

The Dangers of High Stakes Testing in Social Studies

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential impact of Alabama's high stakes testing policy on the instructional practices and curriculum of 12th grade secondary social studies teachers. This phenomenological instrumental case study of four participants used guided interviews, a document analysis, and a focus group interview. The study was grounded in the theoretical framework of constructivism, using the methodological foundations of the power relations theory of Michael Foucault. From this study, the researchers began to understand the impact of high stakes testing on instructional practices and curriculum in the state of Alabama. The results of the study indicated that the participants shifted their curriculum and instruction to focus on state mandated testing due to local school administration and internal pressures.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the argument regarding standardized testing has been the forefront of educational policy. Even though some states have decided to move away from standardized assessments, the lingering effects of high stakes testing, along with the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* referred now as the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, still play a crucial role in educational policy. Educational policies, either by state or introduced by the federal government, have a significant impact on curriculum and instruction (Center on Educational Policy, 2009). The problem of educational policies, like high

stakes testing, is the trickle down dynamics of policy affecting instructional practice (Au, 2009). Currently, more than 24% of states still require students to successfully complete some form of state assessment in order to graduate (Gewertz, 2018).

As states continue with assessments from the Common Core, including the Partnership for Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), the issue of testing has not evaporated from the educational landscape (United States Department of Education, 2014). Recently, nearly 30 states added student performance of testing as part of teacher's evaluation; therefore, understanding how state policies directly impact teachers and instructional delivery is significant (Lacireno-Paquet, Morgan, & Mello, 2014). In P-12 education, the implementation of educational reform is difficult; especially where policy makers have relied on mandates from high stakes testing as a means educational accountability (Finnegan & Gross, 2007).

This study was designed to examine the impact of the educational policies of high stakes testing, specifically the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, and how this specific state assessment affected and influenced the instructional practices and curriculum of four 12th grade secondary social studies teachers.

Literature Review

A History of High Stakes Testing

Historically, the issue of high stakes testing in the U.S. came after *A Nation at Risk*. In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education released their report, which determined that the U.S. public education system was in a state of failure, based on poor international assessment models and a gradual reduction in SAT performance from 1963 to 1983 (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Mehta, 2013). "American schools across the board are substantially underperforming and in need

of reform; that schools rather than social forces should be held responsible for academic outcomes; and that success should be measured by externally verifiable tests” (Mehta, 2013, p.286). After *A Nation at Risk*, federal, state, and local education officials mobilized to ignite educational reform, such as a longer school day, higher entrance expectations for universities, and continuous testing to monitor the progress of students; thus, extending the federal role in the nation’s school districts (Davies, 2007; Lewis & Young, 2013). “*A Nation at Risk* signaled the ever-growing federal role in public education characterized by an interest in providing and achieving equality of educational opportunity as well as developing citizens capable of performing effectively in the Global Economy” (Johanningmeier, 2010, p.348). After *A Nation at Risk*, states across the nation began to develop more rigorous state assessments to measure student achievement. The result of *A Nation at Risk* was the birth of the testing movement; including high stakes testing that required students to pass the state assessment in order to graduate.

High Stakes Testing with *No Child Left Behind*

By 2000, educational accountability and testing students to measure progress and achievement were manifested by new federal guidelines and mandated accountability measures in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. *No Child Left Behind* “required states to develop improvement plans that established challenging content and performance standards, implement assessments to measure student progress in meeting these standards, and adopt measures to hold schools accountable for the achievement of the standards” (Webb, 2006, p.335). “Since 2001–2002, every state in the United States has had to develop and implement a standards-based accountability system that meets the requirements of the law” (Zigmond & Kloo, 2009, p.478).

Essentially, high stakes tests were used to measure a school's effectiveness and student achievement (Linn, 2000; Sanders & Horn, 1995).

The determining measure of school effectiveness and success under *No Child Left Behind* was AYP- Annual Yearly Progress. Annual Yearly Progress was assessed based on reading and mathematics proficiency scores; thus, Social Studies was of limited importance compare to other subject areas. Additional subjects could be covered on state examinations, such as English language arts and social studies, depending on each state (Catterall, Mehrens, Ryan, Flores, & Rubin, 1998). "AYP toward academic and graduation goals is the central measure of success or failure for high schools under NCLB" (Balfanz, Legters, West, & Weber, 2007, p.560). With the focus being placed on mathematics and reading, additional academic courses, such as social studies, have been reduced to the form of secondary curriculum (Hillard, 2000). Therefore, at the beginning of *No Child Left Behind*, Social Studies was not a focal point of academic curriculum because Social Studies was not being included in state assessments.

The common outcome of high stakes testing, under NCLB, was that the only content worth teaching was the content of the test; thus, creating a narrowing hierarchy of school curriculum (Clarke et al., 2002; Froese-Germain, 2001; Haney, 2000; Kohn, 2000; Renter et al., 2006; Riffert, 2005; Savage, 2003; Vogler, 2003). Therefore, the power of high stakes testing greatly affects the decisions and actions of districts, schools, and teachers (Elmore, 2002). However, this contradicts the purpose of testing, which is to measure the achievement of students (Phillips, 2006).

Although these new national standards were in place with NCLB, states had direct autonomy over the type, level, and subjects tested and the assessments frequently changed. To ensure that states were meeting the national guidelines of NCLB, states began to "meet the

standard” by changing the assessment and the graduation requirements. This would gradually include adding additional subjects to the state assessment; including a Social Studies section on the state assessments. However, most states, including Alabama, relied on multiple choice assessments that were fact-based, regurgitated types of assessments, which added pressure to change teacher pedagogy (Alabama Department of Education, 2003; Gerwin & Visone, 2006; Johnston, 1998).

As result of multiple choice state assessments, teachers began preparing students for tests with pedagogies that focus on rote memorization and lower-order thinking (Au, 2009; Vogler, 2003). “Since standardized tests today are largely for accountability purposes, teachers and administrators have become focused on having students pass standardized tests” (Westerlund & West, 2001, p. 1). *No Child Left Behind* established a tone for accountability, curriculum, and instruction; thus, by schools concentrating on state assessments, schools could avoid the embarrassment of being classified as a “failing” (Doppen, 2007; Mitsakos & Ackerman, 2009).

High Stakes Testing in Alabama

In the state of Alabama, the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) was being used by the Alabama Department of Education to assess the Annual Yearly Progress of each school, and for determining high school graduation rates. By 2003, the Alabama High School Graduation exam finally included Social Studies and required for all students to pass all five parts (Math, Reading, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies) as a graduation requirement (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). The Social Studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam consisted of 100 multiple choice questions covering American History from the colonial period to World War II, and without a passing score, students could not graduate. For a student to receive a passing score, they had to successfully

answer 53 questions correctly on the Social Studies section.

The content of the AHSGE is from the Social Studies Item Specifications (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). These specifications are framed into seven sections that included America's exploration, impact of the influences of intellectual and religious thought on the political systems of the United States, essential documents of the United States government, the American Revolution, the Era of Expansion, the Civil War Era, the settlement of the West, industrialization and urbanization, World War I, the Great Depression and the New Deal, and World War II (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000). This specific curriculum is covered within the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study in the 10th and 11th grade (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000).

In 2008, Alabama students could graduate with the Alabama Credit Based Diploma if they passed three sections of the AHSGE (only reading, math, and one additional section). With the change in the AHSGE, it was easier for those potential students to graduate from high school in Alabama. Due to the changing method of assessments and standards, it was difficult to establish if individual schools and states were achieving results, or if the assessments had been changed to meet the requirements to avoid the loss of federal funds under NCLB (Jehlen, 2009).

Methodology

Theoretical Framework of Constructivism

This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of constructivism; thus, being rooted from interpretivism, shares the goal of understanding and construct meanings from explicit circumstances (Charmaz, 2006; Glense, 2011). National studies indicate that potential issues resulting from testing could include: possible pressures experienced by each teacher, the potential shift in their pedagogical approach, the socially constructed power structure of the

school, and the dynamics linked to this decision making (Au, 2009). Since the constructivist framework seeks to create understanding, using several of Foucault's power relations, the intention was to understand and construct meaning from the marginalized group, mainly teachers, within this study.

Methodological Foundations of the Power Relations Theory of Michael Foucault

From Foucault's power relations, the concepts of governmentality, shift of the self, discipline and punishment, and technologies of the self, was used as a critical lens to evaluate the possible impact of high stakes testing on 12th grade secondary social studies teachers.

Governmentality is the pressure imposed by an institution on individuals to produce docile citizens (Foucault, 1988). For Doherty (2008), Foucault's governmentality focuses on methods used by the state to maximize resources; thus, granting state interference into the lives of citizens. Governmentality, the influence nature of governmental pressure started at the congressional level with the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, which transformationally impacted assessment, accountability, and teacher quality (United States Congress, 2002).

Governmentality is profoundly rooted in the federal government, which proceeds to local school districts as power and pressure falls directly into localized classrooms. This institutional and governmental hierarchy existed as the federal government used financial (in the means of federal funding), and political pressure (through congressional legislation) to ensure that states followed *No Child Left Behind*. Thus, governmentality becomes the extension of political power (Peters & Beasley, 2008). As a result of *No Child Left Behind*, states then established guidelines for local districts to reinforce federal mandates. The localized districts, needing to provide "public accountability," placed instructional priorities in schools with the ambition of meeting the federal goal of Annual Yearly Progress; which is the measurement of *No Child Left Behind*.

Another possible result of governmentality at the local level for Alabama educators was the shift of the self. Peters and Beasley (2008) argue that individual control and conduct are substantial components of state manipulation. Due to the possible shift of the self, teachers could be in the transformation from independent classroom instructional practitioners to programmed, trained, technical, scripted classroom teachers, who become docile practitioners fearing a negative evaluation and instructional backlash. As a possible result, teachers could be drawn away from independent and autonomous classroom instruction to being transformed into willing participants of the state, yielding professional judgment and practice. For Foucault (1977), the state directly influences the training, aptitude, conduct, attitude, and the state of mind of the individual by a disciplinary apparatus. Due to the performance pressures and governmentality, school districts and schools might impose mandates and instructional practices that reduce independent instructional decision making into forced instructional methods for the purpose of merely passing the standardized assessment and meeting the standard of NCLB.

Another power relation that overlapped governmentality was discipline and punishment. Discipline and punishment can be developed by observation and punishment, which is considered to be an administrative act of power (Pongratz, 2008). This is possible when teachers were forced to use instructional methods to increase student performance on standardized testing; eventually augmenting to mandated curriculum and test preparation.

An example of possible discipline could be the surveillance of teaching by administrative walkthroughs. Instead of autonomous teaching, where the teacher independently developed lessons based on practitioner and pedagogical content knowledge, mandated instructional techniques could be imposed. By conducting administrative walkthroughs, administrators would guarantee prescribed instructional methods were being followed. The

punishment of not following the “recommended” instructional methods would result in a poor evaluation performance; therefore, facing the loss of tenure and benefits. The state apparatus, in its sovereign nature, will exercise power by specific mechanisms of enforcement (Foucault, 1977).

Technologies of the self could be described as the training that result in the shaping of individuals (Peters & Beasley, 2008). Teachers might consider high stakes testing as a technology of the self, used to assess student performance and achievement. As Foucault (1977) argues, influencing a person also includes the operation of self-regulation. As a technology of the self, teachers might determine that low student achievement, and might alter pedagogy to improve test performance, thereby creating a creditable view within the community or school.

Research Design

An instrumental case study design was applied to four 12th grade social studies classrooms in three secondary high schools, from urban and rural school districts in west Alabama that have not consistently made AYP under *No Child Left Behind*. This case study, which is a multi-case design, attempts to identify and detail the phenomena in several locations (Stake, 2006). This type of design allows for a coordination of understanding and evaluating the individual case studies within the same context of research; thus, examining a phenomena in numerous cases instead of just one (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen; 2006, Glenese, 2011; Stake, 2006)

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were four male 12th grade social studies teachers, from urban and rural high schools (2 urban, 1 rural) in west Alabama. The two urban schools had between 500-1000 students, were classified as Title I schools, and had a majority of students on

free or reduced lunch; this meant that most of the students were from families of poverty. The rural school had between 1000-1500 students, and was not a Title I school.

Participants	School Profile	Teaching Experience
Participant A	Urban School	23 years experience
Participant B	Urban School	8 years experience
Participant C	Rural School	12 years experience
Participant D	Urban School	3 years experience

Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative triangulated method of data collection that consisted of individual interviews, document analysis, and focus group interviews were used. Triangulation is the practice of using multiple forms of obtaining data. (Glenese, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Three individuals interviews were conducted after the first Alabama High School Graduation Exam was given during the school year. In these interviews, the teachers were given an opportunity to answer questions regarding their instructional methods. Teachers were also asked to submit three lesson plans during the months in which the graduation exam was administered; which were evaluated using a document analysis. Finally, a focus group interview was conducted toward the end of the data collection process where teachers were asked questions in a group setting about their experiences and instructional methods with the AHSGE. For all interviews, a digital recorder was used to collect questions and responses from the researcher and the participants.

Phenomenological Data Analysis

The type of analysis used in this research was phenomenology. Phenomenology is the systematic approach of interpreting an experience as perceived by the people that participated in it (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Patton, 2002). Instead of developing categories in advance, categories were developed as the data was read, analyzed, and coded; identifying the essence of the phenomenon. This process of identification is referred to as phenomenological reduction (Patton, 2002). Then the data was clustered around emergent themes and a structural synthesis is conducted, which describes the phenomenon and its structure (Creswell, 1998). This analysis continued until saturation occurred, allowing the “discovery” and interaction of the phenomena to become clear and evident (Creswell, 1998). Subsequently, a secondary analysis was performed during a member check within research triangulation.

Results

From the triangulated methods of data collection, three emerging themes were discovered describing the impact of high stakes testing on instructional practices and curriculum of the four 12th grade social studies teachers. The themes that appeared were (1) the difference in intensity of instructional practices and curriculum shift used to review for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), (2) the pedagogical shift in social studies instruction, and (3) the performance pressures from administration and professional obligation.

The Difference in Intensity of Instructional Practices and Curriculum Shift

The first theme that emerged in the coding process was the difference in intensity of instructional practices and curriculum shift. From the data collected, there was evidence that the

intensity of instructional practices to review and prepare for the social studies portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) varied throughout the year. From August to November of 2013, every teacher in this study conducted some form of daily review for the AHSGE. Some of these types of instructional methods included activities such as bell ringers, warm ups, review games, and flash cards. Yet, as the 12th grade social studies teachers got closer in schedule to the graduation exam, especially within two weeks of the AHSGE, the instructional practices of test preparation intensified, thus becoming the dominant form of instruction. Teacher C further stated,

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

Besides the professional decisions that were made by the teachers regarding the frequency of review instructional practices, administrative factors also influenced the frequency. Teacher B stated, “Administrators did expect you to be focused on the exam prior to its administration, to basically stop what you were doing, at least two weeks before the exam.”

As the intensity of instructional practices altered during the testing period, the curriculum of the 12th grade social studies teachers in the study also transformed. As the school schedule moved closer to the actual AHSGE time frame, especially within two weeks of the exam, all of the teachers shifted their curriculum. Instead of teaching the objectives from the Alabama Course of Study for Government and Economics, the curriculum transferred solely on the social studies testing content of the AHSGE. Teacher C stated, “I mean theoretically, you’re supposed to teach it as part of the daily curriculum, but in reality, when you shut the door, it has to be

about this graduation stuff.”

Daily instructional planning was also impacted by the modification in curriculum.

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

Pedagogical Shift

Another evident theme that emerged from the data was a pedagogical or instructional alteration in all of the 12th grade social studies classrooms. During daily instruction, test review activities such as bell ringers, warm ups, flash cards, review games, and PowerPoint reviews were merely a small portion of the instructional time. Teacher A added,

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

Teacher C stated, “I started off in my classroom my first eight years here, warm up, then graduation exam question.” Yet, as time progressed, getting closer to the AHSGE, especially during the two week period before the test, these review instructional methods increased from being a part of daily practice, to becoming the only instructional practice in the classroom.

Teacher B stated, “I did a lot of rote memorization, just a lot of drilling, and information that they might memorize until the day of the test and then immediately forget.” According to

Teacher A, “I had a list of 100 flash card facts, and I never once, not one time, had a kid make 100 flash card facts and learn them, never had one fail the exam.” This shift in instructional methodology moved from lessons that were student centered (such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, the analysis and discussion of primary sources), to teacher centered lessons

that only implemented test review activities and strategies in preparation for the AHSGE.

Performance Pressures

The last major theme that materialized from the data was the issue of performance pressures, both administrative and personal. All of the teachers felt that administrators placed instructional demands, either explicit or implied, in relation to preparation for the social studies portion of the AHSGE. These instructional demands were required on a daily basis and continued before the graduation exam. Teacher C commented, “You are viewed somewhat among your administrators and peers by your success or failure there. So I think your biggest factor is your reputation among your peers and especially your administrators.” One teacher noticed that despite teaching at multiple schools, administrators had the same outlook for blocking out instructional time to review for the AHSGE. Teacher B states, “At the different high schools that I’ve taught at, at each one I’ve had administration at each one say, it’s time to stop and it’s time to review for the graduation exam.” Instructional planning was also impacted, as teachers were required by administrators to document their instructional preparation for the state assessment.

However, all of the participants felt a personal responsibility to help students pass the social studies portion of the state assessment, the AHSGE. The participants all described the importance of the high stakes test, and what was ultimately in jeopardy for students; therefore, the teachers felt it was their duty and obligation to help the students pass the examination. Even if the teachers disagreed with the instructional methods that they used, from their own personal experiences, they believed that this was the best way to prepare students for the AHSGE. Teacher B stated, “So even if you disagreed with it pedagogically, if you felt, your job is ultimately to prepare those for success”. Due to the pressures of the AHSGE, and the

compassionate need to their students, teachers did everything they could to help students pass the state assessment. Teacher A stated, “I always felt an enormous amount of pressure to do all that I could to help a kid graduate from high school.”

Discussion

From this study, one of the most noticeable impacts was the influence of high stakes testing on instructional practice. From the document analysis of lesson plans and the interviews conducted throughout the fall semester of the school year, only a small portion of instructional time was used as part of the daily practice focusing on test preparation instructional methods. Yet, as the AHSGE soon approached the academic calendar, the instructional practices took a shift in direction. Teachers replaced authentic instruction with drill and practice to simply teach to the test; teacher centered instruction with memorization and test example activities for the purpose of passing the test (Froese-Germain, 2001; Gerwin & Visone, 2006; McNeil & Valenzuela, 1999; Riffert, 2005; Smith & Rottenberg, 1991; Solley, 2007; Vogler, 2003). From August to November of 2013, every teacher in this study directed some form of daily instructional practice as test preparation. Due to the influence and governmentality of *No Child Left Behind*, the political influence of the federal government had a direct impact on states to produce state assessments to evaluate student achievement. This led to a perpetual filtering of state requirements, making the AHSGE the influencing phenomenon on the instructional practices and curriculum in this investigation. The drill and practice test preparation methods that were only a small portion of classroom instruction shifted to become the dominant form of instructional practices, especially two weeks before the examination. Therefore, authentic teaching under high stakes testing gets replaced with drill and practice or multiple-choice teaching (Savage, 2003; Smith, 1991). Instructional methods are often used to hold schools

accountable for student achievement and school effectiveness (Linn, 2000; Sanders & Horn, 1995).

Even with the daily introduction of minimally test preparation methods, most of the instruction given from August to December focused on curriculum grounded in the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study. As the intensity of these test preparation instructional methods increased, especially two weeks before the examination, the curriculum shifted from the Alabama Social Studies Course of Study to the eligible content Social Studies Specifications for the AHSGE (Alabama State Department of Education, 2000). Haney (2000) argues that high stakes testing narrows curriculum to test-driven content. This curriculum shift occurred because the social studies portion of the AHSGE content is directly from the Social Studies Item Specifications for the AHSGE. The most important curriculum therefore, is the curriculum that is going to be on the test (Froese-Germain, 2001; Nichols et. al, 2005; Savage, 2003; Taylor et.al, 2001; Vogler, 2003). However, teachers were either willing or asked by administration to prepare students prior to the examination period. They were either willing to conform to the mandates of the power within the school, or were willing to conform due to the performance measures of themselves; a direct example of a shift of the self in Foucault's power relations theory. Some of the participants naturally shifted the curriculum as a reflective tool to improve performance with regards to the state assessment.

One of the performance pressures that reoccurred was coercion by local school administration. Because of state assessments being the political apparatus of *No Child Left Behind*, administrators were to ensure that teachers had adequate instructional time to prepare for the AHSGE. This was a direct mandate in faculty meetings, but also in requirements for lesson plans, and was magnified significantly during the two week period before the examination.

Teachers' instructional practices and professionalism can be transformed by the pressures related to the educational policy of high stakes testing (Au, 2009; Chester, 2005). Testing created pressure from state accountability, to school administration, passed down to faculty at the school level. According to the teachers, the local school administrators were deeply concerned about the academic performance of the students, and that teachers had properly prepared them to take the AHSGE. If conformity to administrative expectations was not met, then the assumption from the participants was a poor evaluation, resulting in discipline and punishment. Teachers became docile instructors willing to conform out of fear of administrative backlash. This fear of administration discipline was again linked directly to the power relations of discipline and punishment described by Foucault.

Another pressure of high stakes testing was from the internal pressure teachers placed on student performance. Due to the nature of the high stakes test, and students not being able to graduate from high school as a result of poor performance, the teachers within this study felt a deep sense of duty to make sure that students were adequately prepared.

Due to the outward governmentality expressed by local school administration, a shift of the self occurred in several participants. This is the willingness to obey the requirements and school expectations involving instructional review and preparation for the AHSGE. This shift of the self led to conformity in instructional practices, curriculum, and also instructional planning. Even with the outward pressures from each institution; however, internal pressures existed in the technologies of the self. Teachers were profoundly troubled about their student performances due to the high stakes atmosphere of the assessment, especially regarding graduation.

Implications and Conclusion

This study investigated four, 12th grade, social studies teachers as part of an instrumental

case study to determine the impact of high stakes testing on instructional practices and curriculum. The investigation found that the educational policy of high stakes testing led to a shift of instruction from authentic pedagogy to test preparation, such as drill and practices activities, to prepare for the AHSGE. As the intensity of these remediation activities increased, the social studies curriculum narrowed as the test approached. Additionally, the administrative and personal pressures of the state assessment led to a sense of duty and obligation because of the high stakes of the assessment.

The educational policy of high stakes testing had a noticeable dangerous impact on instructional practices and curriculum. The first impact was the daily instructional significance of review for the social studies portion of the AHSGE. Despite the differences among schools and teachers, every teacher within this study, implemented some type of daily remediation or review activity to prepare for the state assessment. For 12th grade social studies teachers who participated, a daily instructional shift occurred as teachers used review games, flashcards, and drilling techniques in preparation for the AHSGE. Due to the nature of the state assessment being a high stakes assessment, affecting the graduation rate of schools and the personal graduation of students, teachers had administrative expectations and personal obligations to have their students prepared to take the AHSGE. This instructional impact led to an intense change in the daily remediation and preparation of students, especially two weeks before the examination, where test preparation consumed all instructional time. The impact of testing led to daily drills and instructional methods based on the regurgitation of facts that eventually dominated routine instruction - instead of meaningful, relevant, and engaging instructional practices.

The policy of high stakes testing also overwhelmingly impacted the classroom curriculum of the teachers who participated in this study. From August to November, the

teachers deviated at times from the Social Studies Alabama Course of Study. This deviation occurred daily, when teachers used drill and practice instructional methods to prepare for the AHSGE. Immediately before the examination, the curriculum had completely moved away from the Alabama Course of Study to only the testable material found in the Social Studies Item Specifications for the AHSGE. Therefore, testing deeply impacted the social studies curriculum from a daily deviation to a complete halt during the preparation period of the high stakes test.

Nearly six years ago, more than half of the states in the U.S. still had some form of high stakes testing (Mathews, 2017). Yet, almost more than 24% of states today still use this type of assessment; thus, potentially creating a dangerous impact on curriculum and instruction (Gewertz, 2017). The purpose of the study was to detail the potential effects of the AHSGE, the high stakes assessment in Alabama, on curriculum and instruction. Like previous literature, the influence of the AHSGE affected the nature of instructional and curriculum decisions, replacing excellent student-centered learning to teacher driven test preparation. Although stakeholders enjoy the concept of educational accountability, the lasting effects of high stakes testing on our educational system creates an environment of disingenuous learning that ostracizes curriculum and best practices for instruction (Mathews, 2017). These dangers of high stakes testing extends beyond the classroom and has a lasting effect on the lives of students. The Gates Foundation reported in *The Case Against Exit Exams*, that high stakes state assessments negatively impacted graduation rates and increased incarceration rates by 12.5 percent (Karp, 2008). Even through many of states have ended high stakes testing, the danger remains a part of the educational landscape.

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