with our Investing in Innovation and Promise Neighborhoods
- Sustains and expands this administration's historic investments in increasing access to high-quality preschool.
- Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time.

(U.S Department of Education (n.d) Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA Highlights)

The third, fourth, and sixth action items listed above certainly played a role in the decision making of teachers within the context of this study. Action item four encouraged the funding of innovations, including the establishment of charter schools, which was the context of this study. In supporting the funding of a school outside of the district control, the people within the building were afforded the opportunity to teach and learn in this unique environment in part due to federal policies.

In a more direct line of influence on teacher instructional decision-making, action items 3 and 6 guide policies on testing, they call for the dispensation of information regarding the overall quality of a school based upon its performance on accountability measures and also expectations of intervention and action if schools do not meet growth

goals. These policies enacted at the federal level influenced state policies regarding testing. In turn, state testing policies appeared to influence the day-to-day instructional decision-making of the teachers within this study in a variety of ways. First, it appeared to influence the prioritization of social studies and the time given to the subject area. It also appeared to influence the practices and pedagogy of the teachers. Finally, it influenced the choices teachers made about the selection of classroom based formal assessments in social studies.

Subject areas that were tested appeared to be prioritized by the teachers in this study within and across grade levels. The amount of time spent on English Language Arts and Math was substantially more than social studies in grades 3 and 4. In fifth grade, due to the block schedule, students received an equal amount of social studies instructional time as compared to the other classes. Grades three and four reported sharing a block of time between science and social studies, thus even greater shortening of time allotted for social studies. In third grade, this time was approximately 30 minutes, and in the fourth grade the reported time was 45 minutes on the weeks when it was taught. When asked about the schedule and time given to course work, the third grade teachers specifically acknowledged the pressure of testing with regards to the impact on students (students who do not meet Read to Achieve standards are retained). When asked to describe what social studies was, Ms. Brave responded, "It's the thing you do when you have time...it's not necessarily the most important thing of the day because reading and math take up most of the time." Later on when asked what the biggest priorities were for instruction she responded, "Reading and math...because that's the biggest push and that's what they are tested on. That's what we are judged on." Ms. Matters describes her prioritization when asked what the most curricular subject is, "Test prep. Because this is the year where standardized testing

begins... So we are teaching those reading strategies and marking the text, reading through the answers… how to correctly mark a bubble sheet… because if you get one off on your bubble sheet, you're going to fail." When considering students opportunity to learn social studies, it is clear that time given and subsequently depth of content was impacted when the allotted time to the subject was only half of a designated block of time in a school day.

In determining what to teach and how to teach it, the end of grade tests influenced both what content was covered and how it was covered. In third grade, many of the questions asked were vocabulary based. While observing teachers I saw that the teachers in this study used social studies content to practice reading skills. Even when considering school based assessments the understanding that there was a test appeared to drive the instructional choices of teachers. Ms. Brave discussed how when the Curriculum Resource Teacher (CRT) or team made assessments it helped her know what to focus on saying, "I like to know where we are supposed to be and what we're going to be assessed on…" She explained why she liked having the CRT design the tests saying, "It's one less thing we have to do and it would be more accurate." In fifth grade, Ms. Solo explained how she used data based upon NWEA scores on reading to determine that students needed more practice with cause and effect and making connections (identified as a reading skills), and therefore worked closely with the ELA teacher to teach these skills in social studies. At all grade levels, teachers discussed the use of integration of social studies content with English Language Arts content. During observations of instruction, I observed multiple instances when teachers used social studies time to practice nonfiction-reading skills with social studies texts.

A particularly interesting example of how the tests influenced the instructional decision-making of the teachers emerged in an interview with Ms. Traverse, one of the fourth grade participants. At the start of fourth grade, the fourth grade teachers believed that there would be an End of Grade assessment from the state on social studies. Ms. Traverse described how this influenced her instructional decision-making. "So there was this pressure," and later when asked how that pressure of the test she stated, "Well it guided it a bit more strictly than if I had full autonomy and just been able to make sure North Carolina is there because it is in fourth grade, but then get to do kind of whatever...the fun stuff." She and her teammate Ms. Driver felt it was important to teach the standards based upon what they saw was presented on previous end of year social studies test and used it as a reference to see what the students might be tested on. When asked a follow up question about if she felt the test influenced her decision-making Ms. Traverse again responded, "It did sort of, in the sense that [Ms. Driver] felt our kids need to be prepared for it… I didn't want the kids to feel bad about themselves because they didn't understand, so we looked at it as a guide."

Finally, when creating assessments for measuring mastery, teachers consistently relied on paper/pencil and multiple choice tests to assess student understanding. They reported making this choice because of the format of the end of grade tests as well as a sense that they provided a different form of data than a project or open-ended questions. Teachers in the Cambridge program were expected to provide performance based assessments, but also relied on paper/pencil assessments. Ms. Driver explained how performance tasks affected her students. "I think in doing these performance tasks we're really demonstrating to them that they have the power to affect change," yet later she also

described how she uses formal traditional assessments. Although she believed strongly in project based learning and performance assessments using rubrics, she acknowledged that students who were strong writers were potentially able to "wow" the assessor simply with their writing, and students who were weaker writers might not be able to express what they knew. She further explained, "But if they do a traditional multiple choice or short answer or you know, that sort of assessment, then you can really see that they do have that understanding." Ms. Matters, the third grade Cambridge teacher explained how after conducting a project based learning experience she still chose to do a paper/ pencil test. She stated, "I didn't know how to take that project, that experience, and turn it into a grade." Ms. Solo, who taught all the fifth grade social studies classes including the Cambridge cohort clarified how she used projects based upon rubrics for progress monitoring, and paper/pencil multiple choice tests as formal grades. Her rationale for making this choice is "that's what they see the most of." Ms. Solo also explained that although she modified the writing expectations between her low and high groups, ultimately, "I pretty much do the same thing because they do need to be, because even if I'm differentiating, they still have to take the same standardized tests." Within and across grade levels the use of multiple choice assessments were used as measures of student understanding over project based learning experiences. Teacher description of the value of these assessments appeared to boil down to the similarity to the end of grade high stakes summative assessments.

Policies at the federal level clearly influenced teacher instructional decision-making as it related to social studies. The establishment of the charter school itself was a policy that was supported and funded either directly or indirectly through the federal government. The accountability measures also influenced state policies regarding testing.

These in turn influenced the teachers within this study. Federal policies trickled down into the policies of the state legislators and ultimately the building itself.

Conclusion

Teacher capability and capacity, including the experiences, beliefs, perceptions of student behavior, and training all appear to have an impact on how teachers within the context of this study made decisions about social studies. What teachers believed about social studies guided their decisions about the selection of resource materials, what they prioritized within lessons, and how they interpreted standards. Teacher experiences appeared to influence the practices they used to instruct social studies. Teaching colleagues bolstered some teachers, and helped them take on new challenges. Some teachers chose to defer to their colleagues due to their experience. Finally, teacher perceptions of student behavior and ability appeared to influence the practices and materials selected to instruct social studies.

In addition to individual teacher capability, policies enacted at the building, state, and federal level influenced teacher instructional decision-making. At the building level, administrative policies regarding autonomy allowed teachers to make instructional decisions about content selection and practices. In addition to this, administrative policies also guided the practices of teachers, as evidenced by the implementation of thinking maps. The participants in this study also prioritized what the administration prioritized. Because administration wanted to develop a positive school culture, teachers acknowledged and sought to develop a positive classroom culture. Finally, administrative guidance regarding the schedule and timing of social studies affected the teachers' ultimate decision-making as it related to social studies. Specifically, in grades three and four, scheduling of social

studies was less than other subjects. In grade five, due to block scheduling, the social studies instructor had the same amount of time to teach as her other content area teachers.

At the state level, policies were also influential in teacher instructional decision-making. State standards guided teacher instructional decision-making in social studies. When teachers planned for social studies instruction, the first action was to look at the state standards. Teachers and administrators used standards to pace the instruction of content, and to guide what to prioritize. Testing policies enacted at the state level, also appeared to influence teacher instructional decision-making. Some teachers in this study prioritized other content areas over social studies, in part because they were tested. Teachers' selection of content and their assessment practices were influenced by the structure and content of state tests.

Finally, federal policies, which support charter schools as forms of innovation, as well as policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act, influenced the day-to-day practices of the teachers in this study. The context of the study itself as a charter made it possible to better examine how teachers interact with policies because there was not as many layers of bureaucracy between the teachers and the policies. The federal policies regarding equity and accountability trickled down to the state level as testing requirements. These in turn influenced the teachers' instructional decision-making in social studies.

When considering students opportunities to learn social studies the intersection of teacher capability and policies appeared to be critical in this process. Understanding how teachers make decisions regarding social studies is the first step in understanding how we can shift the current trajectory of the prioritization of social studies. Policy analytics as a framework asks me to not only consider what the impact of policies and the individual

result in, but also ask the research to consider what steps need to be taken to improve the policies, as well as build upon the capability and practices of the stakeholders. In the next chapter, a discussion of specific, actionable items will be discussed and recommendations made to help address the findings housed within this chapter.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how and why intermediate elementary school teachers within the unique context of a charter school made decisions regarding the instruction of social studies. In Chapter I, I presented a logical argument for the need to investigate and understand further why and how teachers make instructional decisions as it related to social studies instruction. I argued that the marginalization of elementary social studies is a problem because it impedes students' opportunities to grow as engaged and informed citizens. I then presented a case for understanding how teacher capability influences teachers' instructional decision-making. Finally, I presented the case that policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level interact with individual teacher capability as teachers serve as the gatekeepers and conduits of policies within their own classrooms.

In Chapter II, I presented the current literature surrounding teacher capability and teachers as gatekeepers of the curriculum. I described the use of OTL as a construct to describe teacher instructional decision-making. I then presented the theoretical framework of policy analytics, as a means to examine how policies are enacted through the key stakeholders' decision-making and practices. Using OTL descriptors to help guide the discussion surrounding teacher instructional decision-making, as well as a policy analytics framework, I describe how the intersection of teacher individual capability and policy interact in the decision-making processes of elementary teachers in the subject area of social studies.

In Chapter III, I clearly defined and described the approach I took to better understand the key research questions presented in Chapter I. I made a case for using a

phenomenological case study looking at teacher instructional decision-making within and across grade levels within the context of a charter school. I provided a clear rationale for my choice of data collection and analysis. I presented evidence for the validity and reliability of this study by citing acceptable practices and previous research done in the field.

In Chapter IV, I presented my findings based upon the thoughtful analysis of the data, using multiple sources, including observations, interviews, and document analysis. I presented my key findings from this study, acknowledging the limitations and bounds of the case. What I found was certainly unique to this one setting, these particular participants, and was as such bounded by both space and time. It did however give a unique insight into how teachers within this unique context, with their distinctive set of capabilities, made instructional decisions. My findings on teacher instructional decision-making confirmed and extends earlier synthesis on the subject done by Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008). Teacher instructional decision making is a complex process that is contingent upon the personal understandings and experiences of the teacher and the intersection of expectations and policies. I extended this synthesis by describing specific policies and capabilities that enacted upon the process of teacher instructional decision-making.

The findings within this study are focused on two major themes: the significance of teacher capability and the influence of policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level. Within the realm of teacher capability, I found that teacher beliefs about the purpose of social studies, experiences teachers had in their own schooling and work life, the influence of work colleagues, and teacher perceptions of student capability and behavior influenced their instructional decision-making as defined through OTL descriptors. Within

the realm of policies, my findings supported previous research regarding policies surrounding teacher autonomy, policies enacted at the federal level regarding testing demands and the influence on teacher prioritization of social studies in the intermediate elementary grades. The findings further helped describe and illuminate how policies enacted at the state level including standards were interpreted and enacted by teachers through their individual lenses of capability, and finally how policies enacted at the building level by administrators were interpreted and enacted within the classrooms.

This chapter includes a deeper analysis of the findings, and further explains them in relation to the literature that currently exists surrounding teacher instructional decision-making. It also includes discussion about policies set forth at the building, state, and federal level that influenced the instructional decision-making of intermediate elementary teachers within the context of this study. Following this discussion, I then makes recommendations for ways to develop teacher capability through teacher preparation programs and teacher support in the field. In addition to this, I address the power of policies and makes suggestions to enhance their effectiveness. I weigh the pros and cons regarding policies related to high stakes testing and funding. Finally, I suggest specific policies administrators can enact to build a pro-social studies culture with appropriate prioritization within their schools. Finally, the chapter clearly defines the limitations of the study, areas for further study, and a final summary of the research.

Review of the Study

In this study, I examined how and why intermediate elementary teachers made instructional decisions as they related to social studies instruction within the context of a charter school. I sought to understand how policies and individual teacher capability

interacted to guide teacher practices as evidenced through opportunity to learn descriptors. The guiding research questions used to examine the phenomena of teacher instructional decision-making were:

1. In what ways, do intermediate level teachers enact gatekeeping, as it relates to elementary social studies in a charter school?

(a) How does teacher capability (identity, beliefs, values and sense of autonomy) influence teacher instructional decision-making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

(b) How do teachers interpret and make sense of policies set forth at the federal, state, and building level? How do policies set forth by leadership influence teacher's instructional decision-making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

The instructional decision-making of intermediate elementary teachers is a complex and dynamic process that involves the interaction of a teacher's own set of beliefs, experiences, perceptions, and sense of support. With this individual capability, the teacher must then respond to the demands of policies set forth at the building, state, and federal level. The key themes that emerged in this study were split within two dimensions- teacher capability and policies. Within the context of teacher capability, a teacher's beliefs, experiences, colleagues, and perceptions of student behavior all interact to guide instructional decision-making. Teachers within this study described having a strong sense of autonomy, yet acknowledged the parameters set forth by their administrators regarding scope and sequence of the content. Teachers also acknowledged feeling constrained by demands of time and resources. Within the context of policies, building level policies set forth by

school administration appeared to influence teacher instructional decision-making. State and federal policies also played a key role in what teachers taught, and the instructional practices they used. In the following discussion, I connect and further explain these themes, and connect them to previous literature surrounding these concepts.

Discussion

Teacher Capability and Instructional Decision-Making

Teachers bring with them their own conceptions about the world, their own interpretation of their role, and their own understandings and knowledge about pedagogy and practices related to social studies (Day, 2002; Ogawa, 2003; Thornton,1989) . Previous research conducted about teacher instructional decision-making indicated that teacher beliefs, experiences, schema, and objectives guided teacher actions and decision-making (Borko, Roberts, & Shavelson, 2008). Teachers ultimately determine what opportunities students have to learn the content, what content is covered, the amount of time and depth that a concept is taught, the topics which are emphasized and prioritized within the content, and the instructional practices and assessments which are used to demonstrate and measure student understanding of the curriculum (Carroll, 1989; McDonnell, 1995; Wang, 1998). Researchers use OTL as a quantitative variable to measure these opportunities to describe students' in elementary grades opportunities to learn social studies (Fitchett, Heafner, & VanFossen, 2014). Policy makers also use it to describe expectations of educational practices and curricula and as a construct to measure the effectiveness of teachers' practices and instruction (McDonnell, 1995). Finally, in recent years, qualitative researchers have used OTL as a construct to describe teacher practices and learning experiences (Heafner & Plaisance, 2016). In this study, I used OTL as a framework to help guide my study and

describe the actions and decisions of teachers. These opportunities to learn social studies are important because they not only affect student achievement, but ultimately they influence our citizenry as a whole. Social studies is the subject area intended to develop effective citizens. As such, it is vitally important for our students to have meaningful opportunities to learn it. Researchers have found that students' opportunities to learn content effect their achievement. Elliott, Kurz, & Tindal (2017) found that mathematics students afforded greater opportunities to learn demonstrated higher achievement levels on testing measures. This is also true for the social studies. Heafner & Fitchett (2015) found that student achievement in US History was positively associated with OTL factors. Scheerens (2016) further explained that the teacher plays a key role in these opportunities. He stated, "The teacher has a key role in realizing the Opportunity to Learn" (p. 3). It is with this understanding of the literature that I present the following findings.

Teacher Capability Influences Teacher Instructional Decision-Making

Teacher beliefs. Teacher beliefs influenced instructional decision-making and ultimately students' opportunities to learn social studies content. Teachers made instructional decisions about what content was covered, the time to spend on that content, the depth or emphasis of the content, and the assessment of understanding based upon their beliefs about the purpose and practices of social studies. This aligns with the research of White and Chant (2014) who posited that teacher beliefs are fairly intractable and do influence the instructional decisions teachers make. At times, teachers within the study put aside their beliefs due to demands for time and resources. This also aligned with the synthesis of research done by Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008) regarding teacher instructional decision-making. Beliefs play a key component in how teachers make

decisions. In conducting this analysis, my work confirmed what Thornton (1989) and Ogawa (2003) suggested as well. Both argued that teaching involves a complex set of dynamics between the interaction of the teacher and the environment she works within. Teacher beliefs about social studies did appear to drive instructional decision-making, yet the demands presented in the context of the actual classroom forced teachers to challenge theories and beliefs presented in their social studies and other core educational courses. This push-and-pull between beliefs about social studies and demands of the classroom as a whole appeared to force teachers to cut short instruction, or cover concepts only superficially. This aligned with the findings of Lucey, Shifflet, & Weibacher (2014) who presented research that showed that teachers "Purport a goal of social studies learning as being development of critical-thinking and problem solving skills, reported instructional practices largely do not support these views, even with classroom access to instructional technology resources that affect opportunities for sophisticated learning opportunities" (p. 288). The authors in this study indicated in their limitations section that observations and case studies needed to be conducted to further explain this phenomenon, which this study has attempted to do. When reconciling the differences between teacher beliefs about social studies and teacher practices, teachers within this study expressed lack of resources including instructional materials, time to plan, and time to implement social studies as factors that influenced their decision-making. These factors could very well explain why teacher beliefs and practices do not always fully align.

Teacher experiences influence instructional decision-making. Teacher experiences and interests often drove the instructional choices teachers made regarding teacher pedagogical practices and materials selection. Previous experience with a topic or

childhood experiences with learning practices (such as inquiry or project based learning) often guided teacher instructional choices of materials or activities. Teacher work experiences and schooling experiences also influenced what teachers were comfortable trying or doing within their classroom. This supports the previous research done by others in the field of gatekeeping and instructional decision-making. As Borko, Roberts, & Shavelson (2008) observed in their synthesis of teachers' instructional decision-making, researchers have clearly established the power of experiences as means of generating the schema that helps expert teachers navigate and make decisions. Expert teachers are able to quickly understand and make sense of student responses. The authors described the importance of teacher preparation. Based upon their suggestions it is apparent that in developing teachers prepared to engage learners within the social studies classroom, we must engage pre-service teachers at a deeper level. Beyond traditional models of teacher preparation with methods courses, teachers need to experience and do social studies. They must see with their own eyes and experience how this instruction looks and feels. Sadly, preservice teachers report that they have very few opportunities to see this type of instruction. Hawkmann, Castro, Bennett, & Barrow (2015) found that preservice teachers in elementary grades were not observing social studies being taught on a regular basis, and when it was being taught the lessons primarily involved textbooks and worksheets over high leverage instructional practices that include discourse and inquiry. The authors lament, "Teacher education in elementary social studies may be hindered when preservice teachers fail to see major concepts and strategies for social studies applied in the real classroom through field service" (p. 203). This supports Crocco and Livingston's (2017) analysis of the literature surrounding teacher preparation in the field of social studies.

Citing work done at the University of Michigan, the authors suggested that new "high leverage" practices that more closely follow the medical model of a teacher intern would provide elementary teachers opportunities to practice in the field and develop authentic learning experiences teaching social studies. The authors also suggested that project based learning research has shown promising results, therefore the pairing of pre-service teacher with schools in which teachers are actually doing project based learning could be an effective measure to help develop teacher comfort and experience with these critical best practices. Ensuring that pre-service candidates are actually observing and experiencing meaningful social studies instruction is a critical first step in ameliorating the problem of low leverage practices such as worksheets and textbooks as the primary means of social studies in elementary classrooms. Within the context of this study, college level courses (i.e. social studies methods courses) were not a driving force in teacher instructional decision-making. In fact, most of the participants in the study did not even recall much about that course. This finding further supports the belief that teacher education preparation must include meaningful practicum experiences as indicated by Crocco, & Livingston (2017). Careful selection of cooperating teachers who demonstrate ambitious teaching in the social studies may help ensure that preservice teachers develop schema that will guide their future instructional decisions related to social studies.

Teacher selection of materials was influenced by their capability. Teachers were more likely to choose resources that were easy to use and implement and were familiar (such as TpT) over other materials that were less familiar. Cost and ease of implementation also influenced these decisions. In follow up questions with the third grade team, two members explained further why they selected the Teachers Pay Teachers packet

over the Inquiry unit provided by the Curriculum Resource Teacher presented at third grade team planning. Ms. Brave, who was less likely to rely on TpT anyway as a resource explained, “I couldn't understand why so many people spent so much money on TpT. Then it dawned on me...they have zero other resources...or so it seems like it and so they buy stuff in TPT. That's the only thing I can figure. I think there's also a lack of trainings available” (Personal communication, September 8, 2019). Ms. Matters stated, “I think it was because of the variety of text and ease of already having everything together in one place” (Personal communication, September 8, 2019). Both teachers indicated that the resource was selected because it was accessible, affordable, and easy to implement. In selecting these resources, the teachers were making instructional decisions that affected the content that was emphasized, the content that was covered, and the quality of the instructional deliverables as determined by the final evaluation of learning. The resource of time to conduct inquiry that is more meaningful and deeper investigation through a variety of lenses of social studies, in other words the content exposure in general, appeared to have a mediating effect on the other opportunity to learn descriptors. Teachers did not have time to gather resources or take chances with unfamiliar instructional practices, so they erred towards what was familiar—in this case packets and worksheets.

Selection of materials is a complex task that requires teachers to consider student-learning objectives, time to instruct, available resources, what content needs emphasis, and actual implementation. In considering the selection of resources, teachers in this study appeared to deliberate between a variety of variables including student needs, the standards that needed to be addressed, the time they had to teach and have students interact with the materials, the accessibility of the necessary resources to conduct learning, and the teacher

perception of the effectiveness of the materials. In addition to this, teachers in this study considered what they felt would engage their students and what they felt their students were capable of doing. This aligns with work done by Kisiel (2007) in the realm of science and teacher selection of materials for a field trip to a science museum. He found that teachers were prone to selecting survey-based questions over open-ended higher level thinking responses to guide student experiences during a field trip to a science museum. The author explained that teachers appeared to select option a- the survey based question over option b- open-ended higher-level questions because of a variety of factors. These reasons included the teacher perception of the (a) task density of the worksheet (what level or depth of understanding the student would need to have to participate and understand the materials), (b) student direction (what the worksheet required students to do), (c) the level of difficulty (teacher perceptions of students cognitive ability or capability to interact with the materials and conduct the requirements of the assignment or worksheet), (d) student relevance (the predicted engagement the teacher felt the students would have surrounding the materials and activities), (e) question formats (whether they were open ended or limited responses), and (f) the cognitive level (the teacher interpretation of the complexity of the questions asked and the student levels or ability to interact with these questions) (Kisiel, 2007, p. 36). Teachers within this study referenced similar reasons for why they chose materials to instruct social studies. They often times referenced the need to "cover the standard" when considering what resource to use, and availability of the resources. In addition to these very basic concerns though, teachers also discussed what they viewed as students' ability to do the assignment based upon their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral abilities. They were concerned about the levels of engagement and interest that the activity

might entail for their students. They also made choices based upon students perceived ability levels. This aligns and further extends what Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008) described in their synthesis of work on teacher instructional decision- making. Teachers are aware of and use their analysis of student ability to make decisions.

Work colleagues influenced teacher instructional decision-making. Within the context of this study, work colleagues mattered greatly. Teacher decisions appeared to be driven by group collaboration and support as well as partnerships between teachers and their own personal beliefs and sense of capability. At times, the expectations of the group prohibited deeper level instructional practices, as was the case with the third grade team who opted for a simpler implementation of a project on culture over an inquiry-based unit of study. Teachers on the third grade team deferred to one another based upon their level of expertise (whether they were an experienced or novice teacher, years at the grade level, and years at the school). Although research indicates that experienced teachers are generally more capable to manage the complex demands of a classroom (Borko, Roberts, & Shavelson, 2008; Darling- Hammond, 2010; Kini & Podolsky, 2016), the instructional choices they made during this study were based on what had worked for them previously and were not necessarily high leverage practices. Newer members of the team reported deferring to these more experienced teachers, rather than challenging or inputting their own ideas. The nuances of team collaboration is an interesting venue for further research to see how to best support the growth of novice teachers while honoring the experiences and funds of knowledge of veteran teachers.

When considering how a group of teachers can help one another grow and make instructional decisions, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are touted for their

effectiveness in raising student achievement and positively influencing teacher practices (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Research surrounding the implementation and use of Professional Learning Communities in school settings have found that teachers must navigate a variety of factors when making a positive and successful learning community (Du Four, 2004; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Stoll et al., (2006) recognized that there were a multitude of ways in which schools might interpret what a professional learning community was and what it entailed. After carefully considering the research surrounding them, the authors felt the essential understanding was that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were "A group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way" (p. 223). The authors highlighted the importance of the community with the participants in the PLC and the school as a whole. All members of the group must feel they are a valuable part of the PLC and have a shared vision of the purpose of the group. Specifically the authors state that to be effective the group must include, "mutually supportive relationships and developing shared norms and values whereas the focus on professionals and professionalism is towards the acquisition of knowledge and skills, orientation to clients and professional autonomy" (p. 227).

Within the context of this study, the teachers did engage in a variety of forms of Professional Learning Communities, although some were more aligned with the heart of the purpose of PLCs than others were. Teachers on the third grade team met and discussed content, reflected on students, and planned for future social studies instruction. They did not spend much time within the actual team planning reflecting on their practices or evaluating student growth in the social studies, rather they discussed pragmatic needs such

as time to spend on content and resources to implement content. The fourth grade team did meet in partnerships and had a shared planning document, but did not collaborate as a grade level to make meaningful instructional decisions to help support the growth of their students and themselves as professionals. However, within the fourth grade team, Ms. Driver and Ms. Traverse collaborated frequently and used reflection and a shared vision to plan for social studies instruction. The two teachers shared a passion for their students. Ms. Driver's background experiences with inquiry-based learning not only drove her decisions regarding social studies instruction, but also gave her colleague Ms. Traverse the confidence to take on new challenges. They worked together to mutually grow and prepare for the growth of their students in social studies. In fifth grade, Ms. Solo collaborated with her peers to consider student needs and growth as it related to English Language Arts and Mathematics, but ultimately planned for and considered the needs of her students within the context of social studies alone. This aligns with work and concerns raised by previous researchers about the lonely nature of middle and high school instruction (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). The findings from this study support the idea that who people worked with, and the attitudes surrounding what kids could and could not do, helped drive what teachers were willing to do within their own classrooms. Across and within grade levels, teacher peers influenced one another, whether this was done formally in PLC meetings or informally through personal relationships.

Teacher perceptions of student ability and behavior influenced instructional decision-making. Teacher perceptions of student behavior and ability also influenced teacher instructional decision-making as seen through OTL descriptors. How teachers perceived student ability and behavior influenced which activities and content they chose

to enact within the classroom. This perhaps could be because of teacher experience and preparation. Westerman (1991) argued that beginning teachers were not yet able to apply schema from previous experiences with student behavior:

> Surface features of classroom problems preoccupy a novice's attention because they know that they do not have strategies for dealing with them. These models may also lead to understanding how expert teachers are able to move the lesson forward to their goals while responding to cues from the students" (p. 302).

Fitchett, Heafner, and Lambert (2014) found that classrooms with more students with IEPs were less likely to instruct social studies. This could be due to teacher perceptions about students' ability to do social studies. They argued, "Clustering of students with IEPs is detrimental to overall student access to content" (p. 60). My findings appear to align with this research. Grouping students heterogeneously or homogeneously appeared to influence the decisions teachers made about what content and instructional practices would work for their students. Because of a shift in grouping practices, this influence was more easily observed and felt by the fifth grade teacher who participated in this study. During her interview, she acknowledged the changes in planning she made when faced with a more homogenous classroom with similar academic abilities and needs. Even when students returned to their homerooms in grades 3 and 4 to receive social studies in a heterogeneous setting, what content was covered and how deeply it was covered was a decision made by teachers based upon what they believed the students within their classrooms were capable and willing to do. In other words, teachers made decisions about content and curriculum as well as pedagogy based on what they thought their students could handle.

This finding again aligns with previous research conducted about teacher instructional-decision making (Borko, Roberts, & Shavellson, 2008). Teachers created archetypes or understandings about what they thought their students could know and do based upon their perceptions of student ability. This in turn drove their instructional decision-making.

Teacher Instructional Decision-Making Interacts With Policies

Teachers serve as gatekeepers of the curriculum. Within the context of a charter school, teachers in theory have less bureaucracy and middle management to guide their practices and beliefs (Berends, 2015; Bulkley & Fisler, 2002; Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995). Within the context of this charter school setting, minimized bureaucracy from district and city levels enabled me to more deeply investigate how teachers interpreted and interacted with policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level. Teachers described having a strong sense of autonomy within the building, and yet upon closer examination this freedom extended to selection of materials and instructional practices. It did not include the management of schedules or the scope and sequence of when standards were taught. Teachers who did have previous experience in traditional public schools acknowledged more freedom, but at a cost, that of minimal resources. Seeking to understand how and if teachers within this charter school interpreted and interacted with policies as gatekeepers of the enacted curriculum, and if policies enacted at these levels influenced these teachers' instructional decision-making as it related to social studies, I was unable to ascertain if the charter school setting made a vast difference in teacher instructional decision-making as compared to their traditional public schools teaching

peers. Within the context of this school, teachers certainly interpreted and responded to the policies set forth by the administration and its governing body, the state, and federal laws.

Building level policies. School administrators create policies for their teaching staff based upon a variety of factors. Within the context of this charter school, the administrators had to answer to federal and state mandates and accountability measures, as well as the demands of its board of directors and charter school management organization (Berends, 2015). The administrators served as the primary conduit between external demands and the school teaching staff. As the purveyors of policy and rules, and the persons most responsible for teacher evaluation, enforcement of school policies, and student retention, it was the job of the administrators within the building to both interpret and enact policy that helped make the school successful. When describing policies at the building level, I am describing policies or expectations set forth by the school administration at this particular charter school as reported and interpreted by teacher accounts, school level documents, and observations conducted by me.

Policies and expectations surrounding school culture. School administration and the policies set forth by administration, did appear to influence teacher instructional decision-making. This aligns with previous research on teacher instructional decision-making and the influence of administration within charter schools (Anderson, 2014; Berends, 2015; Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller, 2015). In fact, it appeared within this context, administrative policies were highly prioritized and influential in teacher instructional decision-making. If it was important to the administration, it appeared to be practiced within the classroom. For instance, building a positive climate and classroom community was mentioned by almost every participant in the study as a key initiative by

the administration. Teachers understood that the first priority in their classrooms was to establish relationships with their students and create a positive culture. Teachers approached this in different ways and believed they had the support of administration to do this. Teachers reported that lesson plans were not even required the first semester of the school year because this was the number one priority of the administration. In conversations with the principal, I learned that the principal wanted to shift the culture of the school to include a sense of caring and community. To set this tone the principal indicated that she tried to make herself present throughout the school and in teacher classrooms. She spoke about the importance of making feedback a safe and positive experience for her teachers. Thus, the primary administration of the building not only expected a caring culture norm among her teachers and her students, but also between herself and her staff.

The actions and policies set forth by the school principal were supported by research in the field regarding collective efficacy. Goddard, Skrla, and Salloum (2017) describe collective efficacy as "The sense among group members that they have the capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve their most important goals" (p 220). For example, Ms. Force indicated that when trying to support her students the principal offered a variety of suggestions to help her be successful as a classroom teacher. Ms. Force presented this information not as a reprimand but rather as positive climate in which she felt supported to learn and grow.

Another example of the influence of administrative policies and initiatives was the use of Thinking Maps in classroom instruction. Because the school had invested money in Thinking Maps professional development and implementation, it was an expectation of the

administration that teachers would use them. Teachers' planning for instruction and observations showed these were included in lesson plans, used in classroom instruction, and displayed throughout the school. In considering how and why teachers make instructional decisions related to their instructional practices, administrative prioritization of specific practices appeared to be a driving force as evidenced by teacher actions.

Administrative policies regarding schedules influenced teacher instructional decision-making. Building level policies regarding time mattered for teacher instructional decision-making. According to the teacher participants, the administrative team primarily determined pacing guides and scheduling of the day. Multiple teachers in the study expressed concerns over having the time to enact quality and meaningful social studies curriculum. In efforts to maximize their instruction, teachers within this study at times chose resources from Teachers Pay Teachers because it was an easy solution. Highly ambitious teachers such as Ms. Driver and Ms. Solo expressed the desire to enact high leverage social studies practices and challenging curriculum, but also acknowledged the lack of resources were taxing. This is congruent with the work of Good, Barocas, Chavez-Moreno, Feldman, and Canela (2017) who found that, "Time is a limited resource and how it is allocated is largely out of teachers' control" (p. 512). Not only did lack of time to plan influence teacher instructional decision-making (specifically in the selection of instructional materials), lack of time in the school day to instruct also impacted teacher instructional decision-making. This is in alignment with the work of other researchers who have found that there simply isn't enough time dedicated to social studies instruction within the school day (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Good, Heafner, O'Connor, Passe, & Byrd, 2010; Rock et al., 2006; Van Fossen (2005). In this study, teachers in third grade instructed

a maximum of 150 minutes per week in social studies. This block of time was also shared with science, therefore some weeks students would receive 0 minutes of social studies instruction. This amount was slightly larger in fourth grade (a total of 225 minutes per week, following the same system of some weeks students received social studies and other weeks they did science). To put that into perspective with other studies on time on social studies (Van Fossen, 2005), and allotting for weeks with and without social studies, the average time spent over the course of a school year on social studies was 75 minutes or 15 minutes per day in third grade. This translates to 115 minutes per week or 23 minutes per day in fourth grade. It was not until fifth grade when block scheduling ensued, that students received daily social studies instruction for a total of 300 minutes per week. This was a huge leap in time allotted to social studies in fifth grade. Allocating realistic blocks of time for the instruction of social studies and protecting time within the school day for teachers to plan and gather resources for social studies instruction is important. The observed and reported time scheduled at this charter school was consistent with other studies that have found that the time on social studies increases throughout elementary school (Brophy & Alleman, 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Heafner et al., 2007; Rock et al., 2006). The establishment of meaningful time set aside for social studies instruction in grades three and four did not appear to be there. The schedules, which were determined by the administration, did have teacher input in the determination of whether they were teaching social studies or science. This lack of time to teach certainly was a force in what teachers chose to teach and what practices they enlisted within their classrooms. When considering what content was taught, the depth to which it was taught, the practices used to teach the content, and ultimately the assessment practices to measure student learning and growth

were all impacted by the scheduling of time to actually instruct and teach in this content area.

Policies that allow autonomy influenced teacher instructional decision-making. Teachers reported feeling autonomous within the context of this study, although there were parameters including what was to be taught and when it should be taught. Teachers had the freedom to select materials to instruct and teach the content, but needed to follow the pacing guides set forth by the administration and adhere to the daily schedule. Mostly this autonomy was about how to teach concepts. Some ambitious teachers reported "stealing time" from other parts of the day to teach social studies, which also represents a form of autonomy. Fitchett, Heafner, and Lambert (2014) argued that teacher preparation, curricular demands from outside forces (i.e. policies regarding other curricular areas and testing demands), and teacher sense of professional autonomy were critical in the time teachers spent on social studies. The authors suggested that teachers who believed or did have autonomy within their schedule to make decisions about time on content were more likely to spend additional time instructing social studies. The findings of this study do not necessarily support their findings, in that teachers reported feeling that they had autonomy but they did not use that autonomy to shift scheduled time for social studies.

Beyond time to teach, autonomy also included the teacher selection of materials and resources. Teachers within this study felt autonomy at times was a double-edged sword. They enjoyed the freedom to determine how the content was taught, but also felt that it meant they were responsible to find and provide the resources necessary to instruct students in the social studies. When given this autonomy, many of the teachers in this study reported choosing resources that were pre-made and created by teachers for ease of

implementation and cost. For instance, when third grade teachers were presented with resources to support their unit of study regarding culture in North Carolina, they still selected TpT packets over an inquiry design unit presented by the Curriculum Resource Teacher. This TpT unit used the term culture loosely and was more a unit on appreciating differences. It did not align with the state standards. In addition to this, the final assessment of learning was a group project on different cultures around the world, also not a part of the designated standard. This selection of materials may have been due to a variety of factors including the comfort with conducting an inquiry, the familiarity of the resources, the ability or willingness to devote the time to conducting a true inquiry, or that work colleagues influenced which unit to select. Teachers within the third grade team did have the autonomy to alter the project, as evidenced by Ms. Brave who reported that she did not use the packet but rather had children learn about another country where a friend lived. Ultimately, teachers' autonomy to select resources within this context may not have ensured the best practices and content for teaching the standards. In considering teachers as instructional gatekeepers, we must consider their individual capability in addition to the resources made available to them, in weighing the pros and cons of autonomy.

Teachers essentialize standards to key terms. Teachers' approach to planning included looking at the standards but then essentializing the standard to a key term or topic. Thornton (2001) openly wonders, "Since it appears we are stuck with national standards and their state counterparts, how might teachers be educated to use them intelligently rather than as laundry lists to be covered?" (p. 77). The teachers in this study consistently looked at the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and then distilled the standard to a key term or process. This essentialization unfortunately affected the depth of content and the

emphasis of content that students experienced. When teachers make the decision to essentialize standards, they risk losing key components of the standard, which are designed to build upon previous concepts taught at different grades. In North Carolina, the preamble to the social studies standard course of study clearly makes the case that each standard is developed upon the next by grade level:

> The North Carolina Social Studies Essential Standards offer a sound, thoughtful, and defensible curricular framework that is designed to enable all students at all grade levels to acquire the essential knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to be informed, active citizens in the 21st century. The five organizational strands of the social studies program: history, geography, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, and culture are addressed with increasing rigor and relevance at each grade level. Underlying these strands is the belief that all students should understand social studies to develop civic efficacy.

In the case of essentialization of standards, teachers' instructional decision-making appeared to occur at the intersection of their own capability and the demands of teaching, as well as policies. This aligns with Thornton's (1989, 2008) belief that teaches serve as the gatekeepers of curriculum because of their own capabilities and the demands of the job. The teachers in this study may have chosen to essentialize the standards as a byproduct of trying to fit a great deal of content into a very small amount of designated time for instruction and because they did not have time to truly think about and plan for the content.

Policies around testing influenced teacher instructional decision-making. Testing clearly influenced teacher instructional decision-making in this study. This aligns with previous quantitative and qualitative research regarding testing and instructional time

spent on social studies instruction (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Fitchett & Van Fossen, 2013 Pace, 2011; Pace 2012; Rock et al., 2006; Van Fossen, 2005). In the context of this study, teachers did not prioritize social studies as a subject area in part because other subject areas were tested. My findings help further illustrate what previous research has found. Teachers reported that other subject areas took priority because they were tested. This prioritization due to testing influenced the teachers' instructional decision-making in the time they spent on content, what content they emphasized, how much content was covered, and how they assessed student mastery of content. Teachers reported using multiple-choice assessments to prepare students for end of grade assessments because they believed they provided a more clear assessment of student understanding of content. These findings also align with previous research that examined time on subject area with OTL variables (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014). It helps qualify what we already knew quantitatively, when students are tested in a subject area, teachers within this context made instructional decisions about the content to be covered, the practices to ensure mastery and understanding materials (content emphasis), the time given to the content, and the assessment practices of the teachers. This study illustrates what other researchers assert, teachers decisions about content and time on the subject area are influenced by these high stakes tests. In the context of this study, the fourth grade teachers believed there was an end of grade assessment on the social studies content at the start of the year. When they discovered that there was not, the teachers shifted the content that they covered and the emphasis on certain topics. When the teachers believed the possibility of a test in social studies was there, the teachers did consider the test format and content when planning and making instructional decisions. It was reported by third grade teachers that the assessments

teachers selected were chosen because of their similarity to state mandated tests. Teachers chose to use multiple choice and pencil paper tests over alternative projects because of comfort but also because ultimately the end of grade tests were multiple choice. Some teachers felt that these more formal standardized tests gave more clear feedback about whether or not students had mastered the content. Even when teachers chose to do projects as a means of assessment, many also chose to do a paper pencil test as well to document student learning. This indicates that teachers make instructional decisions about assessment based upon policies enacted at the federal and state level.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications for policy and practice based upon the findings of this study and the current literature in the field are housed within the two realms of teacher capability and policy. Policy analytics requires me, as the researcher, to consider what possible next steps should be taken to address these findings. These recommendations are suggestions based upon the interviews, observations, and artifacts that I used to triangulate understanding of essential themes. Although these recommendations may be useful in other settings, the bounds and limits of the study must be considered and acknowledged before specific recommendations are made. These findings and recommendations are based solely on this one particular context and within the bounds of these particular teachers, within this particular time period.

Develop teacher capability.

Strengthen teacher beliefs. Teachers within this study understood the purpose of social studies, but did not necessarily prioritize it. It was not until block scheduling in fifth grade that social studies was given equal time for instruction. This was due to

administrative policies, but also was reinforced through teacher practices in third and fourth grade. Several teachers within the study acknowledged that social studies was one of the least prioritized subjects. This mindset has repercussions on teacher instructional decision-making. Shifting these mindsets will require a strengthening of beliefs surrounding the importance of social studies. Fitchett, Heafner, & Van Fossen (2014) found that teachers who prioritized social studies were more likely to make time to teach it. They stated, "Elementary teachers' positive professional attitudes toward social studies and their instructional decision-making in the model accounted for over twice the variance in the overall amount of proportional time spent on social studies" (p. 23). It is important that policies are developed which help foster positive attitudes and prioritization of social studies. These may include a prioritization of social studies in teacher preparation programs. For certification purposes, accountability policies that require teachers to have a proven working knowledge of the key elements of social studies through testing or a portfolio work may help with its reprioritization. Once teachers are actually in schools, administrators' leadership can enhance the beliefs surrounding the importance of social studies. Leadership is key in teacher perceptions about the importance of social studies (Anderson, 2014; Van Fossen, 2005). Leaders who take a pro-social studies stance could help shift teachers perceptions of the need to prioritize meaningful social studies instruction.

Develop and insist upon meaningful learning experiences to develop teacher capability. Before teachers step foot in the classroom, we have an opportunity to develop their beliefs, experiences, and awareness of best practices through meaningful teacher preparation programs. Preservice teachers need exposure to and experiences with social

studies instruction that is done with fidelity and demonstrates best practices in social studies. Models surrounding teacher preparation need to include field experiences for more sustained periods, which are held accountable for demonstrating best practices in the field of social studies.

Teacher preparation programs must provide meaningful experiences where teacher candidates actually observe and practice teaching social studies using best practices. This can be done through field experiences as well as with case studies and videos to demonstrate the possibility of this form of instruction. Bolick, Adams, and Willox (2010) contended, "Field experience in social studies needs to be reconsidered. If the purpose of field experiences is to observe powerful social studies in action, then our current system within the universities studied is not working" (p. 16). This is due to minimal exposure to genuine social studies instruction within the elementary classroom. This was evident in the interviews with teachers within this study, some reporting they could not even remember their methods courses, while others wished the experiences had prepared them more for intentional instruction of social studies.

Pre-service teachers need opportunities to observe and participate with meaningful social studies instruction and planning. Traditional preparation programs need to do more to guide the learning and experiences of their candidates as it relates to the preparation for social studies instruction. Preparing preservice teachers to think deeply about standards as more than a laundry list of to-do items, but rather to think critically about them as Big Ideas (Brophy & Alleman, 2008).

An additional benefit to improving teacher understanding of best practices by extended field experiences is exposure to classroom management practices. Many of the

teachers in this study expressed concerns about student behaviors as a driving force behind instructional decision-making. Teachers dreaded negative behaviors associated with student driven learning. Teachers who were willing to conduct inquiry and face a variety of student behaviors had previous experiences and knowledge about how students may act and behave, and thus had strategies for classroom management to address these behaviors. Teachers who have seen inquiry in action are more likely to believe that ALL students can engage in this time of learning. When preservice teachers see models of ambitious social studies teaching they are also seeing how to manage classroom inquiry, discourse, and project based learning. They are able to shift beliefs about children's ability to participate in this style of learning. Having experiences and understandings of methods for management in these less structured learning environments takes practice. Having opportunities to see teacher practices managing learning teams, facilitate thinking and moderate negative behaviors will help develop confidence and willingness to try more high leverage and active practices in the social studies classroom.

Work colleagues can shift teacher capability. Creating collaborative teams for each grade level and school, which include expert and novice teachers, provides a funds of knowledge and resources that novice teachers do not have (Borko, Roberts, & Shavelson, 2008). In selecting teams, years of teaching experience do matter, but so do the practices those teachers use. As evidenced by this study, colleagues clearly influence the instructional decision-making of teachers.

Establishing Professional Learning Communities to foster positive collegial relationships within buildings is a great first step. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) asserted, "When whole grade levels, schools, or departments are involved, they

create a critical mass for changed instruction at the school level. Teachers serve as support groups for one another in improving practice. Collective work in trusting environments provides a basis for inquiry and reflection, allowing teachers to raise issues, take risks, and address dilemmas in their own practice" (p. 2).

School administrators should identify and leverage their ambitious teachers to create and build upon a pro- social studies culture. The findings of this study extend the current literature in the field by describing the impact that ambitious teachers have on their colleagues. Teachers who trusted their colleagues' expertise were willing to take risks, as seen in the relationship between Ms. Driver and Ms. Traverse. Administrators should maximize their capabilities to demonstrate the potential and possibilities of high leverage practices in social studies education to elevate and extend the current social studies teaching and learning practices that exist in most classrooms. The ambitious teachers could be afforded opportunities to become familiar with and develop learning experiences around inquiry materials and resources that are available. They can then lead demonstration/observation experiences in their classrooms along with facilitating debriefing sessions to build capacity among the faculty. This work would support the development of knowledge and skills around the use of these materials and the design of meaningful learning experiences in the social studies.

Develop Meaningful Policies

Alter federal and state policies regarding accountability. Testing policies enacted at the federal and state level influence teacher instructional decision-making. As a policy, we need to change the format or high stakes nature of these tests. Good, Barocas, Chavez-Moreno, Feldman, and Canela (2017) described the relationships between policies

and teachers, explaining that although teachers are those ultimately responsible for enacting policies, they are not included in the design of the policies. Current accountability policies that require testing to demonstrate growth have shifted the practices of teachers across the nation. Teachers have changed their practices to ensure that they are preparing their students for the tests. Social studies instruction has taken a back burner to other content areas because of testing demands. This was evident in the instructional decision-making of the participants in this study.

Some have suggested that to ameliorate this issue, social studies should also be tested (Churchill, 2014). I fear that in doing so, social studies instruction would be reduced to surface level facts, rather than meaningful and deep learning experiences. Instead, I argue that if best practices in social studies include project based learning, assessment of social studies should include a portfolio of learning experiences throughout the school year. These experiences would be based upon the established standards of the state and would hence drive the educational experiences of the students in social studies classrooms. Creating policies that support social studies portfolios based around inquiry and discourse as well as social action encourages best practices in the field. It would benefit both the teachers and the students because the prioritization of the content area would increase and the practices would change.

Develop thinking around standards. Teaching teachers how to think about and interpret standards at a deeper level may help alleviate current essentialization or to do list attitudes towards learning standards. During the course of the study, this researcher observed teachers essentializing standards to "cover the content." Although teachers ultimate goal was to "cover the standard," sometimes in essentializing the standard some

of the key ideas were missed or cut. Using Professional Learning Communities and focusing on Big Ideas to guide the planning of social studies could be a first step in supporting the deeper understanding of the standards and practices that best support student learning of social studies. Starting with teacher education, and extending through professional development within schools, teachers need to learn how to make sense of what they are being asked to teach and why they are teaching it. Alleman, Knighton, and Brophy (2010) encouraged the use of Big Ideas planning. They suggested that when teachers consider what they are teaching they 1) move from a memorization of facts mindset to a connecting of ideas mindset, 2) structure lessons with this mindset, 3) deeply know and understand the curriculum, 4) identify the key themes and consider what the point of the instruction truly is (p. 28). This requires teachers to carefully examine the standards and then write Big Idea statement(s) that capture what they want students to know and be able to do at the end of instruction related to important understandings of the content. It also provides a clear focus and alignment with the standards throughout the process of instructional design. In taking this approach to planning, teachers will still be able to prioritize instructional goals and determine essential content, but they do so with a clearer view of key needs for instruction. Instead of seeking to "cover the content" teachers then will be able to understand and plan for the instructional needs to deliver the content.

The buck stops here: Administrators need to enact pro-social studies policies in their buildings. Ultimately, for teachers to do their jobs they need time to instruct and plan. Policies at the building level that protect dedicated instructional time for social studies in all elementary grades is important. In addition to this, teacher need time to plan. If schools are going to allow their teachers the autonomy to decide how they are going to

teach content, they need to provide teachers time to find the necessary materials to enact curriculum. Creating an environment where teachers have time during the school day to reflect on standards, find resources, and think fully about the pedagogical practices that are best for children is critical. This time is in addition to time teachers need to do the clerical duties of teaching and the interpersonal needs of teaching including meetings for student needs, parent communication, and committees. Creating a school schedule that provides time for ALL the demands of teaching beyond the actual instruction of children will require the input of administrators and teachers. In addition to building level policies ensuring teacher time is protected, state policies that specify guidelines for time on social studies content by grade level could change building level policy and practices.

Administration within the building is the key conduit between policies and teachers. As such, what administrators choose to emphasize and encourage will in turn influence teacher instructional decision-making. Administrators should be thoughtfully prepared for their role as leaders within a school building. Understanding all subject areas' content and pedagogy are important components of administrators' duties as well as the leadership side of the job. If administrators fully understand the best practices for social studies pedagogy, the policies and expectations about instruction they enact within a building regarding instructional practices should ultimately influence positive teacher instructional decision-making.

Administrative policies that appeared to negatively influence teacher instructional decision-making in regards to social studies oftentimes related to scheduling. Within the context of this study, teacher schedules were created in such a way as teachers did not feel there was time to find and evaluate materials. Thoughtful blocking of the schedule to

ensure teacher time to plan and instruct social studies is important. Experts in the field recommend at least 45 minutes per day dedicated to the subject (Heafner, 2019; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018) It was evident in this charter school that the block schedule afforded the fifth grade social studies teacher more time to teach social studies content than her third and fourth grade counter parts. Current practices in elementary education include teachers being responsible for the instruction of all content areas. It is the decision of the building level administrators whether to allow teachers to departmentalize by subject area. The benefits of departmentalization are beyond the scope of this study, but are areas that could be important for future research. Nevertheless, administrative policies are important to teacher instructional decision-making, therefore it is important to develop administrators who are well versed in content and pedagogy as well as administrative needs.

Administrative policies that could enhance teacher capability include mentoring or pairing teams of colleagues that include ambitious and highly capable teachers. Previous experience with inquiry, comfort with the standards, and schema that includes positive classroom behavior management can be found in expert teachers. Thoughtfully staffing teams so that both expert and novice teachers are available to support one another can help enhance overall teacher capability. In so doing, teaching teams can benefit from the experiences of expert teachers, and develop stronger practices in novice teachers through their beginning teaching experiences. Allowing teachers to observe and support one another when conducting inquiries and learning experiences can also foster a deeper understanding of specific methods for classroom management and practices related to inquiry.

Summary of Recommendations

Understanding how and why teachers made instructional decisions in this unique context is a starting point in making strides towards fostering a pro-social studies culture within the school. Specific recommendations to help support teachers in their endeavors include recommendations for Teacher Educators, Legislators, and Administrators.

Teacher Educators can support both preservice and in-service teachers' growth by providing meaningful learning experiences with social studies instruction. Observing and participating in inquiries and problem based learning experiences will help develop teacher capability within the classroom. Experiences that help teachers develop schema surrounding classroom management of this style of learning and understanding of student responses and actions will help facilitate teacher willingness to participate in this form of pedagogy.

Legislators eager to help support pro-social studies cultures within schools should consider policies which foster pro-social studies practices. Although testing appears to foster increased social studies instruction, it does not guarantee quality. Instead of additional standardized tests, required portfolios of student practices might foster shifts in teacher instruction. Using portfolios of evidences of active participation in social studies through learning experiences, inquiries, and problem based learning can help shift instructional practices and time towards meaningful social studies instruction.

Finally, Administrators within buildings can enact policies that facilitate a pro-social studies culture. As the day-to-day manager of schedules and pacing guides, administrators should ensure that teachers have adequate time to teach and plan for social studies. Specifically, teachers need an uninterrupted 45 minutes per day to instruct,

carefully positioned so that other school demands do not force teachers to cut it short. In addition to this, teachers need protected planning time to gather, evaluate, and prepare resources. Beyond protected time for social studies, administrators can facilitate positive mentoring of pro-social studies practices by strategically staffing grade level teams to ensure that experienced and ambitious teachers can support novice and experienced alike in high leverage social studies practices.

Future Research

While this study certainly helped describe how and why teachers within this unique context made decisions regarding social studies instruction within elementary classrooms it also raises additional questions within the context of the study and the existing research in the field.

Investigate Teacher Selection of Materials.

In the selection of resources, I observed that teachers had a tendency to select materials designed by other teachers, on sites like TpT, even when alternative higher leverage free resources were made available to them. Investigating how teachers search for resources and then ascertain their value could help steer preservice teacher instruction on practices surrounding the thoughtful analysis of resources. Teaching these beginning teachers how to critically evaluate content and quality of resources, as well as how to adapt them to fit the needs of their students can help support practices that will ultimately result in stronger social studies practices within classrooms. In addition to helping preservice teachers, research surrounding why and how teachers select instructional materials could also guide policies established by administrators within a building about what materials to use. Administrators could require the use of a rubric to ascertain the depth of complexity

and quality of the resource(s) that teachers choose to use within their classrooms. Conducting further investigations into why teachers select materials to teach content could certainly help develop understanding and change practices in the field that currently rely heavily on lower level thinking worksheets.

Is Autonomy Best?

Another question that continues to need more exploration is levels of teacher autonomy and ultimate implementation of best practices within the classroom. Teachers have consistently reported that they prefer having autonomy, yet when given autonomy are teachers employing high leverage practices? Who are the teachers who choose to enact do so? What characteristics of teachers seem to afford greater comfort and ability to use autonomy for the better good of their classroom? Investigating these questions further can help in a variety of ways. By understanding what teachers choose to do with their autonomy, we can better see if more structure and guidelines is a necessity to ensure quality of instruction. The teachers within this study appreciated their autonomy to determine how to teach the content, yet they did not use that autonomy necessarily to cultivate a pro-social studies practices and instruction. Rather, the autonomy they were afforded often left them scrambling to find resources that were not aligned with the standards or best practices identified by NCSS. Perhaps, providing teachers more supports to enact their autonomy through protected and dedicated planning periods could help.

Influence of Work Colleagues

It was observed within this study that work colleagues matter. Previous research on the subject has confirmed this; yet further investigation into how and why some work relationships foster positive practices could be influential in developing a teaching force

that consistently uses high leverage and powerful practices when teaching social studies. Conducting both qualitative and quantitative studies to examine the relationships within school buildings and their influence on teacher instructional decision-making could help guide future work on fostering positive working teams that maximize and support growth in the instruction of social studies.

Limitations of the Study

This study was bounded by the time and context in which it happened, and the participants who so kindly agreed to be a part of the study. The ideas and themes raised within this study are simply observations surrounding the instructional decision-making of these teachers within this very unique context, and are thus they are not generalizable.

Summary

Teacher instructional decision-making is a complex phenomenon with many moving parts. Within the context of this charter school, teachers served as the gatekeepers of the curriculum to their students. Understanding how and why they made decisions regarding social studies is important to understand when considering students' opportunities to learn social studies. It appears that the decisions teachers made surrounding the instruction of social studies were influenced not only by a teacher's own capability, but also by policies enacted at the federal, state, and building level. The interaction of teacher capability and policies helps us better understand the instructional learning experiences in elementary social studies classrooms, and as such provides a valuable insight into the educational experiences of elementary learners.

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APPENDIX A: SEMI-FORMAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

The researcher used a semi-structured interview format. The goal of the researcher was to examine how teachers as gatekeepers of the curriculum make instructional decisions as it related to intermediate elementary social studies using the lens of Opportunity to Learn descriptors. To review, these descriptors included:

- Content Coverage —These descriptors measured whether or not students were exposed to the core curriculum for a particular grade level or subject matter.
- Content Exposure —These descriptors take into consideration the time allowed for and devoted to instruction (time-on-task) and the depth of the teaching provided.
- Content Emphasis —These are descriptors that influenced which topics within the curriculum were selected for emphasis and which students were selected to receive instruction emphasizing lower order skills (i.e., rote memorization) or higher order skills (i.e., critical problem solving).
- Quality of Instructional Delivery — These descriptors revealed how classroom teaching practices (i.e., presentation of lessons) affected students' academic achievement

Interview Structure:

Introductions and gathering key participant information

Framing the research

General questions about beliefs and curriculum planning

Specific questions related to social studies

Wrapping up, allowing time for questions from participants

Protocol Document:

Semi-Structured Questions for Teachers

Question Set(s)	Purpose of asking the question(s)	Research Questions Addressed
Introductory background questions: • Name? • Years teaching at Charter in NC (CNC))? • Subject area(s) and grade(s) currently taught? • Years teaching experiences in all? What context (teacher role, setting, etc…) • Teacher preparation (traditional teaching license and training or alternative certification)?	To understand who the participant is and what funds of knowledge and experiences the participant brings to this unique context.	These questions address participant information and help with describing the sample
Questions about beliefs about education: • What brought you into teaching? • What do you believe the purpose of elementary education is? • What do you feel the differences and similarities are between charter, public, and private schools?	To understand the participants unique positionality as it relates to elementary education.	These questions help access the particular positionality of teachers as gatekeepers.

Questions about Charter in NC • What made you decide to apply to Charter in NC? • How is CNC the same or different than other schools you have taught at? (If applicable) • Are you considering returning next year to CNC? • How does leadership interact with teachers?	To develop a greater understanding of the context as a whole, and the participants relationship and positionality within the school.	These questions help describe the participants attitudes and beliefs about their school, which will help in explaining the instructional decision making of teachers within this setting. (b) How does teacher identity and sense of autonomy influence teacher instructional decision making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?
Questions about beliefs about elementary social studies: • What is social studies? What content does it include? • What do you believe is the purpose of elementary social studies? • How should social studies be taught? • Why do we teach elementary social studies? • How did you learn social studies?	To clarify and describe the teachers' definition and understanding of what social studies is. This will help when the researcher is describing how teachers make sense of and plan for social studies.	These questions help access how teachers as gatekeepers make decisions. Specifically, understanding teacher beliefs and previous experiences about social studies will help in explaining the positionality and role the teacher takes within the classroom. (b) How does teacher identity and sense of autonomy influence teacher instructional decision making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

Questions about content coverage descriptors in social studies: • What content do you cover in social studies? • What do you use to determine what is to be taught in social studies? • What is the guaranteed and viable curriculum? What does that mean for social studies instruction? • Where do you get instructional materials to teach social studies?	These questions will help the researcher describe and explain how teachers determine what content is covered within the social studies, and develop a greater picture of what is or is not intentionally covered.	(a) How do intermediate level teachers enact instructional decision making in social studies related to content coverage, content exposure, content emphasis, and quality of instructional delivery?
Questions about content exposure descriptors in social studies: • How much time per day/week are spent on social studies instruction?	These questions will further develop researcher understanding of intended curriculum, time on content, what content is covered, and how the teacher implements and plans for the	(a) How do intermediate level teachers enact instructional decision making in social studies related to content coverage, content exposure, content

• How do you allot time and plan for time on content to be covered in social studies? • What curricula do you follow (if any) and why? • What resources do you seek out when you are planning for social studies?	curriculum.	emphasis, and quality of instructional delivery?
Questions about content emphasis descriptors: • What do you view as the most critical content to be taught in social studies? • What are key content that you teach in social studies? • Do you group students for instruction in social studies? If so, how? • How do you plan for specific units of study? • When you are planning, what is the process for planning as it relates to social studies? • Do other curricular areas influence how you plan for social studies? Tell me more… • What helps you plan for social studies? • What roadblocks exist which	These questions will help the researcher further understand the phenomenon of teacher instructional decision making as it relates to their own view point and lens, as well as the push and pull factors that occur as instructional gatekeepers.	(a) How do intermediate level teachers enact instructional decision making in social studies related to content coverage, content exposure, content emphasis, and quality of instructional delivery? (b) How does teacher identity and sense of autonomy influence teacher instructional decision making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?

may prevent you from teaching social studies?		
Questions about Quality of Instructional Delivery descriptors: • How do you meet the needs of diverse learners during social studies instruction? • What does a typical lesson in social studies look like? • What are your preferred instructional strategies for social studies?	These questions help the researcher understand the quality of instruction as presented through the teacher. These questions will help the researcher understand how the content is planned for and differentiated to meet the needs of students. It also will help researcher understand what intended practices are and to compare to suggested practices as listed by the National Council for the Social Studies.	(a) How do intermediate level teachers enact instructional decision making in social studies related to content coverage, content exposure, content emphasis, and quality of instructional delivery? (b) How does teacher identity and sense of autonomy influence teacher instructional decision making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?
Questions about administrative influence over instructional decision making: • What does your administration value most in your practice and performance as a teacher? • On a scale of 1-5 how much freedom or autonomy do you feel you have to make instructional decisions in your classroom? • Follow up question- why do you	The purpose of these questions is to better understand how the administration within this unique setting influences or interacts with teacher instructional decision making. Helps teachers quantify their sense of independence in instructional decision making and then asks them to describe their rating.	(c) How do the perceived policies and priorities of school leadership influence teacher's instructional decision making and practices (gatekeeping) in social studies instruction?