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Is it "Just" a Methods Course? - Developing Elementary Teacher's Social Justice Advocacy Competency

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Is it “just” a methods course?

*Developing elementary
teachers' social justice
advocacy competency*

Karyn Allee-Herndon, PhD

45th Annual GERA Meeting, October 2, 2020

Study Design & Objectives

Study Design

Purposive sampling of elementary teacher candidates (ETCs) in ELA/writing methods class ($n = 61$)

ETCs grouped into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for instruction

Collaborative culminating course project = integrated ELA/SS/SJ thematic unit

- Annotated bibliography

- Pre- and post-test Quizlet

- Accompanying lesson plans

- Expository/narrative writing prompts

- Ready-to-go activities

- Centers across the content areas

- Overall unit

Study Objectives

Content analysis of integrated thematic units

Measured using Buchanan's Social Justice Continuum

Two members of the team (not instructors of the course) analyzed the units, coding for aligned practices to the stages of the continuum →

Then the other two members of the team repeated this process for increased validity and decreased bias →

Coding and comparative analysis occurred within unit elements and across unit plans

Breakdown of Sample Population

	First Section (<i>n</i> = 30)	Second Section (<i>n</i> = 31)
PLC 1	American Revolution 1 A ♀, 1 B ♀, 1 H ♀, and 2 W ♀	Civil Rights Movement 1 H ♀ and 3 W ♀
PLC 2	Community 1 H ♀, 3 W ♀, and 1 W ♂	Great Depression 2 H ♀ and 2 W ♀,
PLC 3	Establishment of US Government 1 B ♀, 1 B ♂, and 3 W ♀	Holocaust 2 B ♀, 1 H ♀, and 3 W ♀
PLC 4	Immigration 1 H ♀, 1 H ♂, and 3 W ♀	Immigration 1 A ♀, 1 H ♀, and 3 W ♀
PLC 5	State, Capitals, and Facts 1 H ♂ and 4 W ♀	Renaissance 2 H ♀ and 4 W ♀
PLC 6	WWII in Florida 1 H ♀ and 4 W ♀	Women in Herstory 2 B ♀ and 4 W ♀

Study Background

This study/survey was born from the construct that social inequities have a long history in the United States and beyond, impacting our social, historical, and cultural growth, and our ability to create a welcoming community. Education played a salient role in the reproduction of norms of systemic oppression and inequitable social structures through the ideology of the 19th Century common schools, wherein the idea of assimilation was streamlined to a national mindset. Multicultural education is a response to this literal and figurative colonization of bodies and minds.

Social justice practices in teacher education can be understood along a continuum. At the far left end of the spectrum is an awareness about issues of social and educational inequity, as well as how schools can serve as institutions that maintain these relationships.



These different positions on the continuum can demonstrate complexity and depth of social justice approaches to education, but teachers may not necessarily progress along the continuum in a linear fashion. Developing as a social justice educator also involves the iterative process of professional theorizing linking abstract general theories to personal and pragmatic ones.

Anchor Standards and Domains

IDENTITY

1. Students will develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society.
2. Students will develop language and historical and cultural knowledge that affirm and accurately describe their membership in multiple identity groups.
3. Students will recognize that people's multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.
4. Students will express pride, confidence and healthy self-esteem without denying the value and dignity of other people.
5. Students will recognize traits of the dominant culture, their home culture and other cultures and understand how they negotiate their own identity in multiple spaces.

DIVERSITY

6. Students will express comfort with people who are both similar to and different from them and engage respectfully with all people.
7. Students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including themselves) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups.
8. Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.
9. Students will respond to diversity by building empathy, respect, understanding and connection.
10. Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified.

JUSTICE

11. Students will recognize stereotypes and relate to people as individuals rather than representatives of groups.
12. Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).
13. Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today.
14. Students will recognize that power and privilege influence relationships on interpersonal, intergroup and institutional levels and consider how they have been affected by those dynamics.
15. Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.

ACTION

16. Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.
17. Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.
18. Students will speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.
19. Students will make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure.
20. Students will plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are most effective.

Social Justice Standards

For purposes of this study/survey, teacher candidates were required to align **Teaching Tolerance's Social Justice Standards** to their Thematic Units, along with state standards.

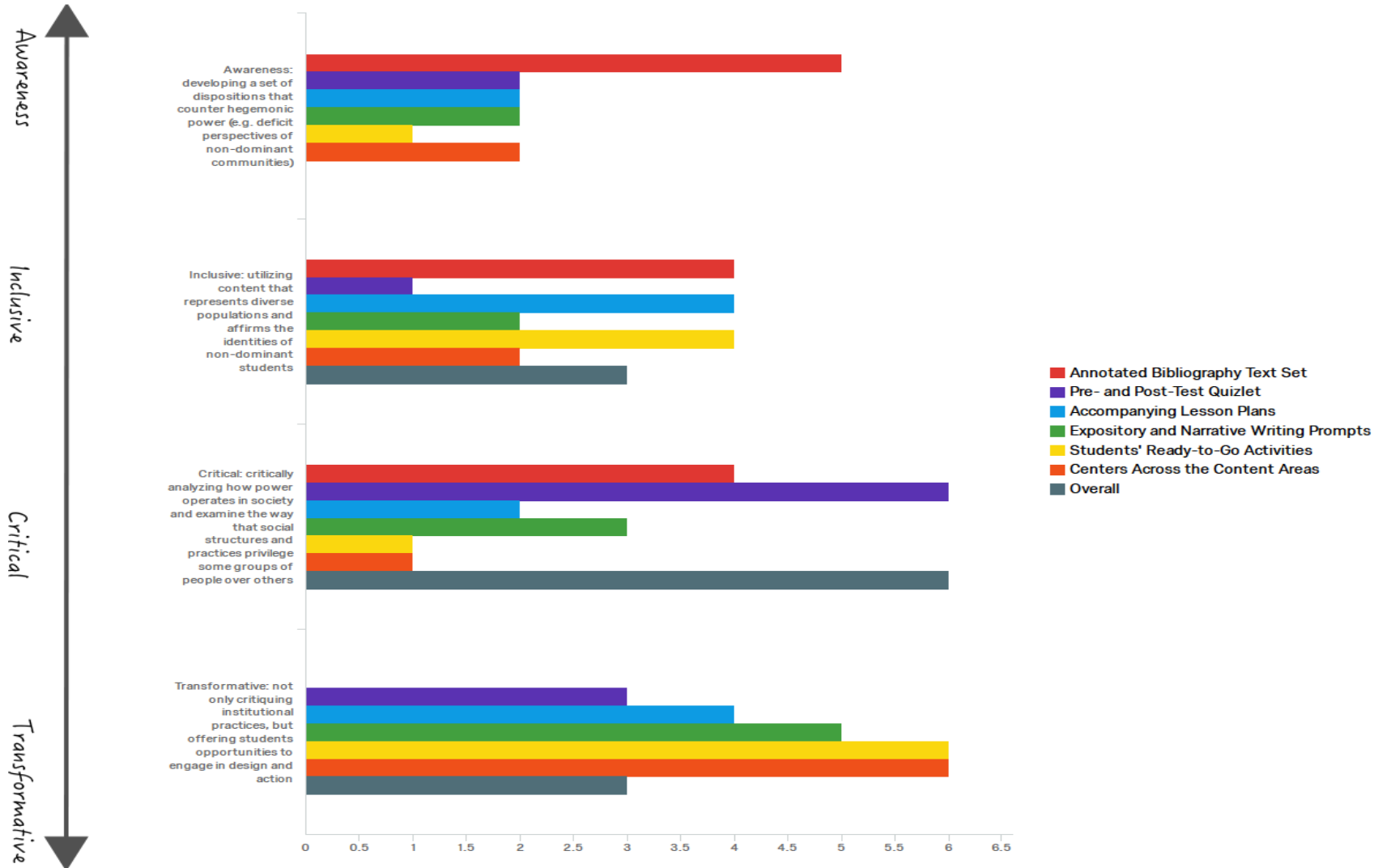
Full standards by grade level can be found at:

<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards>

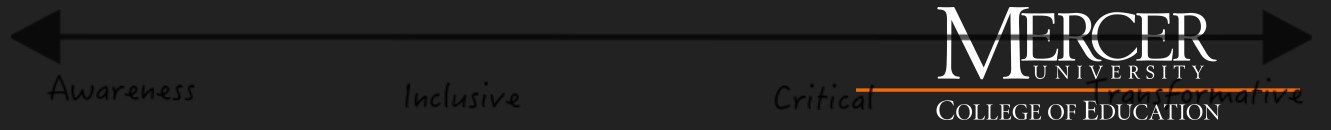
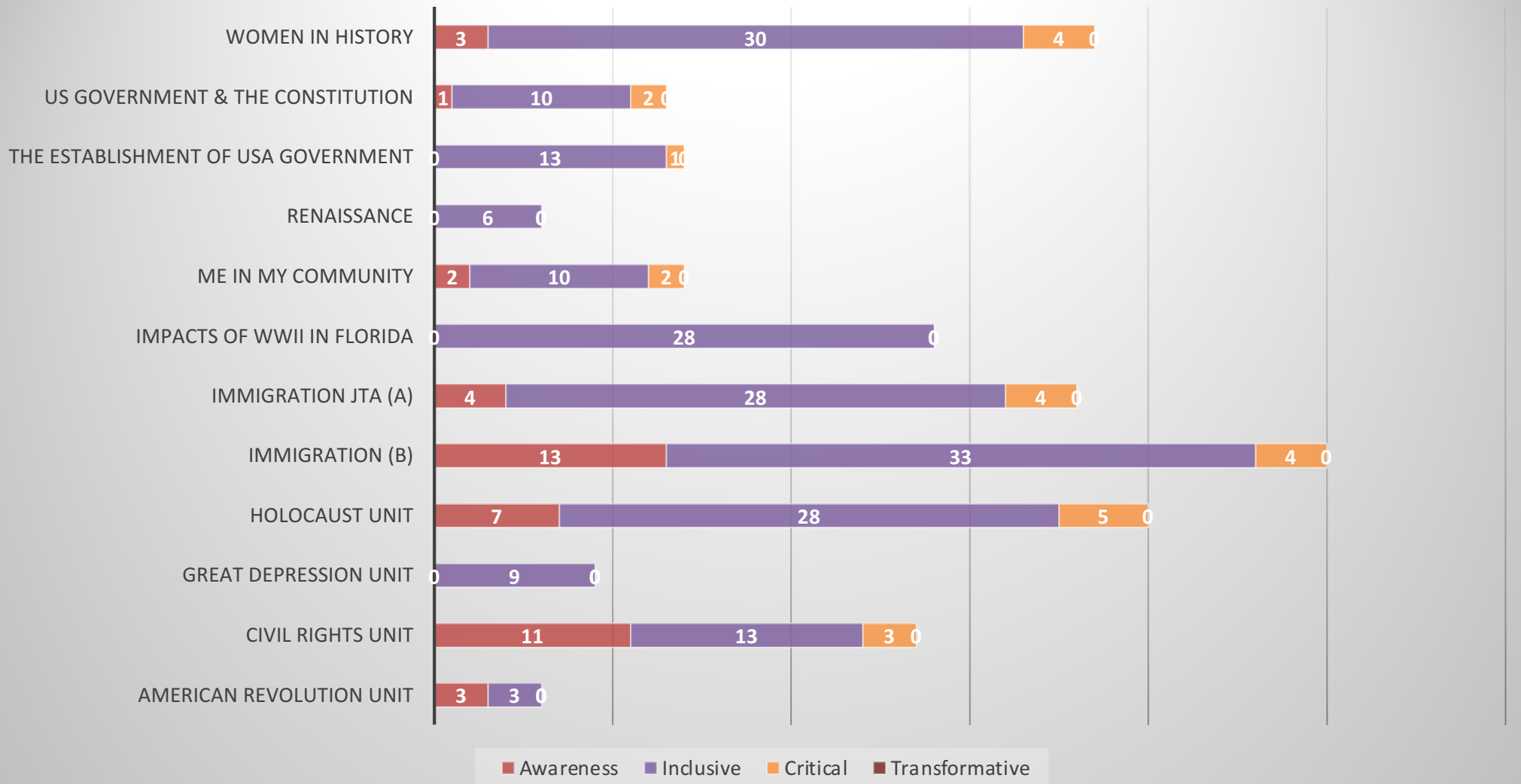
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ETC's Self-Evaluation of Thematic Units— Which elements of the unit fell where on the continuum?



Researcher Evaluation of Text Sets – An analysis of the units using the continuum



Thematic Unit Analysis Across PLCs



Awareness	Inclusive	Critical	Transformative
44	171	25	0

Q&A



References

- Allee-Herndon, K. A., Kaczmarczyk, A. B., Buchanan, R., & Geheb, E. (2020). *Is it “just” planning?: Exploring the integration of social justice education in an elementary language arts methods course thematic unit* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. College of Education, Mercer University.
- Buchanan, R. (2017). *It’s not about that anymore: An ecological examination of the theory-practice divide in contemporary teacher education* [Doctoral dissertation, University of California Santa Cruz]. Electronic Theses and Dissertations. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/91g7w6x2>
- Buchanan, R., & Olsen, B. (2018). Teacher identity in the current teacher education landscape. In Schutz, P., Hong, J., & Cross Francis, D. (Eds). *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations* (pp. 195-205). Springer Publishing.