

PRE-SERVICE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS'
PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-
STANDARDS, HIGH-STAKES

FRANS H. DOPPEN

In his recent book *On the Death of Childhood and the Destruction of Public Schools*, G. W. Bracey posits that the current "educational standards movement and its principal bludgeon, high stakes-testing, have created an educational debacle" that amounts to "educational terrorism."¹ He argues that standardized testing is a "surefire way to destroy America"² because it deprives students of the opportunity to ask questions and forces them to reduce complex realities to selecting "a single, preselected, right answer."³ Referring to the *No Child Left Behind Act* [NCLB] as a "weapon of mass destruction,"⁴ Bracey laments that in many schools NCLB has led to the elimination of recess, art, music, social studies, and physical education from the curriculum. The current high-standards-high-stakes movement has become "a medieval instrument of torture that is turning our children into the miniature adults of centuries past, and has led to the death of childhood."⁵

The current high-standards, high-stakes movement can be traced directly to the release of *A Nation At Risk*, which claimed that "if an unfriendly foreign nation had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."⁶ The ensuing education summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, which was convened by President George H.W. Bush in 1989, marked the beginning of a failed push towards national curriculum standards. However, the actual implementation of curriculum standards has since shifted to the state arena.⁷

While some of recent research has begun to explore how social studies teachers are responding to a standardized curriculum and its accompanying high-stakes tests,⁸ little is known about how teacher education programs are preparing their pre-service teachers for a world in which state curriculum standards and standardized testing often deter-

mine the content of the curriculum they will have to teach and in which the stakes are becoming increasingly higher. This study, conducted at a medium-sized university in Ohio, sought to assess pre-service social studies teachers' beliefs about standardized testing and identify some implications for how to better prepare them for their future role as classroom teachers.

Background

Ohanian has argued that "one size fits few" and that educational standards amount to a "folly" that fails to test what really matters. She maintains that instead of "fooling around" with tests we make sure our children are cared for and help them to acquire the necessary habits of mind to become caring human beings and good citizens for our democracy.⁹

Kohn, another outspoken critic of standardized testing, has argued that if states continue to persist in making a student's fate rest on his or her scores on a single test, the result "will be nothing short of catastrophic."¹⁰ Interestingly, he notes that when the *St. Petersburg Times* challenged several top elected officials to join their state's students in taking the *Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test* [FCAT] and having their scores published, all of them declined.¹¹ Kohn argues that especially in a subject area such as social studies, the best way to teach is "diametrically opposed to the best way to raise test scores."¹² Rather than reducing their subject to a "bunch-o-facts," social studies teachers must seek to help students question issues and events and develop their own perspectives. Furthermore, Kohn argues that in Ohio the pressure to boost test scores has pushed departmentalization into the early grades as the state now forces "middle childhood" teachers of students from age nine to fourteen to specialize and become licensed in two content areas.¹³

While Kohn argues that standardized tests aren't like the weather and "can be questioned, challenged and ultimately reversed,"¹⁴ teachers have increasingly become convenient scapegoats for all that is wrong with education and are continuing to relinquish control of the classroom and curriculum to those who construct the tests.¹⁵ Yet there appears to be no research evidence whatsoever that the use of standardized tests enhances student achievement and learning.¹⁶ Furthermore, describing her experiences with preparing students for the FCAT, Williams has argued that the state test is a "master demotivator" that fails to motivate the unmotivated to learn.¹⁷

While many question whether it can work,¹⁸ since President George W. Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* in January 2002 each state

has been required to devise its own curriculum standards and develop tests to ensure that these standards have been met. As a result, Ohio has increasingly emphasized its *Academic Content Standards*, which now include English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.¹⁹ While during the 2004-2005 school year 4th and 6th grade students were given a citizenship "proficiency" test, students in the 10th grade had to pass a social studies test as part of their *Ohio Graduation Test*. Furthermore, Ohio is now planning to abolish its citizenship test, beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, 5th and 8th grade students will also be required to pass a social studies "achievement" test.²⁰

Similar to others but more specifically applied to the social studies, Evans has argued that standards focus on content knowledge and that they represent totalitarian tendencies by creating one standard for all regardless of equity concerns.²¹ He also argues that social studies standards contribute to a focus on history that is too narrow, ignores multicultural content, and neglects to create inquisitive and thoughtful democratic citizens. Arguing that the profession is far from monolithic,²² Evans rejects the idea that the social studies professoriate is dominated by a "left wing elite that is out of touch with the nation,"²³ and challenges views that the social studies have gone wrong.²⁴

The editors of *The Social Studies* argue that social studies standards testing is a "deja vu all over again."²⁵ Juxtaposing the views of Earl Rugg on whether state testing is beneficial to history teachers with those of contemporary social studies teachers,²⁶ they argue that the tests have little social or political utility for the students, tend to measure factual memorization rather than conceptual understandings and interpretations, do not measure what is actually being taught, are time-consuming and usually occur before all the course material has been covered, and are not very helpful to determine how teachers can improve classroom practice.

According to Savage, assuming that if social studies is not tested it is likely that it will not be taught, many social studies educators have conceded the debate and are willing to accept high-stakes testing. While he suggests that there are relatively few teachers who fear responsible accountability, he argues that high-stakes testing is basically a political tool in the hands of special interest groups that seek to maintain the status quo of socioeconomic inequality.²⁷ Pahl argues that standardized tests trivialize what students know about social studies as officials design simple, easy to score, and inexpensive tests that rely on short, easy to answer, multiple choice questions.²⁸

Bigelow has pointed out that when state education officials in Oregon tried to create a neutral social studies test, they ignored multicul-

tural issues as categories of analysis. The test's "one best answer" approach reduced complex issues to an assessment of disjointed facts to be memorized by the students and turned teachers into delivery systems of approved social information.²⁹ Rejecting Rush Limbaugh's claim that "diversity has nothing to do with the greatness of America," Ohanian similarly argues that standards are in fact "an insult and an impossibility" to issues of diversity.³⁰ And, recounting her unique experience in a remote Yupik village in Alaska, Platt has shown how cultural biases inherent in social studies questions on standardized tests disadvantaged her third-grade students as they could not comprehend the context of the some of the questions.³¹

Furthermore Hursh claims that standardization and testing have led to an increasing emphasis on knowledge as an economic good, to which he refers as commodification and the end of imaginative teaching practices.³² While Vinson suggests the existence of a cult-like unquestioning climate, which imposes a pedagogical, social, cultural, economic and political control and conformity on students and teachers,³³ Savage argues that social studies educators should take a more reasoned stand, accept that there are divergent opinions, and have an open dialogue with the proponents of high-stakes testing.³⁴

In his discussion of where social studies fits in a high-stakes testing environment, Vogler makes an important distinction between test-based reform and standards-based reform.³⁵ While test-based reform uses a single indicator to judge a student's academic progress, standards-based reform is designed to hold schools accountable, yet its purpose is to achieve as much of the students' potential rather than raise their test scores. He describes his school's creative efforts in using Wiggins and McTighe's "backward design" model³⁶ to develop a curriculum that used students' interests as a way to integrate various content-area standards, including those for social studies.

In a similar vein, Schmoker argues that unfair and excessive criticism of standardized tests ignores the fact that they provide data about students' strengths and weaknesses that have helped disadvantaged schools improve their scores. However, he also suggests that we must not become complacent about the sufficiency of standardized tests, but rather have a duty and opportunity to transcend their reigning predominance.³⁷

Field has argued that the content of standardized tests in elementary and middle schools does not have to be at odds with trying to meet local, state, and national standards. She suggests that social studies standards, as stated by individuals, schools, governments, professional organizations and testing institutions, often overlap and that assessment of some sort is

a useful part of any learning situation.³⁸

In a recent study, Grant has argued that little attention has been paid to what social studies teachers learn from high-stakes testing and *if* and *how* that knowledge affects their instructional practices. Based on his observations of two teachers in New York state, he noted that George Blair, whose pedagogical approach was predominantly teacher-centered, appeared to give little explicit attention to the Regents test, while Linda Strait, who engaged her students in a rich array of active learning experiences, used short practice writing exercises modeled after the state test. Acknowledging both Blair and Strait as masterful teachers, Grant suggests that “in neither classroom the test seem[ed] to drive teaching and learning.”³⁹ Rather, he argues that “the direct influence of state-level testing ... is thin” and that the “prevailing sense that tests drive content, instruction and the like seems alternately overstated, ill-informed, or misplaced ... and “maybe [is] an uncertain lever at best.”⁴⁰

In second recent study, this time on the impact of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program [MEAP] on social studies teachers' perceptions, Segall indicates that the test has become a practice that social studies teachers cannot afford to ignore, even though their subject is excluded from the formula for awarding individual student awards. However, because the state awards schools whose students do well on the MEAP, which is based on all subject areas, including social studies, the teachers in his study argued that they could not afford to ignore the test's reality, and that it guided both *what* and *how* they taught. What they did in the classroom constituted some form of compromise between their own beliefs about teaching and learning social studies and the state test.⁴¹ Unlike Grant, Segall concludes that his findings suggest that standardized testing also affects *how* one teaches and that this is influenced by one's own perceptions, beliefs, understandings, commitments, and investments.⁴²

Furthermore, some teachers in Segall's study argued that the MEAP forced them into a box in which “there's only two sides to an issue” rather than supported them in helping students gain “more complex, nuanced, and multi-perspectival understandings of the world.”⁴³ As a result, they responded to their feelings of frustration by changing their pedagogical approach to “become the teacher [the state] already believes I am.”⁴⁴ Enraged and feeling belittled by not being included in what is considered the most significant stake attached to the MEAP, the social studies teachers in this study voluntarily adopted the same criteria that applied to other teachers. As a result, Segall argues that “consequences need not be built into the testing program for the stakes to be high.”⁴⁵

Most recently, van Hover and Cude have argued that policy-makers must be “supremely ignorant of the complexity of teaching to assume that one test can serve as the dominant influence on teacher decision-making.”⁴⁶ Yet at this time no consensus appears to exist when it comes to an assessment of the high-standards, high-stakes movement. As it appears unlikely that the trend towards more curriculum standards and higher stakes will end any time soon, some have begun to argue that higher education has been “left out of the loop” and “off the hook” in the standards movement.⁴⁷ In 1999, Haycock, the director of Education Trust, suggested that colleges of education that prepare teachers do not meet standards themselves, and that while “it may be a daunting task to think about launching the equivalent of standards-based reform in higher education ... the work cannot end with K-12”⁴⁸

Therefore, as teacher preparation programs, including those in social studies, face an increasingly standardized future, they must prepare their pre-service teachers for the reality of the high-standards, high-stakes movement they will face in the classroom. While the research literature includes the entire spectrum of perspectives on the merits of high standards and high stakes, little is known about pre-service social studies teachers’ beliefs about standardized testing and how they are being prepared for this daunting reality.

Method

Since this study sought to assess pre-service social studies teachers’ beliefs about standardized testing and identify some implications for how to better prepare them for their future role as classroom teachers, I chose to use a case study approach. Advocates of such an approach argue that this method is especially appropriate when a contemporary phenomenon is being studied in a real setting.⁴⁹ It involves an inductive process of discovery that is begun with no prior expectations.⁵⁰

The setting for this study consisted of two separate undergraduate social studies methods courses at a medium-sized university in Ohio, one for Middle Childhood majors and one for Adolescent-Young Adult majors. Students typically enroll in each course during the quarter immediately prior to the one in which they are scheduled to student teach and after they have completed nearly all of their content and education courses.

Ohio has a unique licensure program in Middle Childhood Education [MCE] in which pre-service teachers must select two areas of concentration. Students in this program are typically referred to as Middle Childhood majors. In addition to the seventy-nine quarter hours

they must earn in their education core courses, their reading courses, their two methods courses, and their student teaching, all Middle Childhood majors are required to take thirty-seven to forty-five quarter hours in each area of concentration, i.e., language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies. Students who choose a social studies concentration must complete forty-five quarter hours of course work in anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, and sociology. Once they have met all program requirements the state will license them to teach in grades four to nine only in their two areas of concentration. While the first statewide cohort of Middle Childhood majors graduated in 2003, many schools, especially those in rural areas with small faculties and self-contained classrooms, are trying to adjust to the reality of these newly licensed teachers.

Students in the Integrated Social Studies Education program are being prepared for an Adolescent Young Adult [AYA] licensure, which will allow them to teach social studies in grades seven to twelve. Students in this program are typically referred to as AYA students. In addition to the fifty-five quarter hours they must earn in their education core courses, methods courses, and student teaching, AYA majors must complete ninety-four quarter hours in teaching field requirements that include coursework in psychology, sociology, economics, history and political science. Therefore, AYA licensure in Integrated Social Studies overlaps with the Middle Childhood licensure for grades seven to nine.

Data collection for this research study included the administration of a traditional multiple-choice *Content Knowledge Assessment*, consisting of thirty-three multiple-choice questions selected from *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*⁵¹ When deciding which questions to include, I selected seventeen questions from the history section and sixteen questions from the literature section (see Appendix A). In both courses I decided not to announce the assessment until the students reported to class. I explained that a study conducted nearly twenty years ago labeled “a nationally representative sample of eleventh grade students” as “a generation at risk” because they earned “failing marks” on a standardized multiple-choice test on their knowledge of history and literature, i.e., they had earned “a score of less than 60 percent.”⁵² Furthermore, I informed them that since they were about to begin their student teaching and would be entering the profession in the near future, it would be reasonable to expect them to be able to earn a satisfactory score. In each course I allowed ample time for the students to answer all questions.

I checked the assessment in both courses and assigned each student a percent score. During the next class meeting I first asked my students to respond in writing to the question, “*Did you think the test was fair?*” Next,

in each course I presented their overall percentage scores using a stem-leaf format before I returned the individual scores. I then asked the students to once again respond in writing to the question, "Do you think the test was fair now that you know your score?" Finally, after admitting that I had been bluffing, although for an educational purpose,⁵³ I facilitated a discussion that focused on whether the way in which I had administered the test had been fair and whether the questions that I had chosen to include had been reasonable. During the ensuing discussion I particularly challenged the students to identify reasons both for and against standardized tests and allowed them to freely exchange their thoughts. Once the discussion ended I asked each student to respond in writing to a third and final question: "After our discussion do you see any reason to change your response?"

Data sources for this study consisted of the students' actual assessments and their written responses following the classroom discussion. In order to protect their anonymity I assigned each student a pseudonym. To analyze the test scores I opted for a limited descriptive statistical methodology, which served to identify which questions the students had answered either correctly or incorrectly. Next, I chose to analyze the written responses using Dana and Silva's four steps for teacher inquirers.⁵⁴ First, I read the responses in each separate methods course to form a detailed *description*. Second, I began the *sense making* process in which I developed a number of categories that fit patterns in the responses. I then undertook an *interpretation* of the data that showed more directly how the participants viewed the various aspects of the test. Throughout the second and third stage of my analysis, I used the constant comparative method to determine common themes within and between the data from each separate methods course.⁵⁵ Finally, I looked at the *implications* of this study for my own practice and how other social studies educators might perhaps be able to use these findings in their own setting.

Findings

Student Scores

The *Content Knowledge Assessment* consisted of 33 questions selected from *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* As on Ravitch and Finn's assessment, to earn a "passing score" a student had to answer at least 20 questions correctly.

In the Middle Childhood methods course 23 students, or 79.3 percent of the students, earned such a score while in the AYA course 27 students, or 93.1 percent of the students, did so. However, the overall scores of the students in the AYA methods course were noticeably higher

than those of the Middle Childhood students. While almost half of all AYA students answered twenty-seven or more questions correctly, only about one seventh of the Middle Childhood students did. Likewise, while one-fifth of the Middle Childhood students answered 20 or less questions correctly, less than one-tenth of the AYA students did.

Table 1
Total Scores on Content Knowledge Assessment

# of Answers Correct	Middle Childhood [MCE]		Adolescent-Young Adult [AYA]	
	# of Students	% of Students	# of Students	% of Students
< 14	1	3.4		
14-16	3	10.3		
17-19	2	6.9	2	6.9
20-23	10	34.5	5	17.2
24-26	9	31.0	8	27.6
27-29	4	13.8	7	24.1
30-33			7	24.1
Total	29	99.9	29	99.9

An analysis of the total number of incorrect answers on *Content Knowledge Assessment* (see Appendix B) indicates that in the Middle Childhood methods course all students answered three questions correctly. These questions pertained to the constitutional system of checks and balances [# 3], Lincoln's authorship of the Emancipation Proclamation [# 6], and Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare [# 22]. In the AYA course all students answered two questions correctly. These pertained to the launching of Sputnik [# 8] and the preamble of the Declaration of Independence [# 25].

In both courses combined, six questions were answered correctly by three or less students. This indicates that more than 90 percent of students in both courses had some content knowledge of Stalin's leadership of the Soviet Union during World War II [# 2], the constitutional system of checks and balances [# 4], Lincoln's authorship of the Emancipation Proclamation [# 6], the launching of Sputnik [# 8], the McCarthy hearings [# 17], and the Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare [# 22]. An additional five questions were answered correctly by more than 90 percent of the students in the AYA methods course. These questions assessed content knowledge about the countries that were once part of the Soviet bloc [# 10], British settlement on the east coast of the North

America [# 11], when World War I occurred [# 15], the preamble of the Declaration of Independence [# 25], and John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech [# 26].

On the opposite end of the spectrum, more than 40 percent of the students in the Middle Childhood course answered 11 questions incorrectly, whereas in the AYA this was limited to five questions. In both courses combined, three questions were answered incorrectly by more than 40 percent of the students. These questions pertained to content knowledge about the historical significance of the Magna Carta [# 3], when immigrants from eastern and southern Europe first began arriving in the United States in large numbers [# 7], and Richard Wright's novel *Black Boy* [# 32]. Additional questions that were answered incorrectly by more than 40 percent of all students in the Middle Childhood course dealt with areas of the New Deal legislation [# 9], the countries that were once part of the Soviet bloc [# 10], the purpose of the Federalist Papers [# 12], U.S. foreign policy during the early 1900's [# 14], King Solomon's wisdom [# 19], Atlas' burden [# 20], the subject of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* [# 24], and George Orwell's 1984 [# 27]. The two additional questions that were answered incorrectly by more than 40 percent of the students in the AYA course dealt with Jane Addams' role in helping the urban poor [# 5] and two famous axioms from Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* [# 31].

Student Responses to the assessment

During the next class meeting I asked the students in each course three questions in a predetermined sequence as I sought to determine their responses to the assessment.

Do you think the test was fair?

The first question they were asked to respond to in writing was whether they thought the assessment had been fair. Their responses suggest a significant difference between the two courses.

Table 2
Student Responses to "Do you think the test was fair?"

	Middle Childhood [MCE]		Adolescent-Young Adult [AYA]	
	# of Students	% of Students	# of Students	% of Students
Yes	3	10.7	9	34.6
No	16	57.1	11	42.3
Both	9	32.1	6	23.1
Total	28	99.9	26	100.0

Nearly three-fifths of the Middle Childhood students thought the assessment had been unfair, whereas about two-fifths of the AYA students did. Likewise while only about one-tenth of the Middle Childhood students thought the assessment had been fair, about one-third of the AYA did. Furthermore in each course a substantial group of students, about one-third of the Middle Childhood students and one-fourth of the AYA students, give a mixed "yes and no" response to this question. Nevertheless, in both courses those students who thought the test was unfair constituted the largest group.

Some typical responses from students who thought the assessment was fair argued, like Jay [AYA], that "the questions should be answerable by the time students reached high school" and, like Mark [MCE], that it had opened his "eyes to how much or little [he] knew." Claire [MCE] even wrote that she "should go home and look up the answers." Several students also qualified their responses, like David [AYA] did, by stating that the test was fair "so far as standardized tests go."

The responses of the Middle Childhood students who thought that the assessment was unfair focused nearly unanimously on the fact that they had not received any advance warning, had not had any time to prepare for the assessment, and that the content had not been covered in class. Several students also argued that the assessment only asked for trivial knowledge and did not show what they "really knew." For example, Natalie wrote "I don't think this was a fair test because we had no idea that we were going to have the test" and that "it is not a true indicator of how much someone knows." Chelsea even argued that the "test was meant to make us feel stupid and that's exactly what it did."

Nearly half of those AYA students who thought the test was unfair did not like the literature questions arguing that "it assumes I have a background in literature" [Sharon], or that "those questions have little importance to me" [Joe]. Furthermore, only two AYA students made any reference at all to a possible bias in the questions. Robert argued that the

test was outdated because the questions did not address any current events, whereas Brin noted that “the test does not cover the broad scope of social studies. Government, economics and geography were left out, lowering my self esteem as a teacher”

Those Middle Childhood students who gave a mixed response typically argued that the content of the test had been fair but that the way in which it had been administered was not. For example, Roy argued that “this was information we as future social studies should know” but that it was “still unfair because we weren’t warned of it beforehand.” In another thoughtful response Meghan wrote,

I think it was fair because all Middle Childhood social studies teachers should know the important major facts about social studies. I think it’s not fair because just having multiple choice isn’t a very wide variety of assessment. “They” say that teachers should give a variety of assessments and teach students concepts and not just the facts but it’s hypocritical to give teachers a multiple choice test with just dates and facts.

Those AYA students who offered a mixed response typically echoed those of the Middle Childhood students but often included references to the literature questions. In a typical response Robin wrote,

The test had some good questions but in such a short format it didn’t cover everything that could have been considered “important.” Also, the literature questions were very random and too specific at times. It’s reasonable to ask social studies majors to know historical facts but not information about literature. Also, many questions were very specific and don’t take into account our ability as teachers to brush up on our knowledge in the particular fields we are teaching

Do you think the test was fair now that you know your score?

After the students had responded to the first question, I presented the percentage scores for the entire class using a stem-leaf format before I returned the individual scores. I then asked the students the second question whether knowing their actual score changed their opinion about whether the assessment had been fair. In either course none of the students changed his or her mind. Although a few students elaborated upon their response, most students simply replied that they still felt the same.

In general, those Middle Childhood students who chose to elaborate upon their responses expressed that they were either happy or upset with their score. In a typical comment Suzy wrote that she was “pleased,” whereas Claire felt “very embarrassed.” While Chelsea felt “like an idiot” and Meghan commented that “you can’t base someone’s intelligence on thirty-three questions,” Mark wrote that the assessment had made him “realize that [he] need[ed] to brush up on [his] history facts a good deal”

The AYA students offered similar responses. For example, Russ stated

that 'now [he did] not feel so bad" while David wrote that he "thought that maybe [he had done] better." Arlie even "wonder[ed] why [he] answered what [he] did on a couple of the ones he missed," whereas Nick reiterated that "this test does not necessarily prove anything about my teaching ability or knowledge of social studies."

After our discussion do you see any reason to change your response?

After the students had written their second response I informed them that I had given them the assessment for an educational purpose. I then facilitated a discussion in which I asked them to verbalize how they felt about the way in which I had administered the test and whether the questions that I had chosen to include had been reasonable. During the discussion I asked them identify the pros and cons of this particular type of assessment as well as that of standardized testing in general. After the discussion ended I asked each student whether he or she now had any reason to change his or her initial response.

Two of the three Middle Childhood students who initially responded that the test had been fair now believed the test had been unfair. In both courses all other students continued to be of the same opinion, although their responses now were more nuanced. Even Kathy, the only Middle Childhood student who continued to believe the assessment had been fair, added more nuance to her response:

I still believe the same. The structure and questions of the test were fair but I was not prepared at the time to provide correct answers. The test was extremely valid because it [covers] information that social studies concentration majors should know and be able to explain to their students.

Many others expressed they understood the importance of accountability, but argued that standardized tests do not provide an adequate measure of what they teach their students and how much their students actually know. More than one third of all Middle Childhood students and several AYA students wrote that a multiple choice test focuses too narrowly on trivial facts and fails to assess what a student really knows. For example, Brendan [MCE] wrote that "accountability is important but I do not feel that standardized tests should be the only way to show how a teacher is doing. There are too many variables that standardized tests do not show" whereas Richard [MCE] wrote that "there definitely need to be other ways to show parents what their child is capable of." Similarly, Marcie [AYA] thought the test had "vague questions" and focused on "trivial facts about history, instead of the broader, more important themes in history."

While only one Middle Childhood student thought the inclusion of

literature-based questions was unfair, more than one third of the AYA students did. In a typical response Lauren wrote that “the test was very hard because there was a lot of literature involved.” However, recognizing the validity of the inclusion of literature questions in the assessment, Brin [AYA] wrote that it “showed how very little I know about history and some of the literature that goes with it.”

Echoing the importance of having an opportunity to prepare for a standardized test, Jeanne [MCE] pointed out that “even if someone happened to know all of the information, [he or she] could have test anxiety and still perform poorly” while Patricia [MCE] thought that “the test was not able to equally evaluate all students because it does not take into [account] their background.”

While the vast majority of the students did not appear to recognize the deeper underlying pro-Western bias in the questions, a few students indicated they now “realize[d] how “biased” the assessment was. For example, Meghan [MCE] suggested that “there is a lot that it doesn’t cover from other cultures.” And while Frank [AYA] observed that the questions with regard to religion only referred to Christianity, Phil [AYA] maintained that “certainly no public high schools study King Solomon or the Bible.” Likewise, only one Middle Childhood student referred to a perceived religious bias but did so without any further explanation.

Two AYA students suggested the assessment was biased towards history rather than the broad field of social studies. Furthermore, two students argued that the test was “outdated” [Susan, MCE] and had an “age bias” [Frank, AYA] due to the lack of questions about current events. In an intriguing response, Daniel [AYA] suggested the assessment had an ethnic bias when he observed that “most white people who have never taken an African American literature class would [not] have gotten questions # 29 and 32.”

Finally, while Meghan [MCE] was the only student who expressed any concern about “teaching to the test,” Lorraine [MCE] perhaps best represented the feelings amongst the majority of methods students, when she wrote

I completely agree that [standardized tests] are unfair and I could give fifty reasons why I think so. But the fact remains that we will be faced with giving standardized tests and I’d like to learn ways to teach while incorporating the standards.

Similarly, although on a more optimistic note, Michael [AYA] argued that while the assessment was appropriate for pre service social studies teachers “the average citizen could [not] have answered the majority of [the questions] but that is where we come in. We need to give the next

generation that knowledge.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

Curriculum standards and high-stakes testing were very much a concern to the pre-service social studies teachers in this study. The reality of the high-stakes, high standards movement provoked strong emotions in the participants in this study, yet they lacked the ability to critically evaluate the assessment they completed.

Over all, the AYA students scored substantially better on the assessment than the Middle Childhood students. However, while Middle Childhood students have to take 45 quarter hours of course work in each of their two areas of concentration, the AYA major are required to complete 94 quarter hours of course work in integrated social studies. This may well help to explain why nearly three-fifths of the Middle Childhood students thought the assessment had been unfair whereas only about two-fifths of the AYA students did, and why only about one-tenth of the Middle Childhood students thought it had been fair, while about one-third of the integrated social studies students did. Thus as they had a more extensive social studies content knowledge preparation, more of the pre-service social studies teachers in this study believed that the assessment had been fair.

The assessment evoked much stronger negative emotions among the Middle Childhood students than among the AYA students. Their negative responses especially focused on the fact that they had not received any advance warning, had not had any time to prepare for the assessment, and that the content had not been covered in class. Their responses indicate that they held strong beliefs that standardized tests are not fair unless students know ahead of time what will be on the “test” and are given plenty of opportunity to get ready.

Among those AYA students who thought the assessment had been unfair, many responses focused on the inappropriate inclusion of literature questions as they argued that literature is not a part of the social studies. Interestingly, this was not an issue among the Middle Childhood students, perhaps because the majority of those who choose a concentration in social studies choose language arts as an area of concentration as well. Therefore, while literature is an integral of any civilization’s history, it is evident that the AYA social studies majors in this study perceived it to be a distinct and separate subject area in which they did not have to be well versed.

Although about one-third of the Middle Childhood students and one-fourth of the AYA students responded with a mixed “yes and no”

answer, the reasons they presented were similar to both those who thought the assessment had been fair and those who thought it had not. Furthermore, only a few of these students in either course argued that the multiple choice format reduced the assessment to a test of trivial knowledge and that it did not include any questions related to the contemporary era. Likewise only a few had any perception of a cultural bias.

When the students received their actual test scores, their responses focused primarily on how well they had done on the assessment. Although most students offered more nuanced responses *after* the classroom discussion, they generally reiterated their previously stated opinions. While those students, who initially thought the test had been fair generally persisted in that opinion, those who thought otherwise often presented additional arguments against standardized testing, even though many now also recognized the need for accountability. Those who addressed the multiple-choice format of the assessment argued that it did not give them an opportunity to show what they really knew and, although they offered no specific solutions, suggested that there had to be other ways as well for students to demonstrate what they knew.

Despite the discussion few students recognized that most questions focused on information related only to the history of Western Civilization and the Cold War era, which dominated global politics at the time when Ravitch and Finn conducted their assessment. Even when the pre-service teachers in this study argued that the assessment had a cultural bias, they referred to questions about Christianity as being part of the study of religion rather than it being an integral part of a civilization's history. Likewise, the participants in this study generally failed to make any reference to a lack of questions related to issues about cultural diversity, whether it pertained to their own country or other countries elsewhere in the world.

As the pre-service social studies teachers in this study faced the world of high-standards, high-stakes in the near future, it was evident that they were struggling to understand its true impact. While they worried about how to cope with the reality of curriculum standards and the high-stakes tests their future students would have to pass, most participants in this study failed to critically analyze the content of the assessment. Consequently, the findings in this study suggest several implications:

- While content courses help pre-service social studies teachers "know" their content, many participants in this study lacked an understanding of what it is that encompasses "the social studies." Therefore, social studies methods courses must help pre-service social studies teachers develop

a fuller understanding of the nature of the social studies.⁵⁶

- Most students in the two social studies methods courses in this study failed to recognize any bias in the assessment they took. Consequently, social studies teacher educators must help their pre-service teachers develop the necessary skills to critically analyze and evaluate the content of the curriculum standards they will be required to implement while preparing their future students for the state test.
- Unless social studies pre-service teachers are taught how to critically analyze the curriculum standards they have to implement and the standardized tests for which they have to prepare their students, they will surrender not only what but also *how* they teach. Therefore, teacher educators must help pre-service teachers recognize the values that are embedded in the highstandards, high-stakes movement and help them understand that, as future teachers, they do have the ability to make their own pedagogical choices.
- While several participants in this study argued that the multiple-choice format of this test did not allow them to show what they really knew, they were nonetheless unable to suggest any other formats. Consequently, they themselves must learn how to use a variety of assessment methods. Only if they are able themselves to use different approaches to assessment in their future classrooms will they be able to become better advocates of alternatives to the current highstandards, high-stakes movement.
- The participants in this study also indicated that an assessment requires that they know what will be on the “test” and have an opportunity to prepare. Therefore, as pre-service social studies teachers learn to develop their own approaches to highstandards, high-stakes, they must also learn how to effectively help their own future students develop the skills they will need to be successful on the state test. Therefore, teacher educators must help their pre-service teachers learn how to teach these skills to their future students.
- Finally, as the current highstandards, high-stakes movement appears to drive teachers and students towards an ever-increasing emphasis on “knowing the facts” and a lesser

emphasis on important social studies skills such the ability to develop personal perspectives, there is a growing need for research on what constitutes an appropriate balance between social studies content preparation and teacher preparation.

While this study examined the specific responses in two separate social studies methods courses at a medium-sized university in Ohio, the high-standards, high-stakes movement continues to sweep the country. Social studies teacher educators must respond to their pre-service teachers' concerns about how to respond to this movement in their future classrooms. While this study has presented one approach to how to help pre-service teachers prepare themselves for this reality, other approaches and studies may well shed further light on this important issue.

NOTES

1. G.W. Bracey, *On the Death of Childhood and the Destruction of Public Schools: The Folly of Today's Education Policies and Practices*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 14-16.
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Ibid., 15.
4. Ibid., 17.
5. Ibid., 22, 179-84.
6. Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 5.
7. Frans H. Doppen and Elizabeth A. Yeager, "National versus State Curriculum Standards for History in the United States: Where will the debate lead us?" *The Curriculum Journal* 9, no 2 (1998): 165-75.
8. S.G. Grant, "An Uncertain Lever: Exploring the Influence of State-Level Testing in New York State on Teaching Social Studies," *Teachers College Record* 103, no 3 (2001): 398-426; Avner Segall, "Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of State-Mandated Standardized Testing: The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) as a Case Study of Consequences," *The OJY and Research in Social Education* 31, no. 3 (2003): 287-325.
9. S. Ohanian, *One Size Fits Few: The Folly of Educational Standards*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), 150-151.
10. A. Kohn, *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), 40-41.
11. Ibid., 60.
12. Ibid., 33-34.
13. Ibid., 28.
14. Ibid., 50.
15. P. Marker, "Standards and High Stakes Testing: The Dark Side of

a Generation of Political, Economic and Social Neglect of Public Education. *Theory and Research in Social Education* 29, no 2 (2001): 357-62.

16. Ibid, 359-60.

17. N. M. Williams, "Thinking Outside the Bubble," *Educational Leadership*, 61, no. 3, (2003): 82-83.

18. W. Beaver, "Can "No Child Left Behind" Work?" *American Secondary Education* 32, no. 2, (2004): 3-18.

19. Ohio Department of Education (2004), *Ohio Academic Content Standards*, http://www.ode.state.oh.us/academic_content_standards/

20. Ohio Department of Education (2004), *House Bill 3/Senate Bill 2: Implementation Schedule of Statewide Tests*.

http://www.ode.state.oh.us/proficiency/PDF/Highlighted%20_HB3_SB2_Testing%20Schedule_2_2004.pdf

21. R. W. Evans, "Thoughts on Redirecting a Runaway Train: A Critique of the Standards Movement," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 29, no 2, (2001): 330-39.

22. R. R. Evans, "The Social Studies Wars Revisited," review of *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* by James Leming, Lucien Ellington and Kathleen Porter-Magee. *Theory and Research in Social Education* 31, no 4 (2003): 525.

23. Ibid., 538.

24. J. Leming, L. Ellington and K. Porter-Magee, *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* (Dayton, OH: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2003).

25. "Social Studies Standardized Testing: "It's Deja Vu All Over Again!" Teachers' Comments from 2003 and Earl Rugg's Views from 1920," *The Social Studies* 94, no 5 (2003): 199-200.

26. E. Rugg, "Is State Testing Beneficial to History Teachers?" *Historical Outlook*, (1920): 231-34.

27. T. V. Savage, "Assessment and Quality Social Studies," *The Social Studies* 94, no. 5 (2003): 201-06.

28. R. H. Pahl, "Assessment Traps in K-12 Social studies," *The Social Studies* 94, no. 5 (2003): 212-15.

29. B. Bigelow, (1999). "Why Standardized Tests Threaten Multiculturalism," *Educational Leadership* 56, no. 7, (1999): 37-40; Bill Bigelow, "Standards and Multiculturalism" in Linda Christensen and Stan Karp, eds., *Rethinking School Reform: Views from the Classroom* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Rethinking Schools, 2003), 231-39.

30. Ohanian.

31. R. Platt, "Whose Standards Are We Talking About?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 85, no 5 (2004): 381-82, #387.

32. D. Hursh, "Social Studies within the Neo-liberal State: The Commodification of Knowledge and the End of Imagination," *Theory*

- and *Research in Social Education* 29, no 2 (2001): 349-56.
33. K. D. Vinson, "Image, Authenticity, and the Collective Good: The Problematics of Standards-Based Reform," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 29, no. 2 (2001): 363-74.
 34. Savage, *ibid.*
 35. K. Vogler, "Where Does Social Studies Fit in a High-Stakes Testing Environment?" *The Social Studies* 94, no. 5, (2003): 207-11.
 36. G. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998).
 37. M. J. Schmoker, "The Results We Want," *Educational Leadership* 57, no. 5 (2000): 62-65.
 38. Sherry L. Field, "Besting Testing Hysteria: Reasonable Preparation for Standardized Tests" *Social Education* 64, no 1 (2001): M9-M11.
 39. S. G. Grant, 418.
 40. *Ibid.*, 420.
 41. Segall, 307.
 42. *Ibid.*, 317-18.
 43. *Ibid.*, 317.
 44. *Ibid.*, 320.
 45. *Ibid.*, 320-21.
 46. S. Van Hover and M. Cude, "Ambitious Teaching in an Age of Accountability," review of *History Lessons: Teaching, Learning, and Testing in u.s. High School Classrooms* by S.G. Grant, *Theory and Research in Social Education* 32, no. 3 (2004): 414.
 47. S. S. Fleury, "The Counterrevolution of Educational Knowledge." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 29, no 2 (2001): 343-44.
 48. *Ibid.*, 345.
 49. R. E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1995); Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1994).
 50. F. Erickson, "Qualitative Methods in Research on Teaching" in Merlin C. Wittrock, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 119-161; Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998); Mathew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1994).
 51. D. Ravitch and C. E. Finn, Jr., *What Do Our 17-year-Olds Know: A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1987).

52. Ibid., 1,201.
53. Sizer and Sizer, Ibid., 47.
54. N. F. Dana and D. Yendol-Silva, *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research: Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn through Practitioner Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press, 2003).
55. Erickson; Miles and Huberman; Yin.
56. National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies, 1994).

APPENDIX A
CONTENT KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

Selected from: D. Ravitch and C. Finn, *What Do Our 17 Year-Olds Know* (Yuma, Ariz.: Harper and Row, 1987).

1. When was the Civil War?
 - a. Before 1750
 - b. 1750-1800
 - c. 1800-1850
 - d. 1850-1900
 - e. 1900-1950
 - f. After 1950

2. Who was the leader of the Soviet Union when the United States entered World War II?
 - a. Yuri Gagarin
 - b. Marshal Tito
 - c. Joseph Stalin
 - d. Nikita Khrushchev

3. What is Magna Carta?
 - a. The Great Seal of the monarchs of England
 - b. The foundation of the British parliamentary system.
 - c. The French Declaration of the Rights of Men.
 - d. The charter signed by the Pilgrims on the Mayflower.

4. The idea that each branch of the federal government should keep the other branches from becoming too strong is called
 - a. strict constructionism
 - b. the system of checks and balances
 - c. federalism
 - d. implied powers

5. Who is associated with the founding of settlement houses to help the urban poor?
 - a. Jane Addams
 - b. Carry Nation
 - c. Susan B. Anthony
 - d. Mary McLeod Bethune

6. President Abraham Lincoln wrote
 - a. the Bill of Rights
 - b. the Emancipation Proclamation

- c. the Missouri Compromise
 - d. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
7. From 1890 through 1910, there was a large increase in the number of immigrants coming to the United States from
- a. western and northern Europe
 - b. eastern and southern Europe
 - c. west Africa and north Africa
 - d. the Near East
8. Sputnik was the name given to the first
- a. man-made satellite
 - b. animal to travel in space
 - c. hydrogen bomb
 - d. telecommunications system
9. Which of the following was NOT addressed by New Deal legislation?
- a. Agricultural price supports
 - b. Labor unions
 - c. Social Security
 - d. Restrictions on immigration
10. What nation was NOT invaded by forces of the Soviet Union after the Second World War?
- a. Hungary
 - b. Czechoslovakia
 - c. Afghanistan
 - d. Israel
11. What European nation was primarily responsible for exploring and settling the east coast of the United States?
- a. England
 - b. Portugal
 - c. France
 - d. Italy
12. The purpose of the authors of *The Federalist* papers was to
- a. win foreign approval for the Revolutionary War.
 - b. establish a strong, free press in the colonies
 - c. gain ratification of the United States Constitution.
 - d. confirm George Washington's election as the first President.

13. The Missouri Compromise was the act that
- granted statehood to Missouri but denied the admission of any other new states.
 - settled the boundary dispute between Missouri and Kansas.
 - admitted Maine into the Union as a free state and Missouri as a slave state.
 - funded the Lewis and Clark expedition on the upper Missouri River.
14. Which of the following characterizes United States foreign policy during the early 1900s?
- "Fifty-four forty or fight?"
 - The Good Neighbor policy
 - "The business of America is business"
 - "Speak softly, and carry a big stick"
15. When was the First World War?
- Before 1750
 - 1750-1800
 - 1800-1850
 - 1850-1900
 - 1900-1950
 - After 1950
16. The United States was provoked into entering the First World War by
- German submarine attacks on American ships
 - Japanese aggression in the South Pacific
 - Soviet attempts to blockade Berlin
 - European grain embargoes
17. The controversy surrounding Senator Joseph R. McCarthy focused on
- investigations of individuals suspected of Communist activities
 - agitation to secure civil rights for Irish immigrants
 - leadership of the movement protesting the war in Vietnam
 - leadership of the movement to improve veterans' benefits
18. Aesop is best known for having written
- fables
 - dramas
 - proverbs
 - epic poetry

19. In the Bible, King Solomon was famous for his
- courage
 - frugality
 - eccentricity
 - wisdom
20. In Greek mythology, what happened to Atlas?
- He was turned into a tree
 - He had to support the heavens on his shoulders
 - He had to map out the heavens
 - He sat by a pool but was not allowed to drink
21. Which mythical Greek hero demonstrated his bravery and cunning during his long journey homeward after fighting in the Trojan War?
- Theseus
 - Achilles
 - Odysseus
 - Telemachus
22. What is the moral of ... "The Tortoise and the Hare"?
- Slow and steady wins the race
 - Don't trust flatterers
 - The race is to the swift and strong
 - Look before you leap
23. Who is the Spanish knight who attacked windmills, thinking they were giants?
- Sancho Panza
 - Don Quixote
 - El Cid
 - Zorro
24. *Julius Caesar* by Shakespeare is a play about Caesar's
- discovery and escape from a plot to kill him
 - ultimate triumph in the Gallic wars
 - death and the fate of his assassins
 - love affair with Cleopatra
25. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." These words are from
- Common Sense*
 - the Declaration of Independence
 - Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address
 - The Rights of Man*

26. Which President said, "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country?"
- Richard Nixon
 - Theodore Roosevelt
 - Lyndon Johnson
 - John F. Kennedy
27. What is the novel *1984* about?
- The destruction of the human race by nuclear war
 - A dictatorship in which every citizen was watched in order to stamp out all individuality
 - The invasion and ultimate takeover of the earth by creatures from outer space
 - A man who went back in time and changed history
28. The novel *The Scarlet Letter* is the story of
- the correspondence between a woman and her fiance during the Civil War
 - the correspondence between a Revolutionary War spy and George Washington
 - a woman who was unfaithful and had to observe the effects of her sin on others
 - a woman in a New England town who was executed for being a witch
29. Which of the following is a play about the experiences of a black family as they made plans to move into an all-white, suburban neighborhood?
- The River Niger*
 - A Raisin in the Sun*
 - Porgy and Bess*
 - Blues for Mister Charlie*
30. Which twentieth-century European statesman said, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat," and "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent?"
- Adolf Hitler
 - Winston Churchill
 - William Gladstone
 - Joseph Stalin

31. "A penny saved is a penny earned" and "A small leak will sink a great ship" are two maxims from
- Solomon's proverbs
 - Kipling's *Just So Stories*
 - Aesop
 - Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*
32. Who wrote *Native Son*, a novel about black life in Chicago, and *Black Boy*, which is highly autobiographical?
- Richard Wright
 - Eldridge Weaver
 - LeRoi Jones
 - Malcolm
33. Which American poet, who lived mostly in solitude as an adult, wrote frequently about death in such poems as "I heard a Fly buzz when I died" and "Because I could not stop for Death?"
- Elizabeth Bishop
 - Gwendolyn Brooks
 - Emily Dickinson
 - Amy Lowell

APPENDIX B

Total Incorrect Answers on Content Knowledge Assessment

Question #	EDMC 350		EDSE 479	
	# of Students	% of Students	# of Students	% of Students
1	10	34.5	5	17.2
2	3	10.3	2	6.9
3	17	58.6	12	41.4
4	0	0	1	3.4
5	10	34.5	14	48.3
6	0	0	1	3.4
7	18	62.1	15	51.7
8	1	3.4	0	0
9	13	44.8	5	17.2
10	13	44.8	2	6.9
11	4	13.8	1	3.4
12	13	44.8	5	17.2
13	11	37.9	8	27.6
14	17	58.6	11	37.9
15	4	13.8	1	3.4
16	8	27.6	5	17.2
17	2	6.9	1	3.4
18	9	31.0	7	24.1
19	18	62.8	9	31.0
20	19	65.5	5	17.2
21	11	37.9	9	31.0
22	0	0	1	3.4
23	11	37.9	6	20.7
24	12	41.4	8	27.6
25	6	20.7	0	0
26	10	34.5	1	3.4
27	12	41.4	11	37.9
28	10	34.5	6	20.7
29	9	31.0	9	31.0
30	8	27.6	8	27.6
31	11	37.9	15	51.7
32	13	44.8	19	65.5
33	7	24.1	8	27.6