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# Institutional Control of Social Studies Teaching as Phronesis: A Multi-Case Study

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### Abstract

This paper presents findings from a multi-case study of social studies educators which focused on the impact of institutional requirements on social studies teaching as phronesis. The concept of phronesis, or practical wisdom of human values, occupies a central space in this study, acting as both the theoretical and methodological framework. As a theoretical framework, Aristotle's articulation of phronesis, and its distinction from the intellectual states of episteme and techne, guided the development of research questions and acted as an entry point for analysis of participant data concerning the impact of school-based requirements on social studies teaching. As a methodological framework, this study is grounded in Flyvbjerg's (2001) argument for a "phronetic social science," which envisions social science work as contributing to dialogue about human values, rather than a vain attempt of strict prediction and explanation. I merge these considerations with the value and utility of qualitative case study, which functions as the study design. Based on this framing, I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the role that schools play in the development or control of teacher's practical wisdom and socially-minded educational goals. Answers to this question are discussed through the examination of four different cases of social studies teachers from Alabama. Through a thematic analysis of qualitative data, I illustrate that institutional teaching requirements largely constrained "phronetic" possibilities for social studies education. The major findings indicate that, rather than supporting professional teacher judgments and fostering socially conscious goals, school-based requirements pushed participants to implement technical pedagogies in order to meet pre-determined outcomes. I conclude with a discussion that critically evaluates the nature of contemporary educational reform and considers the place of social studies in this climate.

### Keywords

Phronesis, Episteme, Techne, Phronetic Social Science, Case Study

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## **Institutional Control of Social Studies Teaching as Phronesis: A Multi-Case Study**

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*This paper presents findings from a multi-case study of social studies educators which focused on the impact of institutional requirements on social studies teaching as phronesis. The concept of phronesis, or practical wisdom of human values, occupies a central space in this study, acting as both the theoretical and methodological framework. As a theoretical framework, Aristotle's articulation of phronesis, and its distinction from the intellectual states of episteme and techne, guided the development of research questions and acted as an entry point for analysis of participant data concerning the impact of school-based requirements on social studies teaching. As a methodological framework, this study is grounded in Flyvbjerg's (2001) argument for a "phronetic social science," which envisions social science work as contributing to dialogue about human values, rather than a vain attempt of strict prediction and explanation. I merge these considerations with the value and utility of qualitative case study, which functions as the study design. Based on this framing, I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the role that schools play in the development or control of teacher's practical wisdom and socially-minded educational goals. Answers to this question are discussed through the examination of four different cases of social studies teachers from Alabama. Through a thematic analysis of qualitative data, I illustrate that institutional teaching requirements largely constrained "phronetic" possibilities for social studies education. The major findings indicate that, rather than supporting professional teacher judgments and fostering socially conscious goals, school-based requirements pushed participants to implement technical pedagogies in order to meet pre-determined outcomes. I conclude with a discussion that critically evaluates the nature of contemporary educational reform and considers the place of social studies in this climate. Keywords: Phronesis, Episteme, Techne, Phronetic Social Science, Case Study*

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This paper presents selected findings from a larger multi-case study examining the ways that institutional job requirements impact the ability of social studies educators to teach for socially valuable purposes. Specifically, it investigates the role that such requirements play in the development or prevention of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. Drawing from Aristotle's (2000) articulation of this ancient concept, many scholars have incorporated *phronesis* as a framework for analyzing and critiquing a wide range of educational topics in both empirical and philosophical studies (Birmingham, 2004; Eisner, 2002; Field & Latta, 2001; Halverson, 2004; Melville, Campbell, Fazio, & Bartley, 2012; Noel, 1999). In his discussion of *arête*, or virtue, Aristotle distinguishes between the intellectual states of *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*. Briefly, *episteme* is scientific knowledge, *techne* is productive knowledge or skill, and *phronesis* is practical knowledge, "concerned with what is good and bad for a human being" (p. 107). After discussing these states in more detail in the next section, I briefly pull from contemporary educational scholarship to argue that *phronesis*, with its practical consideration of human values, corresponds with the strength of

social studies as a content area that requires contextual judgments and, particularly, value rationality. Thus, it is important to understand if educational institutions foster or hinder the development of *phronesis* among social studies educators, how this occurs, and what implications this has for social studies and teacher education in general. With this guiding framework in mind, the intent of the study was to investigate more specifically how institutional job requirements (e.g., meeting pre-determined curricular objectives, incorporating literacy standards, etc.) impacted the ability of social studies educators to engage in “phronetic” understandings of teaching.

After articulating the theoretical framework, I discuss how *phronesis* was also central to the methodological framework and, thus, the study design. The application of *phronesis* as a methodological framework emphasizes both practical and value rationality, in contrast to the technical rationality that has historically characterized much social science research (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Instead of attempting to test, predict, or control, “phronetic” research emphasizes investigating the particulars of lived practice to understand how human beings act within distinct cases and contexts. I will argue that this fits with the strengths of qualitative research in general and case study research in particular. Additionally, “phronetic” research asks value-rational questions, considering issues of power and how particular practices contribute to a deeper consideration of praxis, or action in aim of some social good. As such, this research connects with critical traditions of qualitative research that seek to, not only understand and explore, but also evaluate the specifics of processes of power and domination (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

The findings section draws upon four individual cases of social studies educators and the major themes that emerged from analysis of individual interviews, classroom observations, and school-based documents. Using *phronesis* as an analytical guide, I discuss common themes that illustrate the ways in which institutional job requirements impacted the teachers’ abilities to incorporate their own professional judgments of what they deemed as socially valuable and important. On the whole, job requirements worked to control, rather than foster, “phronetic” educational practices. Teaching requirements from the schools, especially related to mandated curricular objectives and Common Core literacy standards, mostly limited teachers’ opportunities to teach for socially valuable components of social studies, such as active citizenship. It is important to understand that this study provides in-depth case knowledge, or what Thomas (2011) calls exemplary knowledge, of *how* something works, rather than providing knowledge that is necessarily generalizable to other contexts. It does, however, correspond to trends in contemporary educational reform that are characterized as diminishing the social role of education in favor of economic objectives. Thus, the intent of this study, in keeping with the “phronetic” framework I will outline, is to offer case knowledge of *how* institutional power operates in distinct contexts to spur dialogue of value-rational questions concerning what is good and bad for social studies education. I conclude with a discussion of the study’s findings in the context of neoliberal education reform and its impact on socially valuable goals of education.

### Theoretical Framework

Aristotle’s (2000) discussion of *phronesis* can be found within his larger consideration of intellectual states in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, *phronesis* stands in stark contrast to the largely theoretical and technical rationalities of *episteme* and *techne*. Scholars in various academic disciplines have returned to the concept of *phronesis* to challenge applied theory or technical models of practice. Most notably, perhaps, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) engages with *phronesis* as a central idea in the conception of a human science based upon philosophical hermeneutics in his book *Truth and Method*. More recently,

scholars in diverse fields have pointed to the contributions that a phronetic understanding can provide to professional practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram, 2012; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012). Proponents of a phronetic orientation argue that professional practitioners are not those who simply apply general truths to concrete situations. Rather, professionals must make practical judgments with considerations of value given the complexities of each particular situation. In education, many scholars have identified *phronesis* as a crucial, yet overlooked, disposition which breaks from the technical rationality prevalent in contemporary educational reform (Dunne, 1993; Noel, 1999; Eisner, 2002; Birmingham, 2004; Melville et al., 2012). But, what exactly is *phronesis* and how is it distinguished from other intellectual states? In this section, I describe the states of *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis* as articulated by Aristotle (2000) and discuss their connections to education, particularly how teaching might be conceptualized through the lens of each state respectively. Lastly, I argue that social studies, a content area which engages themes of social value, most closely corresponds to the key characteristics of *phronesis*.

### **Episteme**

The first of these intellectual states of reason is *episteme*, which can be translated as scientific knowledge. Aristotle (2000) describes the nature of scientific knowledge as that which “cannot be otherwise” (p. 105). He goes on to explain that scientific knowledge is eternal and does not come into being or cease to be. Due to the eternal essence of scientific knowledge, Aristotle contends that it is teachable, learnable, and concerned with universal principles, either through induction or deduction. He closes his discussion of scientific knowledge by saying that it “is a state by which we demonstrate” (p. 106). In summary, *episteme* is a state of reason dealing with universal principles or laws that one can teach or demonstrate. Applying its tenets to the profession of teaching, an epistemic view might hold that there are underlying universal truths about effective teaching that simply must be discovered and applied. These ultimate truths could then presumably be demonstrated to practitioners who would then possess the scientific understanding to promote learning regardless of context. Contemporary educational reforms in the *No Child Left Behind* era are perhaps representative of such an applied sciences model of teaching (Hansen, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Next, I discuss *techne* and its distinguishing characteristics, along with how this intellectual state connects with and breaks from the applied science model.

### **Techne**

The intellectual state of *techne* is often translated as “skill.” Aristotle (2000) first distinguishes skill by describing it as a “productive state involving true reason” (p. 106). It is a rational state concerning production or bringing things into being. *Techne* differs from *episteme* because it is not concerned with things that come into being by necessity and is “concerned with what can be otherwise” (p. 107). Skill carries with it a connotation of context-dependent knowledge. Whereas scientific knowledge is concerned with demonstrable universal principles, skill is concerned with practical knowledge about how best to achieve certain ends. It might be said that *episteme* is a kind of “know that” while *techne* is a kind of “know how.” Understanding the practice of teaching through this lens would reflect teaching as a craft that emphasizes the practical knowledge and expertise of the teacher. Thus, *techne* allows for a conceptualization which breaks from the applied science model by positioning teaching as a skill, or craft, and not a science.

However, there is also a potential correspondence between *episteme* and *techne* due to the relationship between means and ends within craft knowledge. Though skill is concerned

with practical knowledge, according to Aristotle (2000), it is a practical knowledge of making, or producing, external ends. In other words, the craftsman does not necessarily question the value of producing something, only how it may most efficiently be produced. Furthermore, such a technical application may heavily depend upon the theoretical considerations of *episteme*. In this sense, *techne* would simply represent the “applied” part of an applied sciences model. It would represent the practical knowledge of an expert who knows when, where, and how to apply scientific principles. I believe this framework is particularly useful for understanding contemporary educational policy. Through the adoption of standardized curricula and achievement benchmarks, teachers are left to question only the means of education and not the ends. Additionally, educational policy consistently emphasizes that decisions about means be “scientifically-based” and “data-driven,” rather than based on experiential knowledge or traditional wisdom (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013). Such a conceptualization of teaching represents a technical rationality that accentuates issues of method over questions of value in education. Some scholars have argued that contemporary educational policy has deprofessionalized teaching so that educators are now simply technicians of an external design outside of their own making (Apple, 1986; Barrett, 2009). These scholars argue that educational policy and institutional requirements should not simply reduce the practice of teaching to a set of theories or context-independent techniques. Rather, teaching should involve practitioners’ experiential knowledge and evaluative judgments of both means *and* ends. Aristotle’s (2000) articulation of *phronesis* provides a useful framework for such an understanding of teaching.

### **Phronesis**

The intellectual state of *phronesis* is often translated into the phrase “practical wisdom.” Aristotle (2000) begins his discussion of *phronesis* by considering the characteristics of those whom society calls practically wise. According to Aristotle, the practically wise person can “deliberate nobly about what is good and beneficial for himself” and can see “what is good for themselves and what is good for people in general” (p. 108). The concept of deliberation already distinguishes practical wisdom from scientific knowledge because deliberation is not involved in things which are universal. Aristotle further distinguishes it from scientific knowledge by stating that practical wisdom requires an understanding of particulars and not universals only (p. 110). Thus, practical wisdom, like skill, is concerned with practical knowledge of what can be otherwise. However, Aristotle makes a clear distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* as well. Whereas skill is associated with production, practical wisdom is associated with action. Aristotle writes, “For while production has an end distinct from itself, this could not be so with action, since the end here is acting well itself.” (p. 107). Thus, *phronesis* is an intellectual state of practical knowledge concerning values, or as Aristotle describes it, concerning “what is good and bad for a human being” (p. 107). The value rationality offered by *phronesis* stands in stark contrast to the technical rationality of *techne* and the theoretical rationality of *episteme*. Applied to education, *phronesis* would involve both practical and values-based judgments about teaching. It would involve educating for social values including considerations of what is good for oneself and for others. I believe that this is, or at least should be, the major strength of social studies education. Whereas other disciplines may educate us about general truths or practical skills, social studies allows us to consider what is good for ourselves and for others in society. Thus, *phronesis* is a critical intellectual element of social studies education.

## Phronesis and Social Studies

Many scholars argue that social studies connects with social goals of education and that practitioners should evaluate educational objectives rather than simply implement techniques to produce institutional ends. Thornton (2005) explains that social studies teachers must engage in “aims talk,” not simply viewing themselves as content masters. Ross (2006) additionally states that, rather than reducing social studies education to predefined activities, social studies teachers must “be actively engaged in considering the perennial curriculum question—what knowledge is of most worth?” (p. 5). This is because social studies disciplines consider questions of human value and social application. Scholars concerned with social studies education point to its contribution to social goals, such as social justice, citizenship education, teaching for democracy, multiculturalism, and changing perspectives and beliefs (Bender-Slack & Raupach, 2008; Gibson, 2012; Kovacs, 2009; Wineburg, 2001; Zong, Garcia, & Wilson, 2002). Additionally, the *National Council for the Social Studies* (NCSS) explains that this content area 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” (in Herczog, 2010, p. 218).

These considerations suggest that social studies prominently engages with questions of value and social application. At its core, social studies is not about uncovering laws or producing skills but is rather concerned with active applications toward societal goals. This is how Aristotle (2000) describes *phronesis*, stating that practical wisdom “must be a true state involving reason, concerned with action in relation to human goods” (p. 108). Based upon the understanding of *phronesis* as an essential disposition for social studies education, I chose to investigate how *phronesis* is supported or constrained by the everyday realities of teaching requirements in schools. Next, I discuss how this topic of inquiry emerged out of my own experiences as a pre-service teacher and interests that developed as a doctoral student.

### Researcher Positionality

My interest in issues concerning social studies education comes from my educational background. After earning a degree in History, I entered a master’s program in teaching with the hope of becoming a social studies teacher. I had positive experiences in this program, learning not only of diverse learning theories and techniques, but also of distinct educational philosophies that grounded what I believed to be at the core of social studies education; namely, civic and democratic values that contribute to questions of the social good. As I began the clinical portion of my degree, I realized that the requirements and expectations of teachers in schools often overshadowed professional deliberation. Much of my pre-service work, including my semester of student teaching, centered on constructing lesson plans, ensuring that lessons strictly matched pre-determined curricular objectives, and gathering assessment data meant to illustrate that students had met these objectives. Though I had some room to include my own judgments, I felt somewhat disconcerted that much of the work of teaching focused on more mundane technical activities at the expense of robust intellectual discussions of social studies content areas and how these might be usefully brought to bear on important social questions impacting student lives. After completing my degree, I was fortunate to gain an opportunity to continue my education in a doctoral program in education. This program gave insight to my past experiences, granting exposure to diverse philosophical traditions in both education and the social sciences. It engaged me in historical conceptualizations of teaching, ranging from those advocating for the scientific management of teaching, understanding education narrowly as a process of producing desired behaviors, to those advocating for humanistic, artistic, and political understandings of teaching as a moral

craft aimed at social betterment. It was here that I began reading Aristotle's (2000) *Ethics* and how modern philosophers and education scholars have appropriated *phronesis* to counter the common "applied sciences" model of teaching (Zeichner, 2010). This work provided a language through which to articulate and understand my pre-service experiences. From my perspective, schools espoused teaching as *episteme* and *techne* with their emphasis on standardized learning outcomes and "evidence-based" teaching techniques. This was to the detriment of teaching as *phronesis*, where social studies teachers might use their knowledge to navigate the complexities of classrooms in order to engage students in practical deliberations of the social good.

These experiences illustrate my general interest in social studies education and my more particular interest in the ancient concept of *phronesis*. Based on these interests, I wanted to investigate how the requirements of educational institutions impact teaching, specifically in relation to the practical wisdom of teachers. Working from the literature base outlined earlier, which explains the increasing technicization of the contemporary educational era, I wanted to focus on *how* this phenomenon takes root in particular schools. Thus, I developed a study based in qualitative traditions that emphasize thick description (Geertz, 1973) of contexts and practices. Additionally, however, I wanted to use this more concrete knowledge as entry into a normative examination of social studies teaching itself. What *should* social studies education do, in other words, and how can current conceptualizations of teaching be evaluated based on these considerations? Interestingly, this emphasis on practical and value rationality led me back to *phronesis* and scholars that have appropriated this concept in the context of social research. Next, I more specifically explain the philosophical assumptions of the methodology and the study design that is grounded in this particular tradition.

### Methodology

As discussed previously, *phronesis* is central to the methodological framework for this study in addition to its importance within the theoretical framework. In other words, while this study investigates the impact of educational institutions upon teacher *phronesis*, I also conducted this study in a way that was methodologically informed by theorists who center *phronesis* as a key concept for social research. This is, perhaps, most notable in Bent Flyvbjerg's work, particularly his book *Making Social Science Matter* (2001). Here, Flyvbjerg argues that the social sciences have for too long attempted to emulate the predictive and explanatory capacities of the natural sciences, striving in vain to understand the social world according to the same causal mechanisms by which we understand the natural world. He contends that the social sciences are weak in their ability to accurately measure, order, and reduce the social world to a set of context-independent laws and generalizations. On the other hand, the social sciences are strong where the natural sciences are weak, namely in their ability to contribute to practical and value rationality. Flyvbjerg suggests, then, that social researchers reconsider their work as integrated within the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom of what is good and bad for humans, rather than *episteme* or *techne*, which are more suited for the natural sciences.

Flyvbjerg (2001) offers several methodological guidelines that correspond to what he terms a "phronetic" social science, or research on the social world that focuses on practical knowledge and contributes to considerations of values. These include "getting close to reality," "emphasizing little things," "looking at practice before discourse," "studying cases and contexts," "dialoguing with a polyphony of voices," "focusing on values," and "placing power at the core of analysis" (pp. 130-140). I want to focus on three particular guidelines as I articulate the methodological background of this project: "studying cases and contexts,"

“focusing on values,” and “placing power at the core of analysis.” These guidelines serve as the methodological basis for the study’s design and central research questions.

The guideline of studying cases and contexts clearly links with case study approaches to social research. According to Yin (2003), case studies are empirical inquiries “that [investigate] a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 11). Though this definition is not incorrect, Flyvbjerg (2011) extends understandings of case study by dissecting some of the scholarly misconceptions surrounding this research approach. Among the misconceptions that Flyvbjerg argues against is the notion that case studies are only useful for generating hypotheses. While he contends that case studies can be used to test hypotheses, and thus make broad generalizations via falsification strategies, he also stresses that case studies are not limited simply to activities concerning the generation and testing of hypotheses. He writes that case studies are, perhaps, most useful in contributing to our practical knowledge of the social world, suggesting that “‘the force of example’ and transferability are underestimated” in scientific development (p. 305). Supplementing this argument, Thomas (2010) explicitly links the strength of case study research with the practical knowledge characterized by *phronesis*. Thomas argues that, rather than emphasizing deduction (i.e., testing hypotheses in practice) or induction (i.e., building hypotheses from practice), social researchers should emphasize “abduction,” or “conclusions drawn from everyday generalizations” (p. 577). This focus on “exemplary knowledge” contributes, not to generalizable laws, but to transferable knowledge drawn from “example viewed and heard in the context of another’s experience...but used in the context of one’s own” (p. 578). This articulation forms the foundation for this study, which sought to generate rich, case-based knowledge of teachers navigating their practical wisdom in institutional contexts, which might connect with the experiences of others. However, I also came to understand these teacher experiences as what Flyvbjerg (2011) terms paradigmatic cases, or “cases that highlight more general characteristics of the societies in question” (p. 308). The context-rich experiences of the teachers in this study are emblematic of the more general trends toward an applied science understanding of teaching that characterizes contemporary education (Hansen, 2007; Zeichner, 2010).

While the preceding discussion locates the practical rationality of “phronetic” social science within case study, the guidelines concerning values and power emphasize its value rationality. Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that the goal of social science is to “produce input to the ongoing social dialogue and praxis in a society, rather than to generate ultimate, unequivocally verified knowledge” (p. 139). Such a stance links “phronetic” social science with tenets of critical traditions of research. As Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) explain, “Inquiry that aspires to the name ‘critical’ must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society” (p. 164). Thus, in addition to generating rich, case knowledge of teacher experiences, I also wanted to interpret these experiences from a normative perspective; considering the power implicit in these case examples and how this serves particular values within social studies and education more generally. This section has discussed the methodological assumptions and research traditions that informed the construction of this study. In the next sections, I articulate more specifically the study design, including the participants, data collection, and analysis.

### Study Design

I selected a case study design for this project as, based on the preceding methodological discussion, it fits nicely with many of the assumptions of a “phronetic” orientation to research. The overarching design is a multiple-case study. Baxter and Jack (2008) write that this design investigates multiple cases that occupy different contexts with

the intent to understand the similarities and differences between cases (p. 550). This was true in this study as each participant, or case, worked either in a different school/classroom or as part of different teaching programs<sup>1</sup>. While some explanations of multiple case studies focus more on making predictions across cases (Yin, 2003), others emphasize gaining practical insight. Stake (2006) in particular offers “instrumental case study” for the purpose of gaining “insight and understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon” (as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). This description more closely connects with the intent of this study as I sought to gain practical insights into the particular situations teachers navigate within their institutional contexts. Finally, as discussed earlier, in hindsight, I see these teachers as paradigmatic cases (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The practical insights that emerged from investigation of these cases exemplify the general characteristics of contemporary education, which emphasizes technical knowledge over practical judgment. With these considerations in mind, this study examined four cases of teachers. I analyzed these individual cases to understand what common patterns emerged in the context of the following central research questions:

1. Do local institutional requirements impact teachers’ professional practices and perceptions? If so, *how* do these requirements impact teachers’ ability to engage in teaching as *phronesis*?
2. What do these cases indicate about how institutional requirements for teaching function in social studies education? What mechanisms of power exist? Who wins and who loses by these mechanisms of power?

## Participants

After obtaining third-party approval from a university Institutional Review Board, I began to recruit participants according to goals of purposeful selection in qualitative studies. Maxwell (2005) notes that two particular goals of purposeful selection are to “deliberately examine cases that are critical for the theories that you began the study with” and “establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals” (p. 90). Based on my theoretical framework, I intentionally recruited teachers who taught social studies at the secondary level in public schools and, thus, would be subject to job-related requirements, such as meeting curricular objectives, instilling literacy learning outcomes, etc. Additionally, I wanted to recruit participants from both urban and rural environments and at various levels of experience, so that I could compare these cases, though this particular aspect of the study is not part of this paper. I e-mailed teachers meeting these general criteria about their interest in the study, providing each contact with an informed consent letter detailing the study and protection of confidentiality/anonymity. These queries yielded four total participants who volunteered to take part: Mr. Smith, Ms. Happ, Mr. Henley, and Mr. Gwynn.<sup>2</sup> Each of these participants met the purposeful selection criteria in that they taught social studies in either a public middle or high school. Additionally, Mr. Gwynn was acting as Mr. Henley’s pre-service student teacher during the time of data collection. Though teaching in the same classroom, the fact that Mr. Gwynn had to adhere to

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<sup>1</sup> The larger study included comparisons relative to differences in institutional impact regarding urban/rural environments and novice/expert teachers. Thus, there was a mix of different geographical and professional contexts; teachers in urban schools, rural schools, and ranging in their professional experience from a pre-service teacher to one with 10+ years of experience.

<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms to protect participant identities. Additionally, only I had access to collected data and this data was transferred into electronic format in a password protected computer for purposes of confidentiality and anonymity.

both expectations from the school and the requirements of his university teacher education program added another layer to my analysis.

## Data Collection

Though case studies can be conducted either quantitatively or qualitatively, Stake (1978) suggests that the main purpose of this research design is to generate a deep understanding of the case itself. Case studies attend more to idiosyncrasies than generating predictions, Stake argues, so he views case study as more fitted to qualitative research traditions. Dyson and Genishi (2005) also offer that interests in investigating contextual knowledge and the complexity of human experience lead researchers to conduct case studies in the qualitative paradigm. As an in-depth case knowledge of teacher practices in specific contexts was my aim, I deemed qualitative research methods appropriate for the study. As is common with case studies (Yin, 2003), I utilized multiple sources of data collection, namely observations, interviews, and document analysis. I used these multiple sources of data collectively, as they were used to build and supplement each other. For example, I began data collection with a set of classroom observations of each participant<sup>3</sup>. I took field notes for each individual observation and, once points of inquiry began to emerge, I developed these field notes into interview questions for the first two rounds of interviews with each participant. Document analysis also supplemented these rounds of interviews. After receiving permission from participants, I analyzed documents that represented teachers' daily practices (e.g., lesson plans) or that impacted their daily practices (e.g., courses of study, Common Core literacy standards). I analyzed these documents on their own, but also used them to develop interview questions so that I might gain insight into what impact they had on participants' teaching practices. Thus, the first two sets of interviews focused on providing deeper information about observational (e.g., Can you tell me more about your rationale for conducting the hands-on learning activity from the other day?) and document (e.g., Can you explain what the purpose of the CCR/ELA standards are?) data. The third round of interviews focused more specifically on participant perceptions regarding their professional philosophies of education and their role as a social studies educator (e.g., What would you say is the purpose of social studies in the curriculum?). Though there was room for probing questions based on responses, participants received the same common set of questions for these interviews. Thus, within each case, these qualitative methods complemented and built off of each other in the development of data. This also provided an element of trustworthiness, as findings emerging from multiple sources of data serve as one element of triangulation, a common form of providing validity to qualitative results (Merriam, 1998).

## Data Analysis

In this section, I discuss the methods of qualitative data analysis utilized to generate the major findings for this study. This included both within and across-case analysis which led to larger categories that speak to common elements among the cases, as well as themes that focused on individual case findings that supplement the larger categories. To begin, I engaged in qualitative coding to elicit key findings from within each individual case. This within-case analysis included two primary cycles of coding. The first cycle used descriptive and in vivo coding. Saldaña (2015) defines descriptive coding as summary "in a word or short phrase...the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 102) and in vivo coding as

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. Gwynn had fewer total classroom observations because he simply taught less as a student teacher. However, the process described above of using observations to build subsequent interview questions was still followed.

that which “refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (p. 105). I applied this coding structure to each individual data source as appropriate. For example, observation field notes and documents typically received more descriptive codes (e.g., experiential learning), while interview transcripts received many more in vivo codes (e.g., when Mr. Smith explained he felt like a “glorified reading specialist”). The second cycle used focused coding, which Saldaña (2015) says “searches for the most frequent or significant codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus” (p. 240). I analyzed common codes from across interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents to develop into broader themes. These form the individual themes that are discussed later in the findings section (e.g., curricular controls, time constraints, etc.) within the broader across-case categories.

Once I developed these broader themes from within-case analysis, I implemented an across-case analysis that incorporated elements of the theoretical framework of *phronesis*. Broader categories drawn in consideration of the theoretical framework became the organizational structure for the common themes that emerged from within-case analysis. These overarching categories are: (1) evidence of institutional “controls,” (2) evidence of teacher judgment/autonomy, and (3) teacher attitudes about social studies. The first category focuses on data suggesting that job requirements did, in fact, control teaching practices and beliefs and how that occurred. The second category focuses on data illustrating the level of judgment/autonomy, a central feature of *phronesis*, exhibited and expressed by teachers and how it was situated in the overall institutional context of teaching. Finally, the last category focuses on data highlighting teachers’ personal and professional beliefs about social studies, concentrating on the extent to which they felt job requirements supported or contradicted these beliefs. These across-case categories form the organization of the findings section. Next, I summarize these findings using many common themes from individual cases to support and add depth to them. In the Discussion section, these findings are then used as a basis for considering the initial research questions.

## Findings

### Evidence of Institutional Controls

The first major category I discuss in the findings section concerns themes from across the cases indicating that institutional job-requirements worked to control teacher practices in particular ways. More specifically, on the whole, the overarching directives for participants to teach toward pre-determined learning outcomes directed by the institution tended to foster technical pedagogies. This limited teacher abilities to engage in practical deliberation and judgments about what they professionally deemed most valuable and worthwhile for students. In this section, I will summarize and discuss data to support the following common themes that emerged from within-case analysis: *curricular controls*, *time constraints*, and *emphasis on skills*.

#### *Curricular Controls*

The first theme related to institutional controls concerned constraints of the curriculum, specifically the objectives laid out for each grade and content area in the Alabama Course of Study (ALCOS). Though, at times, participants expressed satisfaction with the structure that ALCOS provided, many also noted and exhibited that these pre-determined objectives constrained their teaching. Mr. Smith noted:

I know that in Civics I need to cover the purpose of government and the foundations of government and the three branches of government, and things like that, but I feel like sometimes [ALCOS] is a little bit of a hindrance to me... I have to make things fit into these little boxes.

The institutional expectation of making teaching “fit into little boxes” clearly represented a limitation of professional judgment for Mr. Smith. Field notes from classroom observations supported Mr. Smith’s sentiments, as *limitation of student inquiry* was a consistent pattern. For example, even during experiential, student-led activities, such as a class where students created a mock Congress bill, Mr. Smith would often limit discussion and questioning to have students fill out answers on curriculum aligned worksheets. When asked about these episodes, Mr. Smith explained that he wanted more hands-on, inquiry-based activities but he felt he could not because he had to “get through the curriculum.”

Similar ideas and teaching practices were evident among other participants. Common patterns in field notes during Ms. Happ’s observations were a focus on *teacher-centered instruction*. Her primary form of instruction emphasized content regurgitation as students would take notes from PowerPoint slides or their own textbooks. During these activities, dialogue, inquiry, and practical or social application were noticeably absent, as students primarily copied or recited information. Discussing these observations in interviews, Ms. Happ noted that she would sometimes incorporate activities to foster more student inquiry and critical thinking. However, due the charge to keep pace with ALCOS objectives, she explained that this was difficult and, at times, even resulted in *curriculum narrowing*. In her words, she would have to “get skinny with the curriculum.” This might mean being extremely selective with how much she felt she could engage in deeper, critical reflection. She explained, “There’s really not enough time to get [students] that immersed into something, so you just have to cherry pick [what] you’re going to get that deep in.”

Mr. Henley represented an interesting case as he was the most experienced teacher and, based on observations and interviews, seemed most adept at navigating job requirements alongside his own professional expertise. Despite this, it was also very clear that curricular objectives very much impacted his teaching possibilities. Field notes of teaching observations indicated patterns of both *student-centered instruction* and *limitations of student inquiry*. As an example, Mr. Henley facilitated student-led discussions about the 2013 Congressional budget crisis, tying this present-day conversation to the week’s unit on progressivism. Despite an engaging conversation with students about whether critical social programs should remain untouched during financial crisis, Mr. Henley eventually limited student questions and discussions in order to present students with notes from a PowerPoint covering the bulk of the unit’s content. Discussing this episode, Mr. Henley explained, “There are times we have to cut off the conversation and be able to move on because we have to cover the class content.” These data clearly illustrate that pre-determined curricular objectives constrained teaching possibilities, most notably functioning to limit possibilities for student inquiry, dialogue, and critical reflection.

### *Emphasis on Skills*

The institutional emphasis on skills, particularly related to reading and writing, coincided with the control of curriculum objectives to constrain participants’ judgment and teaching possibilities. Many participants noted that, with the incorporation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) into their districts, they were now expected to focus much of their instruction on teaching literacy skills which then undermined some of the application of actual social studies content. Perhaps, the strongest expression of this was when Mr. Smith

explained that he felt sometimes like a “glorified readings specialist” rather than a history teacher. Going further, he said that the district focus was now “less on let’s learn about history and let’s focus on learning how to read history...Going back to Common Core...we don’t want this to be opinion-based...but more, how can you support what you said in the text.” Ms. Happ linked this literacy focus to testing as opposed to any deeper critical thinking or social application, explaining that CCSS would be evaluated with a district shift to the new standardized test, ACT Aspire. She explained, “I have to teach them vocabulary...so that when they get in there (testing), their brain’s not going to fry out when they see the big vocabulary.”

Mr. Henley was much more direct in discussing the ways in which the focus on skills limited some of the salient features of social studies education. Similar to Ms. Happ, he explained that CCSS literacy standards were now heavily emphasized to prepare for the new standardized testing regimen meant to evaluate student college and career readiness. Mr. Henley stated, “as far as Common Core goes, it’s definitely more towards skills... [administrators are] looking at what are the academic points to meet testing...and we are completely missing a certain component for that active citizenship part.” A clear illustration of the limiting nature of this institutional nature on skills emerged from observations of Mr. Gwynn, the student teacher for Mr. Henley. Like many, Mr. Gwynn would often use lecture and PowerPoint slides to move through curricular content efficiently. During one of these lectures on WWI, a student asked about the U.S. role in the war and whether they could have remained neutral. Mr. Gwynn responded, “probably not because American ships were being sunk,” before quickly going back to the PowerPoint slides from which students took notes. Mr. Gwynn directly tied his favoring of traditional content over active student engagement to skill development for college. He explained, “I don’t know anyone who could have made it through [college] without some degree of note-taking skills, so I think it’s just a good skill to have.” Thus, on the whole, data indicated that the institutional emphasis on development of literacy skills worked to limit possibilities for student inquiry and the social application of social studies content.

### *Time Constraints*

The final prevalent theme indicating evidence of institutional controls concerned both long-term and short-term time constraints. It is important to note that this particular theme added another layer to the first two (curricular controls, emphasis on skills), as time limitations exacerbated the focus on ALCOS objectives and meeting CCSS requirements. In the short-term, Mr. Smith noted that the focus on moving efficiently through set curricular objectives and meeting CCSS literacy standards limited his ability to make personal or social applications from the content on a daily basis. He explained that in his day-to-day classroom he could “spend five minutes talking about socially relevant things. So, yes I can do it but not in-depth. I think I can just hit the top of the iceberg kind of thing.” In the long-term, Ms. Happ would intentionally “shut down” classes weeks in advance to narrowly focus on material covered on impending tests. Discussing the problematics of this, she said, “I shut down so it really cuts into my curriculum, so I have to really get skinny with a lot of things and that makes it very, very hard on me and it’s not fair to [the students].”

A consistent pattern emerging from field notes of classroom observations was the pressure to go faster. In an observation of Ms. Happ’s PowerPoint notes activities, two students raised their hands during the lecture, one to ask Ms. Happ to slow down and another to make a connection between the material and a movie they had seen. Ms. Happ responded with phrases such as “I’ve got to move on” and “Guys we’ve got to hurry.” Similarly, Mr. Henley pushed his students to work more quickly during classroom observations, often

making comments like “Time’s ticking away, you only have a few minutes.” This pressure was ubiquitous among participants and comments from Mr. Gwynn perhaps best illustrate this. During an interview on the importance of student inquiry, he stated, “I’ll try to answer questions to the best of my ability and honestly I’m just sitting there checking my watch [because] if you spend thirty seconds answering a question...that’s a pretty long time.” It is clear, then, that the natural limitations of time, both short-term and long-term, worked to privilege adherence to institutional objectives and limit possibilities for inquiry, dialogue, and social application of content.

The common themes of *curricular controls*, *emphasis on skills*, and *time constraints* support the general category of an institutional control of teaching. What is important to see here is that these controls privileged the efficient coverage of basic propositional knowledge and development of skills; features that I will later discuss align with virtues of *episteme* and *techne*. On the other hand, they limited teacher professional judgment and student inquiry, dialogue, and application of social values, which are more characteristic of the virtue of *phronesis*. Despite these controls, participants did note and exhibit a certain level of professional judgment in relation to these institutional factors. In the next section, I will discuss common themes according to this category.

### **Evidence of Professional Judgment**

The first major category encompassed across-case themes that indicated how institutional job-requirements impacted teacher perceptions and practices. On the whole, these themes indicated epistemic and technical understandings of teaching and learning. The category discussed in this section includes themes that align more directly with characteristics of *phronesis*. The aspects of discernment, dialogue, and contextual judgment are central in Aristotle’s (2000) description of the virtue of practical wisdom. Though the particular themes that emerged in this category were a bit more nuanced and particular across the cases than others, I will focus on two main common themes: *institutional leeway* and *limited judgment of educational ends*.

#### *Institutional Leeway*

Participants indicated that institutional requirements were constraining, but this stopped short of dictating every aspect of their teaching. In terms of navigating the day-to-day functions of the classroom, participants clearly indicated that they had to rely on experience, professional judgment, and even intuition rather than following a rule book. After a classroom observation where Mr. Smith had to navigate issues with student use of technology, he noted this in a follow-up interview:

I think it's more you have to find your own way and that's part of just you know being a teacher and experiencing. Somebody said once...you learn more your first year teaching than four years of college because when you get in here and it's like, it's not just hypotheticals anymore and you've got to make that decision...you've got to think on your feet a lot and you just kind of go with it...every situation is going to be different. You're going to have to think on your feet.

Mr. Gwynn made similar assertions regarding the importance of experience when handling the day-to-day issues presented by students in the classroom. During one classroom observation in particular, Mr. Gwynn facilitated student presentations where students utilized

PowerPoint or Prezis. At times, the classroom technology failed and created some disruptions among students. Interviews concerning these observations focused on what he believed would most adequately prepare him for handling future situations like this. He replied, “I think just further experience, just teaching, dealing with days like that.” Thus, Mr. Gwynn emphasized the role of practical experience, rather than his university training or institutional directives, as a way to further develop his navigation of daily classroom issues.

Ms. Happ actually used the direct terminology of “leeway” when expressing her ability to make professional judgments, which she emphasized within the selection of class materials and texts. She even linked this to institutional goals, stating that “it’s (CCSS) really given us some *leeway* now to be able to pull texts from anywhere.” Interestingly, Mr. Henley used similar language when discussing the particular mandates of his school. He noted that his school administration had recently adopted a Strategic Teaching Model (STM) and Response to Intervention (RtI) program that teachers were expected to incorporate. However, he explained,

I’m required to teach the course of study but how I do that is pretty much dictated by me. There are again, there are some kind of filters, those being that strategic teaching model, but you have a lot of *leeway*.

Again similar to Ms. Happ, Mr. Henley discussed this particular leeway regarding his selection of class materials. During classroom observations, Mr. Henley assigned and had students discuss texts that he brought in, such as *Letters from Rifka* and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, to teach about issues of immigration and progressivism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Participants clearly indicated that there was an important role for experience and professional judgment within the institutional structure that also constrained their teaching. Even referencing some of these institutional requirements, some participants noted how there was space, or leeway, for teachers to make their own determinations. Crucial for my analysis, however, the bulk of professional judgment concerned means rather than ends. In other words, participants did have the ability to utilize their professional judgment, but this was overwhelmingly in relation to *how* to meet institutional objectives rather than the ends they deemed most valuable. The next section discusses data that support this key theme.

### *Limited Judgment of Educational Ends*

Participants overwhelmingly lacked the ability to incorporate content or activities they judged valuable that went beyond institutional objectives, despite the clear evidence of professional judgment exhibited and expressed by teachers. Several classroom observations illustrated that Mr. Smith would engage students in his Civics class in hands-on activities that taught personal finance. Though he expressed that “kids need this,” he explained that he actually had to get administrative approval for this activity because it was not included in the official curriculum. He noted that “one day a month I can afford to spend on something that I think they really need.” This did not necessarily mean that he deemed everything else he taught as not valuable, but that he could only very occasionally incorporate something he judged to be valuable that went outside of institutional objectives. The predominance of institutional objectives within professional judgment was also evident with Ms. Happ. Many classroom observations illustrated an engaging set of student-led activities called “Greek Days,” where students dressed up and reported on a particular Greek god they had researched. Ms. Happ noted that this was something she and a few other teachers came up with and saw as extremely valuable in terms of student inquiry and engagement. However,

interviews indicated that these activities were secondary to institutional objectives. Ms. Happ said,

Learning is not easy. It's hard. You've got to read, you've got to write, you've got to research...But, if they will do these things, then I will find some activity where they can get their hands into it and kind of be non-traditional and continue with their learning process, so it's kind of a "kickback" day.

Additionally, Ms. Happ expressed much of her professional judgment in relation to the objectives of the institution, rather than the educational ends she personally deemed valuable. She noted that the CCSS allowed for leeway regarding the use of texts "as long as it is dealing with our standard and getting our standard covered."

Similar patterns emerged in the cases of Mr. Henley and Mr. Gwynn. Recall that classroom observations illustrated that Mr. Henley would often incorporate student-centered activities focusing on practical applications of social studies content, such as the episode where students discussed the 2013 Congressional budget crisis. Discussing this observation, he explained,

Our district has pacing guides and most teachers will look at their class throughout the year and say, ok, you know, I take my 18 or 12 standards... and I'll divide that by 2 and I have to cover that amount between August and December and the others between January and May and so we are at a pace, but I think it is important for us to be able to stop and talk about contemporary things, things that are going on today for the kids to make it relevant and make it meaningful to them.

Thus, Mr. Henley judged these activities as valuable due to their relevance and meaning to students, but also recognized that they were asides to the overarching goal of covering standards efficiently. Further highlighting that teacher judgments primarily concerned techniques rather than educational ends themselves, Mr. Gwynn explained that the ALCOS objectives and CCSS "allow me to spend more time...thinking about *how* I'm going to teach something as opposed to *what* I'm going to teach."

The data represented in this section support the overall category that participants did have a certain level of professional judgment in their teaching. However, it is important to note that the judgments they expressed and exhibited were often related to the *means* of teaching, rather than the *ends* of education. Additionally, when participants did make professional judgments concerning educational ends, they were mostly sporadic and secondary to the overarching aim of meeting institutional objectives. This is a key distinction as deliberation about ends rather than means, or judgments about values rather than solely technique, is a central characteristic of *phronesis*. The next section discusses themes within the final major category from the across-case analysis.

### **Teacher Attitudes about Social Studies**

The final category encapsulates themes that were largely drawn from the final interviews conducted with participants. These interviews focused on participants' personal and professional attitudes concerning their content area, including questions inquiring about perceptions of quality teaching and the role of social studies as a content area (e.g., Describe what makes an "expert" teacher.; What would you say is the purpose of social studies in the curriculum?). Recall that value rationality, or what Aristotle (2000) describes as "what is

good and bad for human beings” (p. 107), is a central characteristic of *phronesis* that distinguishes this virtue from *episteme* and *techne*. Using this framework for my analysis, I attempted to understand if teachers’ personal and professional beliefs about social studies included this value rational element, if they were characterized by technical considerations in line with the institution, or qualities of both. The two major themes which emerged suggest that participants’ moved in and out of describing their attitudes about social studies according to *institutional objectives* and *social values*. Supplementing the other categories, however, it also seemed clear that institutional objectives in many ways limited or constrained the ability of participants to enact practices aligning with their beliefs about social studies for teaching social values.

### *Institutional Objectives*

Each participant understood their role as a social studies teacher in the context of achieving institutional objectives in some way. Mr. Smith, though often first speaking more to the discipline-specific purposes of History, would sometimes come back to the institutional purposes the school required of him. For example, he explained that he was “really trying to get into this Common Core thing.” When asked about his role as a social studies teacher, he responded, “You know I’ve got to teach the history, but going back to that first question you asked about social studies in general, I’ve got to figure out a way to teach these standards” (ALCOS objectives). Ms. Happ spoke less specifically about the state objectives or CCSS, but did often discuss her role in the context of instilling skills for high school preparation. She explained, “I’m trying to give them skills so that when they get across the road, when they get to high school that they’ll be able to be interdependent and take care of themselves.” Ms. Happ also believed that teaching higher-order critical thinking was part of her role, but noted that teaching basic literacy skills was necessary first. She stated, “We should be teaching critical thinking skills...but what we fall into is that we’re picking up fail-safes that happen below us, so we’re picking up having to teach them reading skills...writing skills.” Though not specifically naming institutional objectives here, it is important to remember that CCSS was the required mechanism through which to teach the skills to which Ms. Happ referred.

Mr. Henley and Mr. Gwynn also understood their role as social studies teacher in part according to meeting the directives of the institution. Interestingly, when I asked Mr. Henley about his “job” as a social studies teacher, he replied straightforwardly,

I think my basic requirement is to teach the required course of study to the students. So this is from the Alabama course of study and also the Common Core. It’s where we get our standard-based instruction from. That’s my primary I guess you say overarching type of objective.

Mr. Henley had different responses when asked about the role and purpose of social studies more generally, which I will discuss in the next section. Similarly, when asked about his responsibilities as a pre-service teacher, Mr. Gwynn replied that “you just have the standards that you have to teach. You have to cover certain material.” These data illustrate that participants often spoke of their role as social studies teachers in relation to institutional outcomes. On the other hand, the next section indicates that participants also went beyond these institutional characterizations and linked the goals of their teaching to social values.

### *Social Goals*

The theme of teaching social studies for socially valuable purposes was also quite evident among the participants. Concerning the purpose of social studies, Mr. Smith explained,

It was more about knowing dates and numbers and names and things like that, but I think it's more about preparing the students to be able to function in society...understanding how groups interact with each other and the relationship between different groups of people...I think it's all about helping them interact with each other.

Though Mr. Smith believed there had been a shift toward the social application of social studies content, he also clearly articulated that institutional goals outweighed them. He stated,

I think that's kind of my role, by kind of opening [students'] eyes to some things. If this is what happened in history, how does that relate to me? What's going on in real life that's happening? But there's not always time for that when you're teaching this reading strategy, this writing strategy.

Ms. Happ connected her role as social studies teacher to goals of citizenship and community. She explained, "I want them to understand what will make them a productive citizen, not just [in] their responsibilities to the government, but also to their community." Recall her assertions in the previous sections, however, that this was not always possible due to keeping pace with the course of study and teaching basic literacy skills.

Mr. Henley and Mr. Gwynn also expressed attitudes toward social studies that went beyond simply meeting institutional objectives. In the previous section, I noted that Mr. Henley described his role as meeting ALCOS objectives and CCSS when asked about his "job." When discussing his role as a social studies educator more generally, he made comments such as

I want them to be developers of a stance on critical civic issues and to be able to know what they stand for... they're going to be the kids that end up having to make those decisions as active citizens.

Mr. Gwynn had similar responses when asked about unique features of social studies. He explained that social studies develops "a more open-minded society...being able to debate with people who have different ideas...and discuss and live with people that have different ideals than you, but respect them." Despite this, both participants recognized the limitations of these social applications due to institutional directives. For example, Mr. Henley emphatically noted the constraints of institutional objectives, stating that his school emphasized CCSS "by a landslide" over social application and that "a school-wide approach to active citizenship is something we completely missed the boat on."

This section described emergent themes related to the category of participant attitudes toward social studies. Participants clearly understood their roles both according to institutional objectives and more transcendent goals of social value. These goals were not always understood in contradiction, but it was clear that participants believed that social application, or deliberation about "what is good and bad for human beings" (Aristotle, 2000, p. 107), was limited by the requirements of their schools. This largely supplements the other

major categories which described how this process took place in teaching practices. In the final section of this paper, I discuss these major findings in relation to the initial research questions and the overarching theoretical framework which guided the study.

## Discussion

The primary research questions for this study included the following: (1) Do local institutional requirements impact teachers' professional practices and perceptions? If so, *how* do these requirements impact teachers' ability to engage in teaching as *phronesis*? (2) What do these cases indicate about how institutional requirements function in social studies education? What mechanisms of power exist? Who wins and who loses by these mechanisms of power? The following discussion attempts to answer these questions in light of the study's findings, guiding theoretical framework, and relevant scholarly literature.

### Research Question 1

The findings indicate that adherence to institutional job requirements, namely maintaining productivity relative to ALCOS objectives and CCSS, constrained participants' abilities to engage in "phronetic" aspects of social studies education. Recall that Aristotle's (2000) definition of *phronesis* is a practical state concerned with "what is good and bad for a human being" (p. 107). The person engaged in *phronesis* deliberates and uses judgment "about what is good and beneficial for himself" and can see "what is good for themselves and what is good for people in general" (p. 108). Thus, it is both personal and social. Lastly, *phronesis* aims at ends themselves and results in *praxis*, or action (p. 110). Earlier, I suggested that the purposes of social studies connect with *phronesis* because social studies contributes to our deliberation about human values. Participants made these connections as well as they all expressed a desire to teach for socially valuable purposes in social studies education, such as active citizenship, social interaction, community responsibility, and fostering diversity. However, in practice, these were the exact aspects of social studies education that were pushed aside by the charge to adhere to institutional objectives. Participants noted that they did not have time to include discussion about social values, make social applications, or foster active citizenship because they had to focus on the ends of ALCOS and Common Core.

In many ways, institutional controls were conducive to teaching practices aligned with the state of *techne*. Aristotle (2000) distinguishes *techne* from *phronesis* by explaining that, while *phronesis* is concerned with ends, or "acting well itself," *techne* has "an end distinct from itself" and is concerned with production toward that end (p. 110). Participants primarily engaged in practices that were productive toward reaching the institutional ends of covering ALCOS objectives and instilling literacy skills through Common Core standards. When participants made judgments, they were primarily about the means of instruction rather than educational objectives. It is also important to note that, in certain instances, especially in the case of Mr. Henley, the institution even attempted to govern judgments about means. Mr. Henley explained that his school expected him to implement "filters" based upon scientifically-researched instructional techniques, such as STM and RtI. This reduction of the teaching process to formulaic procedure echoes the demonstration of universal laws characteristic of Aristotle's description of *episteme*. Thus, instead of engaging students in active citizenship, or a social studies curriculum that created personal and social applications between content and students' lives, participants largely engaged in teacher-centered practices which were productive toward the ends of isolated content knowledge and literacy skills. Emblematic of this phenomenon was Mr. Smith's assertion that "one day a month I

can afford to spend on something that I think [students] really need.” Participants could not afford to engage in a deliberation of human values, at the core of *phronesis* and social studies education, because they remained focused on instilling the ends of the institution.

## Research Question 2

Based upon Flyvbjerg’s (2001) value-rational inquiry at the core of “phronetic social science,” the second set of research questions asked the following: What do these cases indicate about how institutional controls function in social studies education? What mechanisms of power exist? Who wins and who loses by these mechanisms of power? These questions seek to provide an evaluative and critical assessment of the phenomenon represented by these cases. In many ways, the findings of this study connect with broader literature about the impact of neoliberal education reform. As Hursh (2007) points out, neoliberal ideology has formed the basis of most education reforms since the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk*, which blamed individual schools for the economic recession of the early 1980s. He writes that neoliberal reforms have transformed the dominant discourse on education so that “societal institutions are recast as markets rather than deliberatively democratic systems” (pp. 493-494). Echoing this sentiment, Apple (2006) writes that neoliberalism “transforms our very idea of democracy, making it only an economic concept, not a political one” (p. 15). With economic progress as the cornerstone of education in this discourse, teachers are seen as the skilled technicians to instill the knowledge and skills needed for global workforce competition. Writing in the context of *A Nation at Risk*, Apple (1986) argued that schools, acting as apparatuses of the state, turned teaching into a technical process by ensuring that teachers complied with institutional objectives and norms. These technical reforms have resulted in a deskilled, deprofessionalized teaching force continually subjected to managerial control (Au, 2011; Weiner, 2007).

The findings in this study illustrate that institutional norms subjected participants to technical practices which were productive toward institutional goals and which devalued their contributions and judgments about educational objectives. Additionally, these practices were couched within the ideology of economic utility. Participants noted that Common Core standards were now being emphasized by their respective districts to ensure that students would be college and career ready. Mirra and Morrell (2011) explain that the federal endorsement of Common Core illustrates the continued emphasis upon economic goals of education by “focusing explicitly on college and career readiness, to the near exclusion of preparation for democratic citizenship” (p. 409). Au (2013) suggests that within the context of neoliberal reform, social studies has “increasingly become a site of ancillary literacy instruction” (p. 6). This is exactly what participant data from these cases illustrated. Participants all indicated that they were required to incorporate reading and writing instruction into their social studies classrooms, with Mr. Smith even claiming he felt like “a glorified reading specialist.” Speaking of this phenomenon, Au (2013) writes that “in exchanging pure content in favor of pure skills...the *CCSS for Literacy in Social Studies/History* literally take the ‘social’ out of the ‘social studies.’” (p. 7).

The emergent themes from these particular cases indicated that institutional requirements, specifically adherence to curricular and literacy standards, marginalized the socially responsive goals of social studies education. Though particular to their specific contexts, these examples are illustrative of the larger phenomena of the marginalization of social ideals within neoliberal education reform. This doctrine, which has become ubiquitous within educational reform, frames educational discourse solely within economic understandings to the exclusion of social responsibility. As a result, those who retain a top-down managerial control over education are positioned as “winners” in this educational

framework. Also, as Au (2013) illustrates, corporate entities, capitalizing on the demand for testing and curricular materials, are positioned to benefit from the continued focus on standardization illustrated by Common Core. Though the new presidential administration has expressed the intention to undo CCSS, it does not seem to be for reasons that reverse the fundamental logic of privatization, accountability, and education narrowly construed as an economic engine (Strauss, 2016). The confirmation of Betsy DeVos should make this quite clear. On the other hand, critically-minded educators who understand social studies as an avenue for fostering positive change in society emerge as “losers” in this educational landscape; educators like the ones in this study, who know that social studies can powerfully contribute to social application and change, yet who lose those opportunities within the institutional focus on economic production.

### Limitations

There are some important limitations in this study that speak to possibilities for future research. First, though these participants were all certified social studies teachers, they all primarily taught History during the course of the study. Mr. Smith also taught 7th grade Civics and I observed several classes in this area. However, Ms. Happ exclusively taught 8th grade World History and, while Mr. Henley taught other social studies disciplines, I only observed he and Mr. Gwynn teaching 9th grade World History and 11th grade American History. This does not necessarily mean that the dynamics of institutional controls would be different in these other disciplines, but it is possible, thus limiting the scope of the observational evidence primarily to History. However, the interviews, especially the final interviews dealing with participants’ conceptions and philosophies, presumably provided evidence inclusive of experiences in all social studies disciplines that participants taught. Second, the study allowed for only a snapshot of teacher practices and struggles with institutional controls. I conducted ten classroom observations with the three employed participants, which, of course, is only a brief glimpse of their overall practice. This should not invalidate the results as interviews allowed participants to connect the observational data with their broader experiences with institutional controls. However, a larger ethnographic study would provide deeper insight and case knowledge of how participants dealt with institutional controls over time.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that institutional requirements heavily controlled the role of *phronesis* among the teachers who participated. This intellectual state of practical deliberation about “what is good and bad for a human being” (Aristotle, 2000, p. 107) is particularly important for a content area such as social studies which claims to aid in social educational goals such as active citizenship. I characterize these cases as being emblematic of the continued constraint of *phronesis* by institutional forces which focus more heavily on both *episteme* and *techne*. This is particularly unsettling for social studies as Au (2009) notes that this content area is perhaps best situated to challenge the current hegemonic norms of educational discourse by emphasizing a broader need to teach for social justice. How might we react in the face of the consistent marginalization of social goals in contemporary educational policy? Au (2013) suggests that social studies educators have begun to comply with contemporary educational policy by establishing social studies standards, exemplified by the development of the C3 standards by NCSS. Even though this means that social studies may “count” within the context of standardization reform, he asks, “Is our best strategy to become one of the tested subjects, and if so, will we be killing the social studies in the

process?” (p. 10). Perhaps, then, social studies educators must react with greater resistance or even subversion of institutional objectives (Seltzer-Kelly, 2009). Perhaps, only this way can concerned social studies educators both revive this marginalized content area and affect meaningful social change in education as a whole.

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