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Toward More Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Elementary Social Studies

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TOWARD MORE CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY IN

ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES

LAURA DELGADO

136 Pages

In the United States, elementary social studies instruction has significantly declined in recent decades, yet it holds valuable potential in allowing for spaces where the cultures and identities of our students can be centered and celebrated. Our educational systems are too often grounded in hegemonic ways of doing that are based around a dominant narrative that centers white, Christian, heteronormative values. Social studies instruction and its connected pedagogy have great potential to change that narrative.

Following Mintrop's cycle of inquiry model, this qualitative study looked at the experiences of elementary teachers as they undertook the implementation of a new social studies curriculum while simultaneously participating in a course focused on supporting culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms. Through the examination of interviews, a participant survey, and final projects, the researcher sought to understand the impact of these experiences on the ways in which teachers designed inclusive learning experiences, especially in the area of social studies.

Results from the study show that teachers care deeply about their students and want to know them well, but don't always understand the most meaningful ways to do this. Teachers valued a model for professional learning that centered their voices and allowed for collaboration and reflection. This model was an effective approach to growing capacity and understanding of

ways in which teachers can honor their students' narratives in the classroom. The implications of this study could be useful for teachers, principals, and district administrators who are seeking to understand ways to center and support a diverse body of students through instruction and pedagogy.

TOWARD MORE INCLUSIVE CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY

IN ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES

LAURA DELGADO

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TOWARD MORE CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY

IN ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES

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me want to do better, to create spaces of belonging, and to carry that impact into the world. I know you will do the same. Rafael, you have been there for me through thick and thin. I could not ask for a better partner in life. Your journey has inspired me and taught me to always believe in myself and set my goals high. You are a shining example of success and perseverance. I am eternally grateful to have you in my life.

Finally, this research is dedicated to my mother, Elizabeth Brown. You were the source of my drive to create a meaningful life. Your love of education and family have shaped me into the person I am today. I miss you each and every day and wish you could be here to participate in this part of my life's journey. You are with me always, in my heart and in my spirit. I love you.

L.D.

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CHAPTER I: DEFINING AND FRAMING A PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Somewhere around his 13th birthday, my son started talking about his identity. His friends started asking questions about him, mostly about his racial identity. "What are you?" was the most common question. He wanted to know how to answer those questions and what type of response he could have. My husband grew up in Puerto Rico and identifies as Hispanic and I identify as white. Our son is growing up in a primarily white space. Most of the students in his school, his teachers, and the curriculum all reflect a homogeneous experience. The normalization of whiteness is so prevalent, that it is difficult to see past it. This journey caused me to reflect not only on the educational experiences of my son but of all our students. What is school like if your identity is not aligned with the normalized core of school experiences? When do our students of color see themselves reflected in the curriculum or in the ways in which it is delivered? Within a white, Eurocentric-normed system, where are the opportunities for learning and reflecting on diverse ways of thinking and learning? How does this translate to the scope of work I am entrusted with in my role as a district leader?

In 2021, I was hired as the Director of Elementary Education for a large unit school district in central Illinois. One of the first observations I made was that the elementary curriculum was outdated, and teaching practices were inconsistent from building to building throughout the district. The district had recently adopted a new Language Arts curriculum in 2020 and in 2022 I facilitated the adoption process for a new math curriculum being implemented in the 2022-23 school year. I knew our next focus would be social studies. The existing social studies curriculum resources were adopted about 20 years ago. Many teachers no longer have access to these resources and teaching social studies in our elementary schools has become sporadic, even non-existent. Additionally, the Illinois State Board of Education has, in

recent years, created updated standards and mandated units of study for social studies. Our district is not in compliance with these requirements. Many teachers have reached out to ask me about teaching social studies and the time is upon us for curriculum adoption and implementation.

Social studies instruction is a critical component of a balanced education. Our students need opportunities to participate in learning experiences that are inclusive and representative of themselves and their community. Because Social Studies is largely focused on human experiences, it is uniquely primed as a place to explore and implement a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum in our elementary schools. This research will explore this possibility and its impact on our learning communities.

Problem of Practice

In my school district, the problem of practice (PoP) I initially identified was that our elementary teachers did not have access to a guaranteed and viable social studies curriculum; therefore, they were not consistently teaching social studies to our students. A PoP is defined by Mintrop (2016) as "a problem for which a remedy is urgently sought that can be locally implemented" (p. 23). In this case, my initial problem fit this definition and is one that has an urgency for examination and remediation. However, the PoP feels too broad and does not seem to get at the true problem. Therefore, a more complete look at the situation is required.

According to Mintrop (2016), PoPs "deal with the way adults deliver services, which increases the chances that students will have better learning opportunities" (p. 26). As we develop and seek to understand problems of practice, we must move from broad ideas to more specific practices. In this case, the initial PoP still seems too broad. It is important to seek information about what is really happening and why we are not seeing the types of social studies

instruction that is needed in our schools. A closer look at the ways in which social studies instruction is delivered seemed to be a good next step. Once the decision to dig more deeply was considered, I started by thinking about why I wanted to create more culturally responsive learning environments (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). More specifically, I wanted to ensure that students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and connect to their social studies learning experiences in meaningful ways. A focus on equitable practices in our elementary classrooms will help break the cycle of the hegemony of whiteness that exists in our educational structures and curriculum systems.

Prior to the creation of a Director of Elementary Education position, little attention had been given specifically to K-5 needs in the district. Elementary buildings had been working to create their own learning expectations, curriculum resources, and priorities. While local autonomy is crucial to a successful school environment, it is equally important that we have consistent systems in place that ensure all students have equitable opportunities to succeed. These systems must consider the experiences of all students and take a close look at hegemonic systems within the curriculum that may be causing harm, especially to students from marginalized communities.

In the past twenty years, elementary teachers in our district have had no district-level training or support for best practices in social studies instruction. There has been no focus on updating the curriculum resources and no set expectations for teaching social studies in our elementary schools. Because of this, our teachers lack a common understanding of the nature of pedagogy surrounding the teaching of social studies. Additionally, our school district has started some district-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training, but it is not yet comprehensive

enough to have a wide-spread, direct impact on the teaching that occurs in our classrooms. A stronger connection and network of support needs to be put in place.

Updated Illinois social science standards (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2021) require a curriculum and pedagogy that is focused on diverse perspectives and aligns with culturally responsive teaching practices. However, our teachers have not received the resources and support necessary to accomplish these requirements. We must examine ways in which our school district can support the implementation of a district-wide social studies curriculum that supports best practices and aligns with Illinois standards. This leads us back to the core focus for this dissertation, which is "our teachers need resources and support to implement social studies instruction that is culturally responsive and reflective of the identities of our students."

Laboratory of Practice

The school district for my research is located in the Midwest. It is one of two large school districts in the region and is surrounded by several colleges and universities. The district enrollment is just over 5,000 students with one early learning center, six elementary schools, one junior high school and one high school. The district is considered one of the most diverse school districts in the state. The student body identifies as 44% white, 25% Black, 16% Hispanic, and 3% Asian. Less than 1% of students identify as American Indian or Pacific Islander. The rest of the population (12%) has identified as two or more races. The district has over 800 students who speak a language other than English at home, representing over 40 different languages. The district has a comprehensive Bilingual program as well as an English Language Development program.

The laboratory of practice for this dissertation work begins with the Elementary Social Studies Task Force. This group of elementary educators from across the district are committed to

working collaboratively to select a curriculum resource and begin implementing it in their classrooms. The Task Force has 13 educators representing all our elementary schools and most grade levels. The group also has one teacher from a Bilingual classroom, one English Language Development (ELD) teacher, and one Instructional Coach. This group was selected for their willingness to explore and develop social studies resources across the K-5 continuum. The group demographics are somewhat diverse, with one male member and 12 female members. Two of the Task Force members identify as non-white (one Black teacher and one Hispanic teacher). However, the group lacks adequate diversity to really represent our community. We will need to continuously monitor for potential bias as we work on goals and outcomes.

The Social Studies task force piloted and selected a new Social Studies curriculum to be implemented in our school district. The group overwhelming selected the curriculum based on its inquiry approach to learning and its commitment to culturally responsive teaching practices. The rollout of the curriculum was intentionally reserved to honor the time of teachers to navigate a new curriculum alongside a new pedagogical approach to teaching. The task force will continue to touch base to monitor how the program is going and determine next steps moving forward.

CHAPTER II: MAKING INTUITIVE THEORIES OF ACTION EXPLICIT

I started the research process by thinking my problem was the absence of a social studies curriculum. I quickly realized, however, that it is not meaningful to study the absence of something. Our school district recently purchased a new social studies curriculum for implementation in the 2023-34 school year. On the surface, this would appear to solve the problem. However, a deeper look is warranted. Instead of looking into the adoption of a curriculum, I needed to readjust the focus to teaching practices and pedagogy.

Gaining an Understanding

Through observations and conversations with teachers and principals, my understanding was that teachers were inconsistently teaching social studies and when they did teach it, they were pulling instructional materials from random sources. Teachers were selecting topics that interested them personally and activities that they found engaging or interesting for themselves and students. Left to fend for themselves without district guidance, teachers gravitated toward things they liked or were familiar with. According to input from multiple teachers in the district, specifically the ones on the social studies task force, they felt lost and unsupported in providing the social studies instruction they know their students needed. Comments at a meeting in February 2022 included "we pick what we can teach" and "some people shy away from creating resources because they might be uncomfortable." Several teachers discussed ways in which they created and shared resources, but it was not consistent across the district. Looking at these intuitive theories of action, it is clear that a deeper examination of the PoP and the root cause analysis of that problem will uncover which theories should be explored further and which should shift into more specific actions that will help improve the PoP.

Assembling the Team

Collaboration was at the heart of this dissertation study. I hold a district-level position, so the focus of this study was on the district-level implementation and on the impact of a social studies curriculum that is supportive of culturally responsive practices. Because a task force had already been formed, this collaboration had a framework in place that could continue into the dissertation study. Participants in the study were chosen carefully to ensure they could provide meaningful and relevant data that aligned with the research objectives. Through this qualitative study, I needed to know that the participants could commit the time and energy needed to provide valuable insight into the research.

In addition to the existing social studies task force, I assembled a smaller research team. This team met regularly to discuss the PoP, collect information through observations and interviews, and complete a needs assessment to help further refine the PoP. This team consisted of myself, Anne, the Multilingual Program Coordinator, and Edward, an Instructional Coach. Anne was selected for her experiences with our multilingual teachers, students, and programming as well as her ongoing commitment to equitable practices in our district. Edward was selected for his experience as an instructional coach and his participation on the Social Studies Task Force. Both research members came with a unique background and outlook that allowed us to study data and collaborate though multiple perspectives. I worked closely with the research team to uncover tacit assumptions, analyze information, and determine the root cause(s) of the PoP.

Surfacing Tacit Assumptions

This study was designed to discover and address the potential biases and assumptions that were likely to arise during the research work. The temptation to seek a solution before fully examining the PoP was a challenge. In this case, it would have been easy to jump to the conclusion that a high-quality curriculum resource is a one-size-fits all solution to the problem. This is typically how curriculum adoptions are approached. However, this would have been a dangerous assumption for the challenges we were facing. We needed to explore more deeply the real need for social studies instruction and the pedagogy that surrounded the expectations. We knew we would have to work hard to check our implicit biases around the topics we explored and have an open approach to learning more about the impact of our instruction.

In the spring of 2023, the Social Studies Task Force held an open conversation about the status of social studies instruction in our elementary schools. I was a silent observer, allowing the group of ten teachers to discuss two questions. First, what is the status of elementary social studies in our district? Additionally, what should our priorities be for social studies instruction? Several themes emerged during the group discussion that provided insight into the way teachers view social studies instruction. The themes arose from a closer look at the responses of the task force with Anne and Edward. We met and discussed ways in which the responses could be categorized. A consensus was reached about the themes outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Synthesis of Concepts from Social Studies Task Force Conversation

Themes	*Details and Implications*
Diversity and representation in curriculum	● Help students connect with their world, differently from what they see every day ● Windows, mirrors, sliding glass doors - students must see themselves authentically reflected in the work ● Note that teachers' level of comfort is varied ● We must equip kids with the necessary tools to interact with the world ● Community voice
Student Agency	● Students are central to the planning of this work ● Student voice is critical ● Social Studies is an area that we can directly connect to the kids - our world is constantly changing and we need to change with it ● Student engagement - built through experiences ● Many people don't believe that younger students (K-2) can understand the challenging concepts, but they can
Professional learning opportunities and quality materials	● Build teacher collective efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018) ● Need flexibility for decision making ● Learn from one another - time for authentic collaboration ● "What we model for our students we need modeled for us" ● Support for teaching when we are uncomfortable - creating a space where we can feel vulnerable ● Curriculum mapping and integration will help with this

The three major themes from the task force meeting indicated a broad spectrum of needs and opportunities. The most pressing need centered around the need for diversity and representation in our teaching. The teachers in the meeting had a lengthy conversation about the need for diverse content in teaching social studies. Some comments included "we need to add diversity into (social studies), Asian Heritage, World Calendar, Native American Heritage, these are all important," and "we need to be teaching about things that are different from what they (the students) see every day." Teachers also discussed the potential of social studies to open up

the world view for our students. One teacher commented that "social studies sets our kids up to be successful and connect with their world."

The big ideas from the conversation with the Social Studies Task Force formed a basis for understanding some of the tacit assumptions around elementary social studies instruction. While some of the ideas that surfaced during our conversation seemed intuitive, others were fresh and eye-opening. This group of educators clearly valued high-quality instruction and wanted social studies to be a place where that exists. They believed strongly that our instruction should be reflective of our students and community, and they were willing to work to make that happen. Additionally, time and resources were identified as the largest hurdle that teachers faced when creating these types of environments in their classrooms.

Exploration of Existing Data

In discussions with teachers, principals, and administrators, we determined that there was a need to have an explicit curriculum plan for elementary social studies. This plan needed to include ways in which culturally responsive teaching practices could be implemented alongside a high-quality curriculum. On my initial tour of the elementary schools in Fall 2021, I started to hear bits of this conversation when talking with teachers. These conversations continued as we worked to adopt a mathematics curriculum for our elementary schools. Teachers asked about a social studies curriculum as a next step. The talks continued in Winter 2022 as we assembled a social studies task force, which has continued into our recent work with a social studies curriculum adoption. Data from teachers was collected through conversations, observations, and written communications.

As clear as the need for a curriculum plan was, the PoP addresses much more than a lack of resources. When we consider the fact that social studies instruction should reflect the lived

experiences of our students and the cultural references within our communities, the initial observations showing a lack of social studies instruction were not enough. Our district needed a more thorough look at the teaching methods that were being used in social studies instruction and why there is a lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy. According to ISBE, culturally responsive teachers and leaders "intentionally embrace student identities and prioritize representation in the curriculum. In turn, students are not only given a chance to identify with the curriculum, but they also become exposed to other cultures within their schools and both their local and global communities" (ISBE, 2022).

After collecting feedback from Social Studies Task Force members (see Table 1), I worked with my research team to conduct a needs assessment. The purpose for this work was to determine a root cause analysis of the PoP. Anne and Edward had some powerful ideas and the collaboration allowed us all to bring our thoughts to the table. We used a fishbone diagram (see Figure 1) to outline some major reasons that we believed were causing inconsistent implementation of culturally responsive social studies instruction in our elementary schools. Working through this process with my research team, I had several new thoughts about why were seeing the existing problem. One big idea that I had not considered was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the way we teach our students. Another was the confidence of the teachers to make decisions about instruction and understanding of the impact their teaching has on their students.

Figure 1

Fishbone Diagram - Root Cause Analysis of PoP

Changing State Standards
← Multiple changes to ISBE standards
← Lack of clarity from the state
← Confusing communication about expectations
← Multiple documents with different expectations
← Changing social studies consultants at the state level

Lack of Resources/Professional Learning
← No district money allocated to social studies
← Other curriculum areas took precedence (ELA/MATH)
← No person accountable directly for elementary programming
← Time to research and curate curriculum resources

Problem of Practice: We have inconsistent implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices in elementary social studies.

Teacher Self-Efficacy
← Teacher self-identity
← Teacher discomfort with topics
← Teacher preferences
← Teacher and admin bias
← Comfort level of culturally responsive practices
← Fear of community backlash

Prioritization
← Lack of interest or value
← COVID teaching approaches
← NCLB - emphasized reading/math
← Changing DEI initiatives at district level
← Lack of time to focus on the work

Several themes began to emerge as the research team created the fishbone diagram. First, the lack of training and resources from the state and the district appeared to be big hindering factors. In the absence of district guidance, teachers tend to prioritize what has been provided for them. Recently that has been new reading and math curriculums. Additionally, state standards for social studies instruction have shifted and changed over the past five years, causing confusion for a variety of reasons. The emphasis on reading and math instruction that arose from No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation inevitably caused a drift away from social studies. However, the theme that stood out the most was the decision making that came directly from teachers. Even with the lack of resources, standards, and guidance, we still had teachers choosing to teach social studies. As our team continued to take a closer look at why that is and what drives these teachers to do so, we deepened our analysis of the PoP.

Community Input - A Tale of Two Classrooms

No data collection process is truly complete without the input of the school community, especially the families that are directly affected by the experiences of their children in school. Shortly after meeting with the research team in late-February 2023, I received a persistent set of missed phone calls over several days. Upon returning the calls, I was introduced to a grandmother of several children in our district. "I want to know," she asked, "why are you not teaching Black History in our elementary schools?" The question was simple and pointed. Through our conversation I heard a telling and powerful perspective. The grandmother, who identified herself as African American, has grandchildren in two different schools in our district. Both granddaughters are in second grade. Ms. A (pseudonym for the grandmother) told a very powerful story. Throughout the month of February, one granddaughter had been bringing home consistent assignments that were completed in class allowing her to learn about important figures in Black history. Assignments focused on Booker T. Washington, Madam C.J. Walker, and more were coming home from one granddaughter, but nothing visibly focused on Black History was coming from the classroom of the other grandchild. While we had a good conversation, several in fact, the message was clear. Our children are not getting consistent and equal exposure to social studies concepts, especially focused in this case on Black History Month, but even throughout the year. When the grandmother contacted the teacher of the child with no Black History lessons, she received a response that informed her the teacher had taught about Martin Luther King, Jr. on his birthday and she had read a book about Rosa Parks. The teacher clearly felt she had met the requirements for teaching Black History.

My conversations with Ms. A brought home the importance of this study, which is the lack of diverse representation in elementary social studies instruction and the misconception that

teaching about a few commonly known figures will "cover" the basics of representation. This contributions approach to teaching, described by Banks (1989), sends a message that a heroes and holidays approach is reflective of simple additions to our curriculum that meet a minimum requirement or standard for teaching about diverse groups of people that are not part of the mainstream, Euro-centric approach to teaching. Our students deserve to see themselves represented their learning experiences. This series of conversations with Ms. A. also caused me to think more deeply about whether our teachers are consistently teaching from diverse perspectives and points of view in social studies. What are the factors that go into this decision making? Why were these two experiences so different? Was the self-identity of the teachers an important factor in their decision-making? What other factors went into creating this differing experience? Again, a closer look was required.

Revised Problem of Practice

Given the thought and research that had gone into the initial PoP, it was evident that there was a revision necessary. Understanding the assumptions about teaching in a culturally responsive manner and thinking about why we were lagging in this area was at the heart of this work. We have inconsistencies occurring across the elementary schools in the district and even within buildings. Given the input from teachers, the analysis of that information by the research team, and the input from a grandparent, we refocused the PoP to be much more specific. After a deeper dive into existing data and feedback, the revised problem of practice was that elementary social studies instruction in our district is not reflective of our students' identities or cultures. Given that less than half of our students identify as white and given the fact that our current systems of curriculum practices are centered around traditionally white-normed content, a majority of our elementary students are unable to see themselves authentically reflected in the

social studies curriculum and the connected pedagogical approaches to teaching. This creates an environment of othering where students that are not of the dominant culture are immersed in learning experiences that are not reflective of their identities or cultures. Teachers identified the lack of diversity and representation in our curriculum and indicated they would like materials and resources that are diverse and reflective of multiple perspectives. They also indicated a need for professional learning opportunities that allow them to create inclusive environments that honor student voice and identity. Digging more deeply into this problem will uncover more reasons and assumptions about teaching practices, how teachers make instructional decisions, and how we can begin to shift practices in our district.

CHAPTER III: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM AND CHANGE PROCESS

Literature Review

The way our students experience school matters. In recent years, there has been more

attention paid to the cultural relevance of teaching and learning. As our schools and the nation

become increasingly diverse, we are obligated as educators to respond to the needs of our

students, all students, in ways that ensure their success. This review of literature seeks to lay the

foundation for an understanding of the importance of inclusive and culturally responsive social

studies instruction in elementary school classrooms. This will begin with a detailed look at

declining social studies instruction in elementary schools. A closer look at empirical research

will show the impact of culturally responsive and sustaining teaching practices and the

importance of a strong social studies curriculum. This will be followed by a critical framework

that is backed by theoretical research that explores culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy

and critical multiculturalism as foundations for the work we are focusing on in social studies.

Shifting Educational Policy and the Teaching of Social Studies

Federal Policies

Federal policies often feel far removed from the actual work of teaching. However, there

are times when policy has a long-reaching and harmful impact on the work of education. In

1983, the United States published a scathing report about American education. *A Nation at Risk*

(1983), published under the Reagan administration, outlined significant failure within the

American education system. Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell (United States, 1983)

declared that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising

tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." (p. 9) This report

urged increased rigor in schools, with a focus on standards for teaching and learning and

standardized testing to gauge how schools were doing (United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). While the impact of this report was not felt immediately on education, it would eventually have long-standing implications. Most disproportionately impacted were Black and Brown students and students living in poverty. The ushering in of high-stakes national testing brought devastating results as students of marginalized groups underperformed their white peers, creating narratives of disproportionate abilities and opportunities (Au, 2006). National discussions were launched about ways in which the American education system could regain its footing in the global eye. Conservatives began to publicly criticize initiatives such as multicultural education and states started to respond with rigorous content standards and testing (Sleeter, 2018).

No Child Left Behind Act

As a result, in 2001, the federal educational policy No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed and the implications were even more profound. While *A Nation at Risk* (1983) encouraged and pushed for standards, testing, and accountability, NCLB now required states to develop these standards and follow through with requirements for testing and accountability (Hursh, 2005; NCLB 2002). Prior to this, educational decisions were made largely at the local level. State and federal governments were not directly involved with the operation of schools. NCLB changed all of this. As Hursh (2005) writes, the new federal regulations "transferred power away from teachers, parents, and local community members and towards corporate and political leaders at the state and federal levels" (pp. 605-606). In 2015, the Obama administration signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replacing NCLB. One main shift of ESSA was to move the decision-making process back to the states when it came to curriculum and assessments (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). However, the devastating impact of NCLB

still lingers in our educational systems, with disproportionate impact on marginalized students (Au, 2006).

The passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 and its renewal in 2007 had a profound impact on instruction in elementary schools. With a focus on standards and testing to hold students and teachers accountable for those standards, instruction in schools began to shift. Schools were now under scrutiny for scores on tested subject areas. In most states, this included language arts and mathematics and left behind science and social studies (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Fitchett, Heafner, & VanFossen, 2014; Good et al., 2010). Since the passage of ESSA, states have been able to hold more control of assessment decision-making. However, little has changed in the amount of time spent on teaching social studies in recent years (Diliberti et al., 2023).

National Standards for Social Studies

While many have observed and discussed the decline in focus on social studies instruction, the challenges faced with increasing the time spent on social studies instruction in elementary school are varied. Finding both a purpose and a set of methods for teaching social studies is critical when working with schools that want to reallocate more time to instruction in this area.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) describes power and purposeful elementary social studies as having five qualities. Social studies instruction should be meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017). NCSS recommends that schools enhance the effectiveness of teacher preparation and continuing professional development. They also recommend that schools devote time and resources to instruct elementary students in social studies and collaborate on developing well-

aligned systems of appropriate high-quality standards, curriculum, and assessment. NCSS (2017) believes that schools should advocate for quality social studies standards at the local, state, and national levels.

State Standards for Social Science

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has revised the requirements for social science teaching several times in the past decade. ISBE published revised standards for social sciences in 2017 and again in 2023. The latest iteration of the standards has existed in draft form for the last several years, making planning a challenge for teachers and school districts. In March 2023, ISBE officially published the updated standards. The standards were revised "in response to an identified need to actively engage in the work of building more equitable and inclusive learning environments for Illinois learners (ISBE, 2023, p. 2). Indeed, the standards are intended to be taught through an inquiry lens that includes a focus on recognizing perspectives and articulating identities. These inquiry standards are intended to be used while teaching the content across grade levels. ISBE social science standards include a focus on several key areas, but are especially focused on the ability to recognize perspectives and articulate identities (Illinois State Board of Education, 2023, p. 7)

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards in Illinois

In March of 2022, Illinois adopted the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTLS). Designed to support educator preparation programs, the intent of these standards is to prepare upcoming teachers for successful approaches to teaching a wide range of students, especially those who come from backgrounds and cultures that are different from them (ISBE, 2022). The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) partnered with a research agency, WestEd, to develop standards that are intended to bring equitable practices to the forefront of

teaching and create environments that are conducive to learning (ISBE, 2022, Sandoval et al., 2023). The development of these standards is important as they seek to work with teachers on the ways in which they can become agents of change in schools that are run by a dominant narrative focused on white norms of teaching and learning.

The CRTLS have a progression of standards that include a) self-awareness and relationships to others; b) systems of oppression; c) students as individuals; d) students as co-creators; e) leveraging student advocacy; f) family and community collaboration; g) content selections in all curricula; and h) student representation in the learning environment (ISBE, 2022). There is a clear progression of goals that begins with the internal work that educators must accomplish in order to disrupt deficit beliefs and implicit biases. Additionally, looking at systems of oppression and understanding how these are harmful can allow us to engage with integrity (Sandoval et al., 2023). These standards, at their essence, call for a student-centered approach to teaching and learning that is asset-based and honors students' cultures and ways of knowing.

The Impact of Policy on Social Studies Instruction

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2017), social studies as a discipline allows students to see the world through complex perspectives. In their position statement *Powerful, Purposeful Pedagogy in Elementary Social Studies*, NCSS (2017) describes the many purposes of social studies instruction. They acknowledge the importance of students making informed decisions about their world through social studies. Additionally, the statement articulates that "social studies content allows young learners to explain relationships with other people, in institutions, and to the environment, and equips them with knowledge and

understanding of the past" (p. 2). The ability to connect is critical and will allow our children to grow and create a world where everyone is honored and respected.

In addition to the importance of social studies as a venue to fully participate in their world, research has also shown that a strong social studies curriculum has a positive impact on students' reading scores. In their 2020 report titled *Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension*, Tyner and Kabourek (2020; 2021) analyzed evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and concluded that increased instructional time in social studies is associated with improved reading ability. The impact of strong background knowledge on reading comprehension has long been recognized. In a 2015 series of studies, researchers observed that background knowledge had a significant impact on reading comprehension among four-year-old children from low- and middle-SES families (Kaefer et al., 2014). Additionally, teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension during social studies supports improved reading development and content knowledge (Capin et al., 2020). In yet another study, researchers determined that a strong foundation in social studies among second-grade students from low socioeconomic status led to significant gains in content literacy (Halvorsen et al., 2012). It is clear from the research that a strong social studies experience has a positive impact on reading scores.

Declining Focus on Social Studies

Given the understanding of the importance of social studies instruction, one would expect that it is a regular part of the elementary school curriculum. However, research shows that the teaching of social studies has been in a steady decline in elementary schools in recent decades (Diliberti et al., 2023; Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Good et al., 2010)). Researchers have noted that social studies instruction frequently receives the least amount of time in elementary

classroom instruction (Fitchett, Heafner, & VanFossen, 2014; Good et al., 2010; Tyner & Kabourek, 2020). In their 2023 research report, *The Missing Infrastructure for Elementary Social Studies Instruction*, Diliberti et al. (2023) found that states, districts, and schools provide less support for social studies than other core subjects, especially language arts and math. They note that social studies instruction receives one-third the amount of time as language arts instruction in elementary classrooms (Diliberti et al., 2023). As important as it is to understand the amount of time spent teaching social studies, it is equally as important to understand the decisions we make surrounding what and how we teach in this discipline.

The Hidden Curriculum of Hegemony

Social studies has historically been considered a core academic subject in our schools, yet the content of this instruction is led by unseen norms that inform decision-making around what is taught and how it is taught. Our schools operate under systems of hidden curriculum that is normed in white, middle class, mono-lingual values (Apple, 2015). This underlying approach to teaching includes implicit lessons, norms, and values that are regularly delivered in school through policies, processes, and practices including teaching methods, behavioral expectations, cultural norms, and other school systems that are not directly stated within the official school curriculum (Brownell, 2017; Thomas, 2019; Rezende & Ostermann, 2020). A system of hegemony exists within our schools that is so deeply ingrained in the way we do things that we are often unable to see that it exists (Apple, 2015). Our school systems are traditionally defined by the dominant group and are centered around white, middle-class norms and expectations. The notion of hegemony, first described by Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s, explains a system of power, dominance, and leadership by the ruling class that is predicated on the power of ideas. According to Gramscian theory, the concept of hegemony is "based on the consent of the led, a

consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling

class" (Bates, 1975, p. 352). These systems permeate our teaching in all areas, including social

studies where the point of view is largely focused on the dominant cultural perspective of white,

middle-class views of history and society.

Pedagogical Hegemony

Pedagogical hegemony refers to the systems in our teaching methodologies that center

the mainstream culture to the detriment of any other ideologies, pedagogies, or ways of thinking

(Jay, 2003). This hegemony is also rooted in dominant power systems. Apple (2019) writes

about the ways in which the hidden curriculum of school preserves and distributes systems of

power, in particular cultural capital. Delpit (1988) also writes about this "culture of power" that

exists in our educational environments, noting that issues of power are enacted in classrooms and

that the rules of power reflect those who hold the power. Teachers frequently follow these

systems blindly because that is the way things have always been done. Instructional decision-

making is deeply rooted in systems of hegemony that devalue cultural pluralism and lean into the

hidden curriculum within our schools that maintains the dominant way of thinking and learning

(Banks, 1996). Curriculum as it currently exists in our schools does not honor and reflect the

identities and lived experiences of our most marginalized students. Rather, the hegemonic

underpinnings of our American education system work to ensure that the ideologies of the

dominant culture remain at the core of curriculum, teaching, and learning. Educators are most

likely to ignore these underlying assumptions and ideals in favor of the systems that have

historically privileged dominant points of view (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021).

A closer look at the hidden curriculum and pedagogical hegemony are critical in the

understanding of why teachers teach the way they do. Understanding these theories will help us

design systems to overcome the normative systems rooted in whiteness in our schools. This will, in turn, allow all our students to experience school in ways that allow them to connect fully with their own identities and others within their communities.

Multiculturalism in Education

Much attention has been given in recent years to diversity, equity, and inclusion in school districts across the country. However, this is not a new concept. The idea of a multicultural approach to teaching has been developing for decades. Born from the Civil Rights movement as a demand for more attention and focus on the needs of Black communities, ethnic studies evolved into multicultural education. More recently this has evolved into critical multiculturalism (May, 1999) and anti-racist, antibias teaching practices (Love, 2019).

Multicultural education was the precursor to culturally responsive teaching theories. In fact, many use the terms interchangeably. However, there are notable differences between the two that make a separate examination worthwhile. In order to understand the history of multicultural education, one must consider the time period in which it evolved. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Black Americans began to demand a better experience for their children in schools. Although the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) declared school segregation illegal, it wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s that desegregation of schools really began. As students of color were integrated into previously all-white schools, overt racism was rampant, and many white families removed their children from public schools in favor of private education. Black Americans began to demand that their stories, contributions, and struggles be reflected in school curriculum. Other marginalized groups including Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans were also demanding more inclusive curriculum in schools. From these demands the concept of ethnic studies was born

(Banks, 2013; Gay, 1983; Sleeter, 2018). As the field of research and theory progressed, several

iterations of ethnic studies evolved. Within this time period, theories about culturally relevant

and culturally responsive teaching were being formed (Banks, 1989; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings,

1995a).

Critical Multiculturalism

As the 1990s drew to a close, scholars began to look more closely at multicultural

education. Researchers such as Stephen May and Christine Sleeter looked critically at the

approach that had gained a rising popularity and began to ask hard questions. May (1999) argued

that multicultural education had a "largely negligible impact to date on the life *chances* of

minority students, the racialized attitudes of majority students, the inherent monoculturalism of

school practice, and the wider processes of power relations and inequality which underpin all

these" (p. 1). May also stated that multicultural education must connect with the work of anti-

racism educators in order to yield the successful outcomes desired (May, 1999, 2003). The focus

of multicultural education, May (2003) posits, has been "plagued by an idealistic, naive

preoccupation with culture at the expense of broader material and structural concerns" (p. 200).

When educators focus solely on curriculum and pedagogy and ignore the impact of structural

racism and socioeconomic inequality on the lives of their students, a significant positive impact

will not occur (May, 1999; May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter, 2012). When schools and educators

view the purpose of multicultural education as "understanding differences" and work to problem-

solve with this focus, they do so at the expense of inequitable power relationships (May &

Sleeter, 2010). Thus, the development of critical multicultural theory. May (2003) outlines four

key components of critical multiculturalism that work to resolve the problems of the existing

form of multicultural education: theorizing ethnicity, acknowledging (unequal) power relations, critiquing constructions of culture, and maintaining critical reflexivity (pp. 208-211).

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching

The idea of culturally responsive teaching has been around for decades. First developed in 1995 by Gloria Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy was built around the concept that the way we teach mattered in the educational experiences of Black students. Ladson-Billings (1995a) wrote about the importance of the ways in which we approach teaching and the connections to students' cultural identities. At the core of her theory were tenets of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Following the work of Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay took this concept one step further and focused even more closely on the work of teaching.

Gay (2002) outlined an asset-based approach to teaching and learning that was based on the tenets of deeply knowing and understanding students and their cultural identities, building caring communities focused on learning, responding to diversity in the delivery of instruction. She emphasized the importance of "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). While the work of Gay added to the development of culturally responsive approaches to teaching, there was a loving critique on the horizon that took this work even further.

Paris and Alim (2014) took these culturally responsive theories to another level by moving past a singular focus of being responsive to students and working to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism through teaching and learning practices within a classroom culture. All three of these scholars have slightly different frameworks, but they all are focused on

several main ideas. Through an asset-based approach, these theories seek to develop and honor cultural pluralism, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

Cultural Pluralism

In 1973, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education published a statement in The Journal of Teacher Education. *No One Model American: A Statement on Multicultural Education* was a strong position about the value of cultural pluralism, especially in American education. *No One Model American* was an early voice in the field of multicultural education. This foundational work set a path in motion for an approach to multicultural education. The claims were strong: "Multicultural education is education which values cultural pluralism…(it) affirms that schools should be oriented toward the cultural enrichment of all children and youth through programs rooted to the preservation and extension of cultural alternatives" (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1973, p. 264). The concept of cultural pluralism has remained with theorists over time.

According to Paris (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). What is the purpose of schooling in a pluralistic society? Paris (2012) asks. He goes on to discuss the driving force of American political culture as having the goal of maintaining a mono-cultural and mono-linguistic society. This driving force, Paris (2012) states, continually asks students from non-white cultures to give up their language, their heritage, their ways of being in favor of assimilating into the white-normed society.

Further, Laman et al. (2018) describe an approach to using culturally sustaining pedagogies in a classroom of second grade writers. In their work, they initiated a writing study centered around the picture book *Hair Dance* (Johnson, 2007) which celebrates Black hairstyles.

In a classroom of mostly Black students, the cultural and social significance of this work was palpable. The agency that was created for the students honored the students and their cultures. It moved away from a deficit approach to teaching and sought to build on an important part of the children's lived experiences.

Cultural Competence

A deep understanding of and appreciation for the cultures represented in a classroom goes beyond the surface level. Understanding culture is much deeper than food, music, or holidays. Banks (1989) refers to this as the contributions approach. In his work around multicultural education, Banks sought to define the levels of work that teachers might use from the most superficial to transformative. Culture, according to Ladson-Billings (2017), goes beyond the superficial and delves more deeply into "worldview, thought patterns, epistemological stances, ethics, and ways of being" (p. 143). The deliberate and ongoing study of the cultures around us is vital to the success of our children.

Geneva Gay continued the idea of cultural competence in her argument for culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2002) outlines the importance of teachers developing a strong understanding of the cultures of their students. She also emphasizes the importance of cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns (Gay, 2002, p. 107). Gay (2010) draws on her work around multicultural education when she describes the importance of instructional teaching strategies, not just adding multicultural content into the curriculum.

In his reframing of these theories to culturally sustaining pedagogy, Paris (2012) digs much more deeply into the notion of culture. He argues that we must not only understand and acknowledge the cultures of our students, we must position them as central in our teaching and

seek to "perpetuate and foster the assets that young people bring to the classroom" (Paris, 2016). The goal, he states, is to fight against the very strong pull of white-normed languages, literacies, and cultures that permeate our school systems. Our students from non-dominant cultures deserve this. We must provide opportunities for our students to shine through their strengths, not strive for assimilation with the dominant culture. We must actively seek to sustain and center the cultures of our students.

Critical Consciousness

An additional component to successful teaching and learning within a culturally responsive-sustaining framework is the idea of critical consciousness. Freire (1970) first developed this concept while working with adult workers in Brazil. Freire (1970) describes critical consciousness as the ability to use our knowledge of systems of inequity to develop a sense of agency around ways in which to combat these oppressions. Applying a critical consciousness in PreK-12 schools involves developing a lens around our students and families. We must develop a deep understanding that there is more than one way of knowing and being and translate it to work in our classrooms (Sandoval et al., 2023). This is most important as we closely examine our practices that are deeply grounded in the dominant narrative and find ways to build awareness in our students.

When writing about ethnic studies in the K-2 classroom, Agarwal-Rangnath & Camangian (2020) write about teaching for social justice. They argue that "curriculum must encourage students to develop critical consciousness through questioning, while emphasizing principles such as self-determination, social justice, equity, healing, and love" (p. 5). Students must feel authentically connected to their learning and the work they are doing (Ladson-Billings, 2002; Gay, 2002; Paris & Alim, 2014). This raising of critical consciousness can take many

forms, but the ultimate goal is to provide students the tools that allow them to think critically about the ways in which our societal norms create inequities. This can result in community action, critical analysis, or action research. The goal is to combat deficit-thinking and promote social justice action that allows students to participate in an ever-expanding global society.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Action

Since Paris and Alim (2012) outlined a framework for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), much has been written and studied about the impact of this approach to teaching. As Paris (2021) writes, "all work in these traditions seeks to dismantle deficit approaches so pervasive in the education of our young people and to instead critically center our strengths, our assets, our communities in teaching and learning" (Paris, 2021, p. 365). In a closer look at qualitative studies that examine culturally sustaining pedagogy in classrooms, Wynter-Hoyte et al., (2019) draw conclusions about the ways in which teachers can sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural practices as strengths rather than deficits. They note that the creation of critical safe spaces for culturally and linguistically diverse learners allows them to engage in learning that connects meaningfully with their lived experiences (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019).

In a reflection from Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021), she writes about the thirty-year history of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies. Ladson-Billings (2021) notes that culturally sustaining pedagogies are not meant to fit students into categories or boxes. Rather, they are designed to honor the whole self of the student and allow that uniqueness shine in the classroom. This is the critical heart of CSP. As Paris (2017) writes, "CSP takes a dynamic cultural and linguistic dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive, rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (p. 3).

In a reframing of CSP, Laster, et al. (2020) describe ethnic pedagogies as an extension of CSP. In their study they sought to implement a technique for learning that engages cultural traditions as they come from the cultural lives of students. They specifically looked at successful traditions that have not typically been adopted as instructional strategies: call-and-response from Black church and *havruta*, a study tradition from Jewish culture. These traditions were reimagined as secular pedagogy, honoring the lived experiences of students with success.

The critical honoring of culturally and linguistically diverse students must continue to expand in our educational systems. Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to do just that, with an emphasis on the sustaining of heritage cultures, languages, and traditions as assets in our schools.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Social Justice, and Activism

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of demand for anti-bias, anti-racist approaches to teaching in our schools. It is common for school districts to have staff focused solely on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Newsweek reports that public schools have spent $21 million on diversity and inclusion programs since the death of George Floyd in the spring of 2020 (Mayberry, 2022). Multiple authors have researched and written guides to support schools with equity work and the initiatives have exploded. The National Education Association (2021) has published over 300 resources focused on equity and anti-racism in schools. In recent years, authors such as Matthew Kay (2018), Bettina Love (2019), Gholdy Muhammad (2020, 2023), and Liz Kleinrock (2021) have published works outlining the value of antiracist work in our schools.

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Social Studies Education

Several authors in recent years have tackled more current issues around teaching social studies. Agarwal-Rangnath (2022) outlines a framework for social justice that looks at

restructuring mandated social studies curriculum to teach with a critical, social justice lens. The framework focuses on two essential questions: 1. How do we transform and restructure mandated social studies curriculum to teach from a critical, social justice perspective? 2. How do we make room for social studies content when limited to teaching only language arts and math? (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2022, p. 2). This framework recognizes that the dominant, Eurocentric narrative of most curriculum mandates "minimizes opportunities for students to examine historical content through the exploration of multiple perspectives" (p. 12). Instead, Agarwal-Rangnath (2022) argues, we must find ways to push past the dominant narrative to value, honor, and represent the stories of all students, especially those that are historically marginalized.

Rodriguez and Swalwell (2022) call for an anti-oppressive approach to elementary social studies while noting both dominant and counter-narratives. Teaching, they discuss, is told from the dominant perspective of white, Christian, English-speaking people of the middle or upper-class. This approach is the lens through which stories are told that "make the common sense of the people and systems enacting oppression seem natural or legitimate" (Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022, p. 4). They discuss the transformative potential of social studies. In our work with students, they argue, we must move beyond diversity and inclusion, go deeper than kindness or tolerance, build a foundation of mutual concern and beloved community, and understand that dehumanization is not an option (Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022). These principles are key to the work that can be done to make social studies transformative for our students, our schools, and our communities.

A closer examination of the research leads to the conclusion that the teaching of social studies is a necessary and logical place to employ culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. While there are many models for culturally responsive pedagogy, some commonalities surface

that are foundational to all approaches (Byrd, 2016; Gay 2002; Hammond 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy builds cognitive capacity in students, actively engages the cultures and assets of all students, builds on the cultural norms of traditionally marginalized groups, and has the end goal of honoring and sustaining culturally and linguistically diverse students through an asset-based approach (Ladson-Billings,1995; Paris, 2017).

Lack of Research

Little research appears to have been published on the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy in elementary social studies. However, the key principles discussed in this literature review support the connection between the two. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is not simply a set of skills on a checklist, nor a set curriculum that one chooses to teach. CSP is grounded in rigorous learning experiences, productive struggle, and the expectation of excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Hammond, 2015; Muhammad, 2020). Culturally responsive and sustaining teaching is about more than diversity or culture. As seen in the shifts from multicultural education to critical multiculturalism, we must also address the systems of inequitable power that permeate our school curricula in order to make significant impact on the lives of our students, especially those from marginalized communities (May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter, 2012). The intersectionality of critical multiculturalism, social justice, and culturally responsive pedagogy are perfect complements to the teaching of social studies, especially in elementary schools.

Conceptual Framework

In building a conceptual framework for the focus of this research, a closer look at the PoP is required. A deeper understanding of the ways in which teachers approach social studies instruction is critical. This conceptual framework seeks to understand the questions: What are the

factors that influence the instructional decisions and pedagogical approaches of teachers, especially in social studies? What theories might support a better understanding of ways that teachers can create inclusive learning environments that honor and center the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse students? These questions are important in uncovering the true cause of our hegemonic approach to social studies instruction. The framework will look more closely at several theories that attempt to explain the variances in teaching decisions and how these theories nest together to explain the decision-making process around teaching social studies in elementary school.

Culture of Power

Systems of power underly the educational system in ways that advantage students of the dominant culture. Delpit (1988) writes about the systems of power and "silenced dialogue," communicating that issues of power are enacted in classrooms through the power of the teacher over the students, the power of publishers and curriculum developers, and the power of the state. More critically, she writes about the power of an individual or group to determine "normalcy." She adds, importantly, that "those in power are frequently much less aware of, or willing to acknowledge, the existence of their power. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence" (Delpit, 1988, p 283). This is a powerful understanding for teachers as they seek to understand their own power and its relationship to teaching systems.

However, this is not an easy task. As Shields (2018) writes, "those with power are complicit, often unknowingly, in the perpetuation of structures, policies, and attitudes that marginalize and oppress those with less (or different kinds of) power" (p. 58). An understanding that "power and privilege and how they are implicated in language, culture, and learning, also typically have been invisible in school discourse" (Nieto, 2009, p. 1) will be necessary moving

forward. Building capacity and understanding around systems of power will be an important step in the change process.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to the power one has in society and the inherent ability to pass that power along through generations to maintain social class. Defined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) as a way to "explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children from the different social classes" (p. 17), cultural capital explains ways in which families could pass down this implicit power to their children. Bourdieu (1986) writes about cultural capital as a way to explain the unequal achievement of children from different social classes. However, this definition alone is not enough and, in fact, it has been used to perpetuate systems of inequality in schools that are centered in white norms and values.

Our educational systems perpetuate the unequal distribution of capital in ways that mirror the broader society. The dominant culture retains the power through ongoing systems of control. This is the underlying reason, Bourdieu (1986) claims some students are more successful in our school systems than others. When teachers perceive some student strengths as assets and not others, they are reinforcing underlying systems of hegemony and giving advantage to the dominant forces behind our educational systems (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017).

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) redefines Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital into her theory of community cultural wealth (CCW). Bourdieu's theories served to perpetuate the misconception that only the values of the dominant class matter and are what society ultimately seeks to obtain. Ultimately, Yosso (2005) argues, the dominant groups within society "are able to maintain power because access is limited to acquiring and learning strategies to use these forms of capital

for social mobility" (p. 76). Her work refutes the held belief that situates white middle-class communities as culturally wealthy and communities of color as culturally poor (Jimenez, 2020).

In her theory of community cultural wealth, Yosso (2005) describes various forms of capital that are valued and utilized by communities of color. Building capacity for CCW allows educators to understand how students of color access and experience school from a strengths-based perspective. Teachers operate within existing systems and structures in our education system. The value these systems give to both teachers and students matters. CCW provides a counternarrative to the notions of cultural capital, instead situating culturally and linguistically diverse students as having their own sets of strength and value within our schools (Jimenez, 2020; Yosso, 2005). This is a powerful lens through which educators can frame their work with diverse students in their classrooms.

The CCW framework defines six forms of cultural capital that can be leveraged when honoring students and their cultural wealth. These are a) aspirational, b) linguistic; c) familial; d) social; e) navigational; and f) resistance (Yosso, 2005). These ways of knowing and honoring students influence the ways in which teachers interact with students, design learning experiences, and make instructional decisions. We must seek to understand the ways in which teachers consider the cultural capital that their students bring to school and teachers' reactions and behaviors related to this capital (Neito, 2009). Teachers must consider these forms of capital as strengths and draw upon them to build asset-based learning experiences.

Jimenez (2020) describes the ways in which community cultural wealth was brought into a classroom of sixth grade immigrant students as the teacher drew on migration as a form of capital, building on the knowledges and skills cultivated by the students as they experienced the navigation of migration to the United States (Jimenez, 2020). Through the use of specific

pedagogical tools, the teacher was able to counter deficit narratives and create learning spaces that allowed students to shine through the form of storytelling as counternarrative. The end result was empowering for students as they viewed their immigration stories as assets, strengths, and knowledge (Jimenez, 2020).

Some educators are unable to see or recognize the funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) their students bring with them to the classroom. When educators begin to see the assets of each child, the ways in which they choose to teach will shift. We must understand the ways in which cultural capital impacts the experiences and opportunities that are afforded to students from nondominant cultures and backgrounds.

Critical Professional Development

In building an understanding of the ways in which teachers grow and change professional practice, the model through which professional learning is delivered must be considered. Traditionally, professional learning in education has relied on a banking method (Freire, 1970). Freire describes this type of learning as focused on filling the learner, in this case the teachers, with a prescribed set of knowledge. There is little teacher agency in this approach to learning and considers the learner as an empty vessel waiting to be filled, focusing on compliance (Freire, 1970). Through frequent use of short workshops or single sessions of professional learning, teachers are often left with little opportunity to collaborate, problem-solve, or bring their own lenses to the learning. It is rarely, if ever, transformative.

A model of critical professional development (Kohli et al., 2015; Parkhouse et al., 2023) reimagines professional learning as spaces that center and honor teacher voices and focus on a critical look at educational inequities (Parkhouse et al., 2023). Rooted in Freire's (1970) ideas of the importance of dialogue and the study of problems from within, critical professional

development (CPD) seeks to empower teachers to create knowledge from within. It is designed to "provoke cooperative dialogue, build unity, provide shared leadership, and meet the critical needs of teachers" (Kohli et al., 2015, p. 11). CPD is a form of transformative learning that enables critical consciousness and disrupts the ways in which we see the world (Mezirow, 1981; Kennedy & Stevenson, 2023).

In designing learning spaces for teachers, Kohli et al (2015) describe four tenets through which to consider the transformative power of professional learning: 1) cooperation and authentic dialogue, 2) unity through intentional community building, 3) organization of shared power, and 4) cultural synthesis of the needs of the participants is considered over the interests of leaders (Kohli et al, 2015). A consideration of this critical approach to professional learning is a valuable piece of the complex path to more equitable and socially just education in our schools.

Moving Toward Inclusive Social Studies Instruction

A closer look at the intersection of the theories discussed in this review will reveal the complexities that exist in teaching. This is especially true for the decisions that teachers make about content and pedagogy in elementary social studies. Figure 2 depicts a conceptual framework of ideas that combine in a multitude of ways to influence the teaching in our schools.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework: Moving Towards Inclusive Practices in Social Studies Instruction
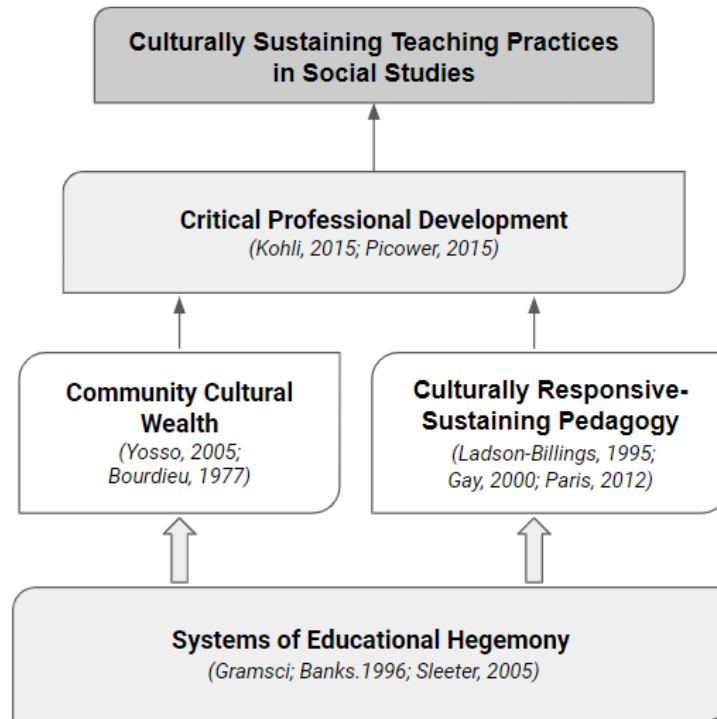
The cultural capital of teachers and students informs the ways in which teachers teach and the content they choose to value. Similarly, the hidden curriculum is indicative of systems of pedagogical hegemony that influence why teachers select topics for teaching or methodologies. Are teachers deeply ingrained in these systems? Are they aware of the ways in which they make choices about instruction? How are they choosing a focus or approach when it comes to teaching social studies? If the desired result is to create classroom spaces that are culturally sustaining and honor diverse perspectives and identities, the role of teachers' decision-making must be considered. Additionally, the approaches to professional learning for teachers must be considered. A transmissive model of learning (Freire, 1970; Banks, 1988) will not help us accomplish our goals. Instead, we must focus on transformative models of professional learning,

especially considering critical professional development (Kohli et al., 2015). These factors must be considered when thinking about ways to ultimately create classroom learning spaces that are responsive to the students and honor cultural pluralism within our schools.

Moving Forward

I have great hope that we can reimagine the ways in which our curriculum and learning environments bring all students to the center of the narrative. We have the powerful responsibility of caring for and nurturing the experiences that our students have in school. Our students deserve to know that they are important and valued. They have the right to not only see themselves reflected in the curriculum, but to know that each of their stories are valued and honored. We have the tools. We have the resources. We must find a way to make this happen.

Social studies as a discipline is uniquely positioned as a vessel for this work. Because the focus of social studies is largely centered around the human experience, we can find ways to make our teaching inclusive and welcoming. We must continue to find ways to fight against curriculum experiences that decenter, dehumanize, and exclude the stories and cultures of our historically marginalized students. Our children deserve nothing less.

CHAPTER IV: DESIGNING A RESEARCH-BASED INTERVENTION

Designing an Intervention

When designing an intervention, it is critical that we understand the purpose of the

process. According to Mintrop (2018), an intervention must work to "intervene in existing

knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, or routines in order to prompt new learning that leads to new

practices" (Mintrop, 2018, p. 133). The process of designing a research-based intervention is

complex and involves a deep understanding of the community, culture, and beliefs of your

organization. The science of improvement is complex work. Bryk (2017) writes "to know that

something is important is not the same thing as knowing how to make it happen regularly and

well" (p. 171). This chapter will seek to outline the process of change and the factors that are

involved in designing an impactful intervention.

Change Theory

A closer look at ways in which organizations change is a critical component of designing

interventions that will change an identified problem within an organization. Changing behaviors,

beliefs, and values involves complex work. It is most important to note that the most impactful

changes do not come about through top-down directives but rather through intentional design

that draws upon the knowledge and assets that teachers possess and building upon those

strengths in ways that center respect and dignity (Mintrop, 2018; Shields, 2020). Leaders who

embrace transformative leadership theory also understand the need to center inclusion, equity,

excellence, and social justice in the change process (Shields, 2020).

Learning and Unlearning

Change requires internal work, both on the part of the leader and the participants. We

must begin our work with an understanding that our own internal sets of understandings and

beliefs are shaped by our own identities and experiences. These sets of understandings may align with the change needed in an organization. Identifying problematic parts of an organization's culture and beliefs is the first step in dismantling and disrupting assumptions and ways of being that may be harmful to those within the organization. This is especially critical when we look beyond the dominant culture and seek to create inclusive and culturally sustaining experiences for our students.

The core of changing is learning (Mintrop, 2018). We must seek to unlearn behaviors, attitudes, actions, and beliefs that are harmful and ineffective in favor of learning new ways of thinking and doing that honor and center the voices of all within our schools. However, the process of unlearning does not simply occur. Leaders cannot bring about change simply by telling people they need to change. A process must be developed that is based in assets and motivates people to shift their thinking.

Asset-Based Change

Understanding impactful change theory also asks us to shift away from an emphasis on what is not working and to ground our thinking in an asset-based approach. The value of building upon what is already going well allows us to launch our work in ways that increase people's capacity and motivation to change. In our case, we must examine our situation and understand what is already working or in place to work that will help drive change. Table 2 outlines some strengths of our district that provide places to embed the beginning pieces of our work. This table was developed with the initial research team as we considered what was working well in our district that could become an asset base for the study.

Table 2

Map of Assets that Support the Change Process

Dimension of Change	District Assets
Knowledge	Some teachers have been teaching social studies and following updated ISBE standards; Teachers are capable of implementing new curriculum and are willing to try new things
Values	Teachers have expressed a desire to incorporate more diversity into their curriculum; They are asking for support to improve in this area
Routines	Teachers like having curriculum maps and guidelines to drive their instruction
Tools and materials	We have adopted a new Social Studies curriculum that lends itself well to culturally responsive teaching practices; We have an ongoing DEI plan to support all teachers; All buildings have a full time Instructional Coach to support teachers
Goals	District has a clear set of goals mapped for curriculum adoption and DEI initiatives
Motivation	Teachers are eager to implement new curriculum and have been asking for support with social studies
Community	Teachers meet regularly with grade level teams and district-level teams to connect with each other
Authority of expectations	The district has a solid plan for teaching and learning that is clearly spelled out and supported with regular opportunities for learning

Drivers of Change

Change for the sake of change is not productive. When evaluating the need for change, a closer examination of the problem and desired outcome is needed. Once those are identified, the research team can begin to gather a set of hypotheses about the ways in which the desired change can occur. Bryk (2017) calls these 'primary drivers' and defines them as "best initial bets about

what to target in the context of the causal system analysis" (p. 74). In the case of this research, the team determined the primary problem is that students' identities are not being fully represented or centered in elementary social studies. The desired outcome is that teachers will intentionally design learning experiences that value and honor the identities of their students through social studies instruction. Given this premise, the research team met to identify our next steps for change. When considering ways in which we might design an intervention for our problem we developed a series of guiding tenets to inform our work. The research team outlined aspects of our work that we felt were important for a successful implementation. From that list, we narrowed it down to the elements we agreed were most impactful. These were based on our district culture, ISBE guidelines, and personal knowledge. Table 3 outlines the tenets that led us to the design of a 90-day implementation.

Table 3

Guiding Tenets of Intervention Work

Guiding Tenets of Intervention Work
Provide clarity and support for teachers in understanding the new ISBE (2023) Social Science Standards
Build on assets and create positive experiences for teachers in understanding and implementing culturally sustaining pedagogy
Find ways to connect curriculum, standards, and student identities in an authentic manner
Support teachers in exploring their own identities and understanding of ways in which these affect their perspectives and beliefs about pedagogy and their students (ISBE, 2022)
Help teachers create lessons and experiences that honor and center the diverse identities of their students
Identify bias and hegemony in our curriculum and find ways to challenge these underlying assumptions
Support teachers in a deeper understanding of the diverse lived experiences and cultures of students, especially those from historically marginalized communities

The development of these tenets and subsequent conversations allowed the research team to focus our thinking about potential drivers for change. Figure 3 outlines the synthesis of the work and the purposed drivers of change. If our problem is that student identities are not authentically represented and our teachers lack district support and resources to make this happen, we need to implement a plan of action to shift this issue. The goal was for teachers to intentionally design learning experiences that value and honor the identities of their students through social studies instruction.

Figure 3

Driver diagram for change in social studies instruction

Problem	Change drivers	Goal
Student identities and cultures are not fully represented in elementary social studies Teacher lack of support for and understanding of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	Support for ISBE Social Science standards Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Explore self-awareness and relationships to others Understanding of students' communities and cultures	Teachers intentionally design learning experiences that value and honor the identities of their students through social studies instruction

Intervention Design

The outcome of an effective intervention is to find successful ways to reach a goal. In this case, the goal is to equip teachers with the understanding and capacity to design learning experiences that value and honor the unique and special identities of their students through intentionally designed social studies instruction. However, when doing this type of equity work, we must begin with ourselves. Building our own understandings of how our self-awareness and identities affect our perspectives and beliefs about pedagogy and students is a critical first step.

We must first understand ourselves before we can authentically understand those who differ from us (Freire, 1970; Shields, 2020).

Purpose of the Intervention

This intervention provides learning opportunities that support teachers in their abilities to create social studies instruction reflective of the diverse students in their schools and communities. The goal of this work was to support teachers in their own internal capacity for understanding the importance of students feeling represented and honored through curricular experiences, especially in social studies. Because this work is intended to be extended beyond the 90-day cycle of implementation, it was understood that these were the first steps in achieving the larger goal of culturally sustaining practices in elementary social studies.

Implementation Tools

The cycle of implementation was a 90-day round of work focused on two main areas. First, we planned to take a closer look at the newly updated Illinois Social Science Standards (ISBE, 2023). These standards have been updated to include a heavy focus on inquiry-based approaches to teaching. These inquiry standards include, among other things, the ability to recognize perspectives and articulate identities (ISBE, 2023, p.7). The participants considered these standards as we investigated our newly adopted Social Studies Curriculum, Inquiry Journeys (inquirED, 2020). Additionally, we used the Illinois Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTLS) to frame our understanding of the importance and relevance of our work (Illinois State Board of Education, 2022). These standards are found in Appendix E. Because the CRTLS are so comprehensive, for this initial work we focused on Standard A: Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others, found in Appendix F. We used the professional

development tools that align with the CRTLS to create a cycle of learning that was specific to our problem of practice.

90-Day Cycle of Inquiry

The main venue for the implementation of this cycle of inquiry was a district-level course that was open to interested teachers. The course was titled *Toward More Culturally Sustaining Social Studies Instruction (K-5): Understanding and Applying the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards to Elementary Social Studies Instruction*. The course met regularly over a 90-day period with work focused on self-awareness, the importance of student identity in the curriculum, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and specifically how these concepts aligned with the ISBE Social Science standards and our new curriculum materials. This course began with establishing norms and agreements about brave conversations and ways in which we would create and maintain a safe, supportive, and active space for conversations about potentially difficult topics. Appendix A outlines these agreements that were used throughout the course (ISBE, 2022). Table 4 shows an initial outline of the learning goals and objectives. However, these were subject to adjustment based on the needs of the group, feedback from course participants, and the data we collected along the way.

Table 4

90-Day Cycle of Inquiry

Implementation Action Plan			
Week of	**Format**	**Content**	**Participants**
8/14/23	Grade Level Meetings - in-person	**Social Studies PD**: Orientation Part 1	**All K-5 Classroom Teachers**
8/21/23	One-on-one meetings	**Pre-meet for study:** initial interviews	**Study Participants**
8/28/23	In-person course	**Course 1:** Introduction - Self-Identity – Who are our students? – New ISBE standards	**Course Participants**
9/11/23	In-person course	**Course 2**: CRTLS: Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others - Dominant Culture and Privilege – Where do our students come from? - Connect to Social Studies	**Course Participants**
9/18/23	Grade Level Meetings - virtual	**Social Studies PD**: Orientation Part 2	**All K-5 Classroom Teachers**
9/25/23	In-person course	**Course 3**: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy – Getting to know our students authentically - Connect to Social Studies	**Course Participants**
10/2/23	One-on-one meetings	**Meet with study participants**	**Study Participants**
10/9/23	In-person course	**Course 4**: CRTLS: Implicit Bias and Structural Racism - Connect to Social Studies	**Course Participants**
10/16/23	Grade Level Meetings - virtual	**Social Studies PD**: Inquiry-Based Teaching Part 1	**All K-5 Classroom Teachers**
10/23/23	In-person course	**Course 5**: What does it mean to honor and center diverse identities? – Connect to Social Studies	**Course Participants**
10/30/23	One-on-one meetings	**Meet with study participants**	**Study Participants**
11/13/23	Grade Level Meetings - virtual	**Social Studies PD**: Inquiry-Based Teaching Part 2	**All K-5 Classroom Teachers**
11/13/23	In-person course	**Course 6**: Reflection and Next Steps	**Course Participants**
11/27/23	One-on-one meetings	**Meet with study participants:** second-round interviews	**Study Participants**

A responsive intervention requires that those in charge of the implementation remain flexible and adaptable to the needs of the group (Bryk et al., 2017; Mintrop, 2016). Bryk et. al. (2017) recommend that it is best to start a change process with small, rapid tests of change and then expand the initiative out as the improvement team learns. This is the approach we leaned into with the 90-day cycle of inquiry. The goal was to begin with a course outline but have an open mind about the specifics of each session. If something was not going as planned, we would need to take a closer look at the situation and adjust. However, this did not mean we went into the intervention without a plan. Bryk (2017) describes intervention design as researchable when it "consists of a set of planned formal activities around which an accurate and efficient search for evidence of change and effect can be organized" (p. 163). This implementation plan was designed around a set of formal activities that encompass social studies instruction, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and a focus on the ISBE CRTLS. The research team and I believed that these experiences would help our participants understand themselves and their students more deeply so they were prepared to design learning experiences that authentically honored student identities.

Professional Learning for All

This implementation had three distinct types of learning opportunities. First, we offered ongoing district-level support to all elementary teachers that was focused on the implementation of our new social studies curriculum. These professional learning sessions were developed by inquirED, the company that produces the Inquiry Journeys Curriculum (2020). The sessions were designed to provide a broad overview of the curriculum, take teachers on a deeper dive into the lessons, and showcase the strategies for support within the curriculum. These series of sessions occurred at grade level meetings throughout the semester and were led by members of the Social

Studies Task Force and Instructional Coaches. Grade level meetings occurred monthly beginning in August, so there were four sessions in total that reached all elementary teachers within the 90-day cycle. However, it was not enough to simply introduce teachers to the scope of a new curriculum. That is not enough to drive change. Therefore, more intense work was required.

Professional Learning for Some

As part of the 90-day implementation, elementary teachers were invited to participate in a district-level course that dove more deeply into the work we believed would impact change toward more culturally sustaining social studies instruction. The course, titled *Toward More Inclusive Social Studies Instruction (K-5): Understanding and Applying the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards to Elementary Social Studies Practices*, was designed to increase teachers' self-awareness of their own identities and the ways in which student identities are authentically represented in their classrooms, especially through the lens of social studies.

The course was advertised to K-5 elementary teachers with a limit of 24 participants. Appendix D provides the course description and parameters. The 15-hour course is a common professional learning structure in our district and was part of the way we provide growth opportunities for teachers. The course took place over six in-person sessions after school for two hours each. Each session required outside work to supplement the learning, including journaling, listening to podcasts, adapting lessons, and reflection.

Professional Learning for Study Participants

Our study participants were selected from within the district-level course roster. Once the roster was established, I reached out to see who was interested in participating in the study research. Of the ten course members, six participants indicated they were willing to participate

in additional sessions for one-on-one interview sessions with the researcher to provide further insight and clarity into the work we were doing. During these additional meetings, the researcher provided additional insight into the study, conducted interviews, and held clarifying conversations about the work that was being completed within the social studies curriculum and the district-level course.

Next Steps

Following the implementation of the 90-day cycle of inquiry, the researcher conducted follow-up interview sessions with the study participants to gain insight about the class experience and to learn about how the work had impacted each of the teachers. These interviews were coded and themed in order to draw conclusions from the research and to recommend next steps for the work.

CHAPTER V: METHODOLOGY

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which teachers' increased awareness of students' communities, cultures, and lived experiences influenced the ways in which they created learning environments that are representative of diverse students and nondominant narratives. Through an intentionally designed set of professional learning experiences, the study sought to understand the impact of these experiences on the ways in which teachers seek to challenge dominant narratives in learning spaces and create inclusive learning experiences.

Research Questions

This design of this study was based on a set of action research questions. Improvement science requires a set of inquiry research questions that are "significant, high-leverage questions focused on complex problems of practice that are often framed around equity, ethics, and social justice – problems are user-centered and compelling" (Perry et al., 2020, p. 38). In a close examination of the PoP, the research team collaborated and developed the following set of research questions:

1. How can the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (ISBE, 2022) inform teacher practices in elementary social studies?

2. How does the self-awareness of teachers impact the ways in which they challenge dominant narratives in elementary social studies?

3. How do teachers ensure the cultural diversity of their students is authentically represented within classroom learning environments?

a. In what ways do teachers seek to understand and honor the authentic identities of their students?

b. In what ways do teachers seek to integrate the knowledge of student identities into the curriculum?

During the 90-day cycle of inquiry, the research questions were used to focus conversations, interviews, and journaling to guide the understandings in this research. After a thorough collection of information, the results were shared with the research team for further analysis.

Researcher Positionality

An important part of qualitative research is the defining of the researcher's positionality in relation to the study. Positionality can be thought of as a description of who the researcher is and the connections they may have to the context of the research (Sybing, 2022). However, this is only the beginning of the ways in which positionality should be considered. When thinking about the relationship between the researcher and the participants, it is critical to note the positions they hold in relation to one another and consider ways in which this might impact the research design and data collection. One's own subjectivity, or subject positions, can help the researcher understand the various dynamics at play in their research (Bhattacharya, 2017). Our assumptions, beliefs, and values intersect with our personal identity groups to inform the ways in which we interact with our research topic. Additionally, exploring positionality is not static or simple. Instead, researcher identities are dependent on the given situation and context (Lam, 2021). Given this understanding of positionality, it is important to understand my own subject positions and how they may influence the ways in which I conduct the research.

I am positioned by several identities that shape the approach to this research. I identify as a white woman from an upper-middle class background. I speak English as my first and only language, and I have held a position in education for over thirty years. I hold multiple degrees in education and have held various positions in public education settings. I have been a teacher, an instructional coach, an instructional assistant professor, a principal, and currently I hold a district-level position as Director of Elementary Education. I recognize the many layers of privilege that are part of my identities and know that I will need to keep this perspective throughout my research. I am also aware of my potential biases and will continue to seek awareness of the ways in which these could shape my research. Additionally, I know that as I conduct my research, it will be important to recognize and be aware of subjectivity in the following areas:

1. My working relationships with teachers. As I conducted interviews and participated in course discussions with research participants, my position of power within the district was a factor that was always considered. I was aware of the layers of trust and comfort that my participants needed to have while doing this type of difficult work alongside me given my current position in the district.

2. My racial and cultural identity. As I worked to support teachers through a growing capacity for self-awareness as a means to incorporate authentic centering of student narratives, especially from marginalized communities, I knew I needed to hold a level of awareness that my positionality and levels of privilege inform the ways in which I interacted with participants, especially those from nondominant identities. I remained aware of my position when doing this work in order to create environments that were trusting and authentic. I sought to listen and learn and be aware of the ways in which this

work may impact people of color in this space and worked to ensure that the space felt

safe and supportive.

3. My role as a mother. My son's own journey of racial and cultural identity has driven my

    interest in this topic. I recognize that all people experience the world in unique ways and

    that teachers are informed by their own sets of identities and experiences that are likely

    different from mine. My relationship with my son and his journey was core to the reason

    behind this study, so I maintained awareness of potential bias in this area and sought to

    remain openly objective about the work.

Education is never neutral and the same can be said about one's positionality. I acknowledge

that my position in this study was not neutral and was informed by my own set of identities and

beliefs. This was a critical factor in the work that I did for this study.

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach that situated the researcher in the

field, leaning into opportunities to observe, ask questions, and collect stories and experiences

from teachers as they completed a district course designed to build self-awareness and a capacity

for thinking about lived experiences that differ from their own. Qualitative research has been

defined by Creswell (2013) as "the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people

and places under study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Another way to consider qualitative research is

by considering the work "within the context of human experiences and the ways in which

meaning is made out of those experiences" (Bhattacharya, 2017). In this study, data was

collected within the school and district settings through the lens of a new social studies

curriculum and a professional learning course.

Specifically, this research followed the methodology of a phenomenological study. Creswell (2013) states that a phenomenological study is one that describes "the common meaning for several participants of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 76). A phenomenological study seeks to find the essence of these lived experiences and question the meanings that are made through these experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017; Farrell, 2020). Phenomenology rests on the assumption that there is a fixed essence to the lived experience of a phenomenon and that the meaning of the experience can be captured through those lived experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). Phenomenology was a good option for this study. While this form of research is more common in the medical field, educational spaces are excellent areas to pay attention to the insights of the human condition (Farrell, 2020). Because teaching and learning are predicated on relationships, connections, and knowledge about the experiences of others, phenomenological methodology was a natural choice for this study.

In this research, I examined ways in which the common lived experience of teachers receiving a new social studies curriculum paired with more focused professional learning fostered ways in which they valued the cultural identities of their students and how they are represented through the elementary social studies curriculum. The beliefs and values of the participants was collected at the beginning of the study and again throughout the study, ending with a culminating look at the experience and how it may or may not have shaped teacher perceptions and actions.

Research Setting

The setting of this study was a mid-sized PreK-12 school district in the midwestern United States. The district is home to six elementary schools, each with approximately 18 teachers in elementary grades K-5. The district has an established Elementary Social Studies

Task Force that met over the previous year with a focus on selecting a new social studies curriculum. This task force consisted of approximately 12 teachers from grades 1 through 5 that were committed to continuing social studies integration into our curriculum.

Participant Sampling

As the school year began, a district-level course was offered to interested teachers from elementary grades K-5. This course, *Toward More Culturally Responsive Social Studies Instruction: Understanding and Applying the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards to Elementary Social Studies*, was limited to 24 participants, all of whom demonstrated a commitment and desire to work on topics such as identity, race, privilege, and bias and the ways in which these concepts connect to teaching and learning. I anticipated that many of these course participants would also be members of the existing Elementary Social Studies Task Force. However, only three of the ten participants had been members.

Once the course roster was determined, an email request was sent asking for research study participants. Of the ten course participants, six agreed to participate in the research portion of the study. Using a convenience sampling approach meant participants were selected based on their willingness to participate (Gill, 2020). While convenience sampling has limitations that include the risk of not getting a representative sample, in this study, six of the ten course participants volunteered to be a part of the research. I was comfortable that the research participants would be strongly representative of the entire group of course participants. I was confident that I would get enough information from the group to draw conclusions about the experiences of participating in the course and the adjacent experiences of teaching a new social studies curriculum.

The research participants spanned four elementary schools and three grade levels. One research participant teaches in a bilingual classroom. The research participants had varying years of teaching experience, came from within and beyond the school district, and had multiple racial identities. Of the research participants, one identified as Latina and one as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Two of the participants speak multiple languages. All participants in the course were female. Teachers in district elementary schools are 88% female and 87.8% white, so the demographics of the class participants were not surprising.

Data Collection

Interviews

Evidence collection for the study came mainly in the form of interviews. Prior to the first course session, I scheduled individual interviews with all six participants. Each interview was conducted in the classroom of the teacher. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and questions were flexible depending on the responses of the participant. Interviews were audio recorded with permission of the participants for later transcription. Interviews were also conducted with the study participants following the final course. The questions at the second interview were adjusted to focus on the work of the course. The interview questions are found in Appendix B. While the interviews were intended to gauge growth in the participants understanding and application of course content, the phenomenological nature of the study was ultimately intended to draw conclusions about a common lived experience (Peoples, 2021). In this case, the common experience was implementing a new social studies curriculum while simultaneously participating in a focused professional learning experience designed to highlight the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices.

A semi-structured interview form was utilized, which allowed the researcher an "openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects" (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). Appendix B outlines the Interview Protocol designed to guide the participants through a series of questions that began broadly and slowly honed in on more detailed questions that were aimed to get at the essence of the research questions for the study. This protocol was developed by the researcher and was designed to explore the essence of the research questions. This was created by developing sub questions from the main research questions that are phrased in a way that is accessible and easy to understand (Creswell, 2013, p. 164). The goal of the interview was to create a comfortable and open conversation that got at the essence of the experience the teacher was having with the new social studies curriculum in combination with the district course materials focused on the ISBE CRTLS (2022).

Journaling

Another method of data collection was intended to occur through journaling. Through a series of intentionally constructed journal prompts within professional learning experiences, the researcher assigned journal entries designed to provide insight and understanding of the impact of the intervention. The journaling occurred in two of the class sessions. Journal prompts are found in Appendix C. The journaling prompts were partially adapted from ISBE CRTLS (2022) professional development materials, specifically the Participant Workbook for Self-Awareness and Systems of Oppression. Reflection questions were used throughout the professional learning sessions that guided participants to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the ways in which they were able to synthesize course content with application to social studies instruction.

Despite the intention to collect journal responses as research evidence, only one study participant shared their journal entries with the researcher at the end of the course. This was likely a result of a variety of factors, including the personal nature of the journal entries and the lack of clarification on the part of the researcher that the journal entries were intended to be collected for the research study. Despite the lack of information from the journal entries, I still felt I had sufficient evidence to extract the essence of this experience through other data collection, so the journals ended up being personal to the participants and a vehicle for their own reflection and growth.

Additional Evidence Collection

Ongoing evidence was also collected during the study through a participant survey, observations of coursework, and a final course project. Results of course discussions, the participant survey, observations, and participant feedback were discussed with the co-facilitator during planning sessions. This information was central to our planning and preparation as we designed the course with the participants in mind. The final course project was another source of understanding what the participants took away from the course and helped to gauge their interpretation of the experience. The final projects were presented virtually and the session was recorded with permission of the participants. All evidence was coded with the lens of emotion coding, in vivo coding, and value coding to determine the feelings, beliefs, and essence of the participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted to arrive at findings that addressed the research questions for the study. The approach to data analysis was connected directly to the types of data collected. Analysis was ongoing and iterative throughout the study and was continuously evaluated as the

cycle evolved. Interviews, a mid-course survey, and final course projects were used as data points for analysis.

Coding and Theming the Data

When determining a coding system for analyzing data, one must first understand the approach to the data analysis. Saldaña (2021) has outlined a detailed set of coding systems that align with approaches to analysis of data. He notes that understanding the nature of your questions, combined with the views of the researcher will drive your options for coding. For this study, I used coding methods aligned with theories of knowing and an understanding of the phenomenon that sought to explore participants' experiences with a new social studies curriculum as they also worked through a professional learning experience aligned with the ISBE CRTLS (2022). Descriptive coding methods were used in a first analysis of the data from the interview transcripts to help determine the big ideas of the interviews. Affective coding methods were used in subsequent reviews of the interview transcripts. Emotion coding and value coding allowed the researcher to reexamine the ideas through multiple lenses. In vivo coding was also considered as a valuable way of understanding the essence of the interviews. Through in vivo coding, I was able to consider the actual words and phrases of the participants as they described their experiences.

Once coding was completed, the next step was theming the data. Saldaña (2021) notes that a theme is "an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection" (p. 175). Researchers who use themes should analyze the coded data and begin to group the codes into bigger ideas that show commonality. These themes were used to interpret the experiences and responses of the participants and informed the analysis of the data. As with coding, themes are tied directly to the ways in which the researcher approaches the categorization of ideas and can

be approached in multiple ways (Saldaña, 2021). Four main themes were identified through this process. 1) Teachers value their students and want to know them better, but they do not always know how to go beyond the surface level or incorporate student identities into the classroom, 2) Teachers want to know more about culturally responsive practices and how to bring them to their classroom spaces, 3) Teachers value professional learning experiences that are driven by their interests and needs, and 4) Teachers are uncertain about their role in bringing equity work to their schools.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with any research, there are potential limitations to this study. First, the sampling of research participants began with willing participants who were already committed to doing the difficult work of personal growth and racial equity work. This is not representative of the entire set of teachers in the school district. Reproducing this study with participants who are less ready or willing to take on this type of work would likely yield different results and would need a reexamination and design of the intervention itself. This process is always subjective and will need to be taken into consideration when further replicating and extending this work.

Another limitation to this study is the racial and cultural identity of the researcher. As a white woman, I have limited capacity and understanding for the challenges that are faced daily by students and teachers of marginalized communities. It will be my responsibility to connect with educators of color to support and potentially lead parts of this work in order to draw upon authentic experiences and understandings.

As all research studies have limitations, so they have delimitations. In the case of this study, the delimitations are focused on what the study will not be able to cover. This biggest factor in this is time. Our cycle of inquiry is focused and limited to 90 days. Because this is a

short amount of time, the study will not be able to examine all components that address the problem of practice. The work needed to create systems of inclusive teaching practices that honor and center diverse experiences and perspectives is long and difficult. It must be tackled one piece at a time. The first piece of this is the inner work of the adults who are designing the work within classrooms. This work can take years to develop and cannot be accomplished in a semester of school. My first instinct in this research was to jump directly to designing lesson and experiences, but I quickly realized that we are not ready to do that in meaningful and impactful ways. This study is not able to look beyond the first CRTL standard in the 90-day cycle. We are not able to cross reference all lessons in our new social studies curriculum and we are not able to involve all teachers in this iteration.

CHAPTER VI: IMPLEMENTING THE INTERVENTION AND COLLECTING DATA

The Intervention

Planning and implementing an effective professional learning experience was at the heart

of this study. In this case, the planned intervention was a 90-day cycle of inquiry through the

delivery of a district-level course, titled *Toward More Inclusive Social Studies Instruction (K-5):*

Understanding and Applying the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards

to Elementary Social Studies Practices. The course was designed to increase teachers' self-

awareness of their own identities and the ways in which student identities are authentically

represented in their classrooms, especially through the lens of social studies. Appendix D

provides the course description and parameters. The 15-hour course is a common professional

learning structure in the district and is part of the way the district provides growth opportunities

for teachers.

Planning the Course

As I began to plan for the district course, I quickly realized that the work would be

greatly strengthened with a co-facilitator. I knew I wanted this person to be a practicing

classroom teacher to lend authenticity to the work and to bring a practitioner's perspective to the

course. A candidate quickly came to mind as thought of a teacher who had previously expressed

interest in co-facilitating a book study about culturally responsive teaching. At the time of her

interest, an opportunity for that book study did not work out, so I was hopeful that she would be

interested in joining me in teaching this course. I reached out to Kendra, a second-grade teacher,

and she quickly accepted the invitation. I hoped that by having a classroom teacher co-facilitate

the course I would mitigate some of the assumed layers of power that are inherent in my position

as a district-level administrator. Her voice was critical in lending a practitioner's lens to the work

as well as building trust that this work was collaborative and meant to be grown from within, not a top-down approach to learning

Kendra is an early career second-grade teacher at a diverse school with a high rate of families living below the poverty line. Kendra identifies as Black. She was recently married and is expecting her first baby. Kendra is not local to our community. She was raised and educated in a larger city environment and moved to this area after graduating from college with a bachelor's degree in education. Kendra was previously involved in the district selection process for the new social studies curriculum. She was enthusiastic about the opportunity to co-facilitate this course and was an integral part of the planning process.

Kendra and I met weekly for five weeks prior to the start of the class. We spent this time getting to know one another better and also looking through resources that would help us plan the course. The process was fulfilling for both of us as we were able to brainstorm, problem-solve, and create learning opportunities that would allow our participants to explore their personal identities, explore the standards for the course, and prepare to integrate the work into social studies lessons. In planning the course, we both knew we wanted to have a set of learning criteria that would focus the work, but we also wanted to follow the lead and input of the class participants. For this reason, we planned the first two sessions fully and left the remaining sessions more loosely structured to allow for teacher input. Once the class started, we continued to meet in between class sessions to plan the coursework moving forward.

Our planning was initially based on the professional learning resources provided by ISBE to support the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (ISBE, 2022). Within each 2-hour session, we wanted to find a balance of equity work and application within social studies. The initial sessions were focused on the concepts of identity, power, and privilege. We planned

to have participants explore social and personal meanings of identity with an understanding that we all have multiple, intersecting identities that play a critical role in how we experience the world (Crenshaw, 2016). We set aside time within each session for application to our social studies units and how the concepts of identity, power, and privilege may inform the ways in which we choose to teach these units. In later sessions, some of our professional learning resources drew directly from our social studies curriculum (inquirED, 2020) and were focused on tenets of culturally responsive education in social studies. This allowed participants to directly connect our learning from previous sessions with their new social studies curriculum in a practical way.

Kendra and I met in between class sessions to reflect and plan our next steps. At our meetings, we started by reflecting on the conversations and revelations of the previous class. Participant input was critical to our planning and we used conversation topics, course work, and reflections from homework to design each session moving forward. We took notes during the class sessions that informed our planning. We also altered our original outline as the teachers in the class expressed interest in various topics.

Format of the Course

The course sessions were designed to be largely discussion-based and the structure was informed by the tenets of Critical Professional Development which include opportunities for cooperation, unity, organization of shared power, and cultural synthesis (Kohli et al., 2015; Picower, 2015; Parkhouse et al., 2023). The idea of cooperation includes the ability for participants to connect, become part of a community, and know their voice is heard. Unity is focused on building relationships and a sense of shared purpose. Shared power is also important

in a critical professional development model. Kendra and I were committed to designing a learning space that allowed for all of these to occur.

Participant Feedback to Inform the Course

As we begin teaching the course, we realized that our plans would need to be adapted to meet the responses of the participants and to adjust for the input we received in each session. After session two, we asked participants to fill out a survey to help us continue to plan for work that was meaningful to them. The survey consisted of three questions designed to help drive our next steps: 1) What has been your biggest take away from this course so far? 2) What would you most like to learn more about in this course? and 3) What suggestions or input do you have for the facilitators? We analyzed the results of this survey to design further sessions that considered the voice of the participants and their shared requests for the focus of the work.

An analysis of this survey showed that participants had positive feelings about the course. They appreciated the time to talk and collaborate in a safe space. They expressed the value of challenging their own ways of thinking about teaching and being inclusive. It was clear from the responses that the course participants were committed to creating inclusive spaces that reflected the identities of their students. However, they were seeking more resources and support for how to put this into action. A topic that came up frequently was the approach to winter holidays in schools. Most of the teachers acknowledged that the centering of Christmas in their schools felt problematic to them, but they did not know how to counter this dominant narrative. Kendra and I took this feedback and made sure to address these topics in future classes. We centered the voices of the participants and designed sessions that honored their input.

Implementing the Course

Course Sessions

The course was scheduled for six two-hour sessions after school beginning in late September and ending in mid-December. Each session was approximately two weeks apart, giving time for application of concepts, reflection, and completing any assignments that were given. Kendra and I co-facilitated the course, taking turns leading discussions and sharing information. Each session was designed to focus on topics related to equity as well as time to work on application to social studies instruction. The topics covered and homework assignments are outlined in Table 5. Attendance in the course was regular and participants seemed eager to attend and work with colleagues around the topics we were learning.

Table 5

Inclusive Social Studies Course Outline			
Session/Date	Equity Focus	Teaching Application	Homework
Session 1: 9/27/23	Identity Power and Privilege	Common definition of social studies Connect social studies lessons to identity	Watch a video focused on identity and be prepared to discuss
Session 2: 10/11/23	Normalization Dominant Narratives	Families and Holidays Evaluate social studies lessons for dominant narratives	Design a learning experience from a counter-narrative lens Complete feedback survey
Session 3: 10/25/23	Understanding culture Creating counter narratives	Holidays in the classroom De-centering common narratives	Implement an idea in your classroom Podcast: Recovering the Voice of Native Americans in the Classroom (Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2019)
Session 4: 11/15/23	Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) The power of stories	Examine social studies curriculum for ways to incorporate tenets of CRE	Plan for CRE strategies in your classroom Podcast: Demystifying the Myths and Misconceptions Around Culturally Responsive Social Studies (Ferlazzo, 2020)
Session 5: 11/29/23	CRE Instructional Strategies Overcoming barriers	Analyze a social studies lesson for authentic content and CRE Instructional Strategies Customizing for your students	Create a final project answering the Essential Question: "What does it mean to design inclusive, culturally responsive practices in my social studies classroom?"
Session 6: 12/6/23	Reflection and Sharing of Final Projects		

Course Goals

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTLS)

One main goal of this course was to familiarize teachers with the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards. These standards are comprehensive and we knew we could not cover them in their entirety during this course. We decided to focus on Standard A: Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others. This standard states that "culturally responsive teachers are reflective and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and how they impact others, leading to more cohesive and productive student development." (ISBE, 2020, p. 1) Standard A has ten descriptors, outlined in Appendix F. Kendra and I felt that this was the perfect opening for the work we wanted to accomplish. This standard informed the class modules heavily, especially at the beginning of the course. We started the course by introducing the concept of identity and how it connects to power and privilege. Our goal was to connect with Descriptor 6 of the Standard: Culturally responsive teachers explore their own intersecting identities, how they were developed, and how they impact daily experience of the world (ISBE, 2022).

Connecting to Student Identities

During the span of the course, Kendra and I built in multiple ways that teachers could continue to connect more meaningfully with their students' identities. In session three, we read the picture book *Our Favorite Day of the Year* (Ali, 2020). In this book, a Kindergarten teacher asks each student to share their favorite day across the span of the school year. Assumptions are made by children such as, "Eid is my favorite day so that must be everyone's favorite day." As the story moves along, students share days that are important to them and their families, including Pi Day and Las Posadas. Christmas is mentioned in the book, but it is not the dominant

celebration, nor does it take precedence over any other special day. This was followed by a suggestion that teachers in our course could have students fill out calendars showing their favorite days and talk about them in school. Both of these were launching points for understanding students more authentically.

Connecting to Social Studies

Kendra and I knew that a main goal of this course was to connect topics of personal growth and equity to social studies instruction in the classroom. Initially, part of the plan was to use the ISBE Social Science Standards to guide our work. However, at the time of the course the standards had been removed from publication for revision. Because we did not want to work with outdated standards, we did not use them as heavily as we planned in this course. Instead, we focused on the standards that were embedded in our new social studies curriculum, Inquiry Journeys from inquirEd (2020).

We designed each course session to begin with an equity-centered topic, then move on to a focus on applying the work to social studies instruction. Table 5 outlines the application topics for each session. At our first session, for example, we learned about identity and the power and privileges that accompany certain identities in our society. The second part of the session involved participants working in grade-level teams to browse through their social studies unit and find places where they could potentially connect to identity. They worked to create a list of strengths and areas of opportunity within the unit. Each subsequent session followed a similar pattern. We would launch the class with an experience grounded in equity topics informed by the ISBE CRTLS and then move into our new social studies curriculum documents for evaluation and further opportunities for connection.

In another session, we read about dominant narratives, discussing what is normalized in our education systems, particularly focused on families and holidays informed by a reading from Chapter 3 of *Social Studies for a Better World* (Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022). Following that work, we looked more closely at our social studies units and spent time noticing what narratives were being centered and if there were opportunities for counter narratives. Participants noted multiple strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum in this area. A social studies unit on innovation, for example, provided stories of inventors that were predominantly white males. The group determined that there was an opportunity to add diversity to these stories to provide counter narratives around innovation. This topic was particularly compelling to one participant who teaches in a Spanish bilingual classroom. She was seeking representation in that unit that looked more like her students' cultural identities. Another unit was focused on Native America, and the group thought that the entire unit was a counter narrative to the typical approach in American schools, which tends to focus on westward expansion of white settlers.

Coursework and Homework

Sessions of this course were designed to be interactive and allow time for participants to collaborate, share ideas, and reflect. Each session was focused on the essential question for the course, "What does it mean to design inclusive, culturally responsive practices in my social studies classroom?" Each session included intentionally designed components that allowed for writing, collaborating on charts, completing surveys, journaling, or lesson design. In session 1, for example, participants filled out an Identity Wheel (Appendix G) from the ISBE CRTLS Professional Development Materials (ISBE, 2022 adapted from Morgan, 1996). This activity is allowed participants to reflect on their multiple identities and how each one has different layers

of power and privilege or oppression in our society. We discussed dominant and non-dominant cultural identities and ways that these influence the way we experience the world.

In another session, participants collaborated to create a digital chart (Appendix H) brainstorming ways we can challenge dominant narratives related to families and holidays. This was a result of a chapter we read in *Social Studies for a Better World* (Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022) focused on what we normalize in school in regards to families and holidays.

Stories were an integral part of the assigned homework and coursework. Through videos, books, and podcasts we explored various topics through lenses that represented different points of view. In a session focused on identity, for example, we watched a TED Talk by America Ferrera (2019) titled *My Identity is a Superpower – Not an Obstacle*. This launched a deeper conversation about self-identity and the identities of our students.

Homework was assigned after each session and included a variety of applications and research. Videos, podcasts, articles, and other resources were launching points for session reflections and application to teaching practices. Homework assignments are outlined in Table 5. The final homework assignment was to create a visual representation of the essential question of the course. Participants presented their projects to the group at the final class session. Projects varied from slideshows to book lists. Samples are included in Appendices F and G.

Concluding the Course

The final session of the course took place online due to lack of a meeting space. This session was designed for participants to share their final projects and a Zoom session was conducive to that. While the session lacked the personal aspect of meeting together in a shared space, there was a comfort level with online meetings, and I didn't feel it detracted from the

value of the course. Several participants collaborated with a colleague from their school on the final presentation, which made the learning even more impactful.

Presenting the Evidence Without Interpretation

The goal of this study was to examine the ways in which elementary teachers seek to understand the authentic identities of their students and incorporate that information into social studies learning experiences. This study sought to understand teachers' shared experiences as they navigated a new social studies curriculum while participating in a district course aimed at building a deeper understanding of culturally responsive practices. Data was collected through a series of interviews with elementary teachers prior to the start of the class and at its conclusion. During the interviews, teachers spoke about the ways in which they seek to know their students and how that information informs their teaching practices. The data findings are presented in this section without interpretation. Additional data was collected through a final course project.

Interviews were conducted prior to the beginning of the district course and after its completion. Throughout the interviews, teachers shared their personal and classroom experiences, ways in which they seek to learn about their students, their understanding of social studies instruction, and how culturally responsive teaching is incorporated into their work with students. In this section, I present the themes identified from teachers' experiences participating in an equity-focused professional learning experience while implementing a new social studies curriculum. Findings presented in this section were guided by the research questions for the study.

1. How can the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (ISBE, 2022) inform teacher practices in elementary social studies?

2. How does the self-awareness of teachers impact the ways in which they challenge

    dominant narratives in elementary social studies?

3. How do teachers ensure the cultural diversity of their students is authentically

    represented within classroom learning environments?

Themes of the Interviews

Upon completion of the interviews, results were studied and coded using several first

cycle coding methods. Through the use of emotion coding, value coding, and in vivo coding, the

results of the interviews were synthesized into themes. Four main themes arose from this study.

1) Teachers value their students and want to know them better, but they do not always know how

to go beyond the surface level or incorporate student identities into the classroom; 2) Teachers

want to know more about culturally responsive practices and how to bring them to their

classroom spaces; 3) Teachers value professional learning experiences that are driven by their

interests and needs; and 4) Teachers are uncertain about their role in bringing equity work to

their schools.

Teachers Value Student Identities

Knowing Students

During the initial interviews and the concluding interviews, participants were asked about

ways in which they get to know their students. Teachers value their students and want to get to

know them better, but they don't always know how to go beyond the surface level. Teachers

mentioned asking students questions during informal conversations or giving them space to share

their ideas. Multiple teachers mentioned attending sporting events outside of school when invited

by students. Two teachers live in the same neighborhood as their school and shared stories of

seeing students outside of class informally. None of the teachers discussed the racial or ethnic

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identities of their students, with many seeming uncomfortable when asked to describe students in this way. Several teachers noted that they had students who spoke another language, but were not able to expand beyond statements like, "I think it's Spanish. Yes, it's Spanish" or "I have one student who was kind of shy about it, so I didn't push it. I didn't ask her to speak it, but she speaks Spanish. It's spoken to her." One teacher teaches in the bilingual program and she was more comfortable talking about the countries her students were from and the experiences they had in their home countries compared to students who are second or third-generation residents of the United States.

During the second round of interviews, several teachers discussed a calendar activity from the course that helped them know about special days that families were celebrating. One teacher was particularly interested in supporting a student who is a Jehovah's Witness. When assigning the monthly celebration calendar to the family, the teacher made sure to have the student note days that were important to the family instead of celebrations. She noted, "this student does not do celebrations because of their religion. I hadn't thought of that before assigning the calendar. So instead I asked the student to write down important dates for their family. I found out they study at the church many days a week so I was able to mention that to the student and tell them that I hope their study session went well and talk to them about it." Another teacher discussed feeling more comfortable talking directly with families after taking the course. She noted the difference in the following way.

I was just very timid when approaching different families because I didn't want to offend them in any way. I really wanted to get to know them and if there were culture differences, I wanted to know the differences but I didn't know how to approach it in a culturally sensitive way because I didn't really know if something would offend them or

maybe they don't wanna share or maybe I'm being too much or, too invasive, but not meaning to. So, I think from this course it gave me the tools to navigate that. I have gained the finesse to talk to families and just kind of be really open and honest. I don't say it out outright, like I don't wanna offend you, but having that confidence to navigate those conversations has opened the door for me to get to know the students. And there's little things here there, stuff that they don't celebrate and what they do celebrate, how they celebrate it, because that could be different from a book. You know here's a Hanukkah book, but it could be different in their family.

One teacher talked about the increased depth of conversation she had with her students. She said, "It just kinda the way you can, I guess, process conversations differently rather than it just being like, What do you like? What do you eat at home? But like really thinking about how that all encompasses into this little being that's in front of me."

Integrating Student Identities into the Classroom

During the first round of interviews, teachers were vague when asked ways in which they incorporate student identities into their classroom. Several mentioned having student pictures or artwork on the walls. One teacher talked about having posters with different colors or buying band-aids in different skin tones. Several mentioned reading books with diverse characters as being important to them. The teacher from the bilingual program has her students complete a heritage project each fall where the students make a presentation about their home culture and share it with the class. One teacher discussed asking families to send in pictures from home of things they do on the weekend and having students share them. She mentioned that a lot of them

are sporting events. She shared one example where "one of my students got to hold a snake over the weekend and she liked showing the students that. The kids love it."

In the second round of interviews, teachers were more descriptive when discussing ways in which they incorporate student identities into their classrooms. One teacher shared how taking the course had altered her understanding of the value of student identity.

I think it makes me be aware of the multiple identities that students have and then also in communicating with families and just the different just the multiplicity of each of the individual students, you know, not just seeing them for gender and race and class and like kind of those typical things, but looking at it on broader terms. You know like we did the *Our Favorite Day* book. It's just what their favorite day was and just how, I don't know, how big that identity piece is. It's not just something you can like go through a checklist necessarily.

Another teacher also discussed using *Our Favorite Day of the Year* (Ali, 2020) with her students on a regular basis. She described the impact below.

I've kept it out and we've read it maybe three times. And each time we do I learn a little tidbit from somebody about something they celebrate. And it's not a holiday usually. Somebody said she's got two siblings who are much older in high school and one might be in college now. And they celebrate report cards, so that's so and so's favorite day of the year because they get really good grades. Somebody else celebrates when grandma comes into town. That's a celebration for them. So, I just learned little bits about their families, their celebrations, little tiny pieces of their cultures, and traditions which has been fun.

Yet another teacher was more cautious with her explanation, stating, "I would say is something that I'm still working on, trying to find ways for them to have a little more identity in the classroom. I do try to give them opportunities to tell about themselves, especially with our new social studies curriculum like finding ways to relate. Like right now we're studying different artifacts. so just trying to find different ways for them to connect and giving them the floor for that. But I think because that opportunity is so new to the kids that it's tough for them. It's also tough for me, too So it's something that we're all kind of learning and working on together."

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching Practices

During the initial round of interviews, teachers were asked about their knowledge of culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) or culturally sustaining teaching (Paris, 2012). For the most part, the teachers did not know what this was. A few had heard the term, but could not describe it. One participant did understand what culturally responsive teaching was based on a prior course and her graduate studies. The rest of the teachers were not able to describe this term beyond some attempts to describe it based on other equity work. One teacher stated, "That makes me think of not using my implicit bias to respond to something that happens. So that also makes me think of using my experiences and knowledge of being an open person who tries to listen first to then use that knowledge to respond." Another said, "I have heard of it, but I have not had much exposure to it. I think it's, um, being in control and being aware of the different cultures in my classroom, but then also making my students aware of other cultures."

In the second round of interviews, participants were asked again about their knowledge of culturally responsive practices. The comfort level when answering this had increased from the first round of interviews. Teachers were able to give longer descriptions such as "I think it means

just being cognizant that everybody brings something different to the table, being aware of that, accepting that but also encouraging that." Another teacher talked further about culturally responsive teaching, saying

> I know now that I really need to get to know individual families more than just the classroom group, kind of like differentiating for a reading group or differentiating for the individual instead. Kinda like what you were saying, the kids are different when they're home then they're here. And we all need to learn how to code switch a bit. You know I'm not gonna text my friends the way I email my teacher, but I do want the space to be for everybody. I want the kids to see themselves in every aspect and area.

When another teacher was asked about culturally responsive teaching, she focused more on the lessons, stating

> It's pretty similar to me with just being very conscious and careful and aware of your lessons, the way you're coming across to students, and that even begins at the start of the day before you're teaching. You know how they would like to be greeted or touched. You know what do they want, asking first. It's in everything. Everything that I do as a teacher, always being aware, and thinking of others that aren't like me.

Dominant Narratives

During the initial round of interviews, participants were asked to discuss the concept of multiple perspectives or points of view. The terms were carefully selected as a precursor to learning about the concept of dominant narratives in school. Teachers were comfortable talking about the idea of multiple perspectives. When asked, one teacher stated, "I'm all about the

different perspectives, and the different ways of looking at things." She talked about a book study she had done that stated humans seek similarities when they meet someone. She went on to state it was important to her that she listen and get outside of her comfort zone. She continued, "Get their perspective, get their, um, what they want to tell you about where they come from. Not necessarily what will make you comfortable." Another teacher discussed her understanding of multiple perspectives by replying,

> I think just helping students to see beyond their immediate life, you know, realizing that there's so much more out there, respecting each other. And I think that's the really awesome part about all the diversity we have at our school is there are so many experiences and just helping kiddos to respect that and see that and have that open mind. And even going beyond, you know, maybe what their grown up says is a family and the mom and dad or whatever it might be just kind of having that ability to develop their own viewpoints based on looking at all the different things that exist.

Other teachers shared their thoughts about multiple perspectives including "That means to me people thinking different things, believing different things, having different experiences" or "Telling two different sides of a story, not just a white male version of history. Oh, like with Thanksgiving, not hearing it just from the pilgrim's perspective. Hearing different sides of the story."

In the second round of interviews, the questions shifted from asking about multiple perspectives to asking about dominant narratives and how they show up in school spaces. This was an intentional switch in language after multiple sessions of the district course explored this concept through reading, listening, discussion and application. One teacher stated that the idea of dominant narratives in school was her biggest take away from the class. She shared her thoughts,

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"Dominant culture is not neutral. It's being more aware of the things. So, I consider myself the dominant culture at least around here. The things that are normal quote unquote, and what's in my face all the time and how that shouldn't be true or isn't true for everybody." Another teacher discussed dominant narratives by saying,

> I think for me dominant narrative would be like, I guess I've always just thought of the white way. That sounds really bad but, being a white American I think that it's the way that it was for a long time. The majority in life is changing and we're maybe not always going to be the majority. So, I guess a term that just always comes to my mind is like whitewashed, the whitewashed opinion of things and so learning and understanding that what we have always been taught isn't always you know the way it was.

Another teacher noted that dominant narratives show up everywhere, even in the calendar she purchased for her classroom walls. She described it how she bought the calendar because it had a lot of holidays on it, but later noted, "Then I noticed the dominant narrative is still there because the calendar name has Christmas trees on it. So, it's everywhere, as a school." Many teachers spoke about their discomfort with the heavy focus on Christmas at their schools, noting that the dominant narrative is, "Definitely here with the Christmas trees and the dominant narrative of Christmas, especially with our assembly is themed on Christmas. I noticed it quite a lot since I did before just because it's a passion of mine. But I'm part of the dominant narrative so now I have the other perspective of still recognize that I'm a part of the dominant narrative but I can step outside and say, whoa. This is like it's really in your face, you know, a lot." Another teacher described it by saying, "Right now in school everything is focused on Christmas. Like I would never have paid it much attention but now it seems I'm hyper-aware of it."

Challenging Dominant Narratives

In the second round of interviews, several teachers discussed ways in which they seek to challenge dominant narratives in school through the use of counter-narratives or different perspectives. This was a concept that was discussed and explored during the class and it rose to the surface in multiple second-round interviews. One teacher talked about the way she discussed Thanksgiving with her students, stating "I think just giving and finding the different narratives of things. So, I mentioned Thanksgiving, I know during the class we had looked a little closer in to some of the like Thanksgiving websites and found some, perspectives online from that. and just trying to make and make those connections and expose the students to those." Another teacher approached this topic by discussing ways she might approach it with her colleagues. She stated, "For example, if there are a group of teachers, and the dominant narrative is just what everyone agrees upon, having the confidence to say well what about this? Have we thought about this? Can we include this? I know that there are other teachers who would feel the same and so not being afraid, but not being invasive or pushy or, you have to change this or you have to do that." Another teacher discussed the idea of dominant narratives throughout her school. She stated, "And down in the office we've opened the gajillion Christmas trees and walked in the hall the holidays, even, in my hall the Santas. I've been really trying to figure out what am I gonna put up in the hallway that isn't representing a dominant narrative. It's really hard, that's why my turkeys are still out there." Another teacher described a conversation she had with a trusted colleague,

> I was talking to the art teacher the other day and she was bringing up teaching kids how
> to draw people and you know when she draws the mom she always draws them in a
> dress. So that's not necessarily you know? I don't ever wear a dress. But like just kind of

some of those things we do, I think even more so at the younger grades to like help them, or we draw straight hair. But like we, in a way, put the dominant in their mind because she was like, "Well, that's just how we see girls." And I'm like, but is it? Or have we made that be the way?

This teacher continued to describe her interaction with the art teacher saying, "Because I know her well, it was a great conversation. We left with more questions than we started with." She said that before she took the class, "I probably still would have said something to her but I wouldn't have continued the conversation. I just would have been like, I wonder why we do that? We're now like, by doing that what is the result that we are causing in our students?"

Professional Learning

Course Structure

Another theme that arose during the interviews was the approach to professional learning in the district course. This theme first came up in the mid-course survey that was designed to gather input from the course participants that would shape the planning of the remainder of the course. After session two, participants were asked to fill out a survey to provide input on the course. The survey consisted of three questions: 1) What has been your biggest take away from this course so far? 2) What would you most like to learn more about in this course? and 3) What suggestions or input do you have for the facilitators? Comments such as, "I am enjoying the thought-provoking ideas that are being shared in this space" and "Thank you for time to talk" led us to know that the teachers appreciated the format. Teachers mentioned that they liked the insightfulness of their fellow teachers and felt it was an open-minded space.

The structure of the professional learning was a common thread in the second round of interviews as well, as teachers reflected on their experiences in the course. Teachers were asked about the impact the course had on them personally and as a teacher. One teacher commented, "The main reason I took the course is that they (my students) deserve it. They deserve a teacher who is willing to learn more." She described herself as a mostly shy and reserved person, but felt comfortable talking and sharing in the class. She shared, "Being in a safe space during the course went beyond just words. I like when we were all respectful of each other. Where we were compassionate of each other." She continued,

I loved the spaces we had to talk where I could hear that I was not the only one who was not comfortable or like, fearful of teaching new things. I think of the person who said 'when we learn we stretch ' and there were times that I wasn't comfortable with sharing things or times that I wasn't comfortable, you know, like having a different opinion. Because I feel that we are so used to that to keep quiet. So, I love to hear all the people's experiences and I am not the only one who feels like an imposter when teaching.

Another teacher reflected on the course saying, "The course gave a safe space to be able to ask those questions that times maybe we feel we don't have that safe space." She continued to describe the feeling of a safe space, "If someone brought up a question, like maybe I was thinking the same thing but maybe did not have the guts to ask. Just knowing we could ask what we might consider tough questions and getting different ideas." An additional teacher commented,

I did not think our course was gonna be what it was when I got into it. I'm not sure that I knew, but I didn't realize it would be so discussion-based. But again, I like, really appreciated that. I love collaboration amongst peers, especially like everybody was there

for like the same reason. That was really, really awesome to be able to be able to hear it from others' perspectives.

Shared Experience

Many of the teachers attended the course with a colleague from their school and they discussed how powerful it was to have someone in their building to discuss the course with and to try things out. One teacher shared her feelings about this by saying, "It was really good. It was cool because we were able to talk a lot about things and, we were just constantly bouncing ideas off of each other and then even sharing things with (our teammate)." She continued to discuss the value of having someone to talk to about concepts from the class.

> It was nice to be able to have someone that you felt comfortable with you know because we are very good friends, outside of being coworkers, that was nice to know that like I mentioned some of those uncomfortable topics, to have someone that I felt comfortable with having those uncomfortable conversations and I think like it was good with (my teaching partner) because she's very thoughtful. So, she, you know always has very good opinions and things and she's just somebody I trust.

A different teacher also shared her experiences taking this course with a colleague. "I think it strengthened it for sure because we rode together, we carpooled. It was just that extra piece that strengthened the experience because we could even then collaborate more and take tangible ideas and experiences from our school and then talk about it right then and there."

Connection to Social Studies Instruction

Another concept that arose was the appreciation of the connection to social studies alongside the equity-focused work. One teacher described it by saying, "I wanted some of the

social studies curriculum to be talked about because we want to do right by this new curriculum but we don't know where to start. The course gave us the confidence because it was integrated." When asked about social studies instruction after experiencing the class, one teacher stated that she liked the curriculum, but was still trying to fit it into her schedule. She mentioned making time for a parent to come in to do a black history presentation, stating it was "super important to their family." Another teacher described her shifting approach to social studies, stating

> I think that a big shift is that it's not we're not giving, at least with the new social studies curriculum, not giving them like here are the facts, here's what we want you to know about these indigenous people. But it's a little more of like they're diving into it and they are trying to come up with the connections versus just being given the connections.

This teacher continued to talk about new ways she is beginning to approach social studies instruction. She stated she was making sure "it's not just centered around the main culture here in the United States. Trying to have my students learn about other cultures, they lack the empathy for that. We are working on building empathy." Another teacher described her scheduling approach to teaching social studies, saying "So, I'm not necessarily doing, like a set social studies time but trying to kind of bring it more conversationally and like through circles and different pieces like that. So, we're still kind of doing it but it's not like social studies block." This same teacher continued to talk about what she felt was important about social studies. She said, "It's more changing the way they view the world, you know, being open minded, recognizing the multiple representations. The dominant/non-dominant thing just like really blew my mind. So, kind of having them have that broad open mind in a way that doesn't make things good or bad."

Personal Responsibility

During the second interview, teachers were asked what they envisioned their next steps might be. They were encouraged to share their thoughts about where they might take their learning from the course and how that might look in their classrooms or schools. One teacher discussed her increased comfort level by saying, "I have the confidence to include it into my lessons, especially around the dominant holiday times we talk about and we celebrate other non-dominant traditions and holidays year-round." Another teacher envisioned her next steps, "I think right now it's just looking at the rest this year through that kind of lens. Maybe redesigning some instruction based off of, you know cultural responsive practices." She continued by saying,

> I think that for me my next steps are to start kinda grade level, and I think build out from there for me. I mean that's where my comfort lies. I don't know that, you know what I mean? Like see people that I feel like you're doing something culturally irresponsible, as long as it's not hurting a student, I'm not inclined to up and say "Hey, have you ever thought about it this way?" But if it were to come up in conversation I most certainly would say, "Hey, have you ever thought about how this could make a certain student feel?"

Another teacher reflected, "And so I think just being more aware of things and it's made me, like a little more comfortable with being uncomfortable about things and being able to make a change. Like knowing that I maybe can't make the change with everyone, but feeling good about being uncomfortable myself and knowing like when I am in that uncomfortable space like, knowing the next steps to take or at least knowing in what direction I need to go."

Challenging School Norms Around Holidays

Several teachers tied their responses to the prominence of Christmas-themed activities in their schools, talking about ways in which they felt challenged to address this big topic. One teacher discussed the tradition of an all-school holiday sing-along,

> I don't know what songs are included on that, but we all get together in the gym and we all sing and it's like, I am not a religious person by nature so Christmas is more tradition just for me than it is religious based. And then of course, you know I'm thinking about my Jehovah Witness student and like, how that isolates them. But then also we're gonna do it as a grade-level and I kinda like don't know where to go with this one, too because we're gonna show the movie Elf because that's what we've always done. It's the hardest time of year, I think, for people who start to change this mindset.

The level of personal responsibility that many teachers felt to challenge dominant holiday narratives recurred in multiple interviews and in course discussions. One teacher mentioned "Friday we have our (holiday) sing-along that, you know, so that would be like a bigger thing but it's like we've got our feelers out for it. You know, that's maybe not where we're going to go next, but we've got you know got our feelers out." She shared more about her approach,

> Because I know for myself, sometimes it's like oh holidays like I'm just not going to do it. I'm just going to skip it over completely, you know, or certain topics like that makes me uncomfortable. So, I'm just not going to do it, not even gonna touch on it, but I think after taking the course going forward that it's sometimes a good thing to be uncomfortable, so, taking a little more initiative and going forward with that.

Another teacher shared her struggles with the Christmas traditions within her grade level. She told a story about a student, "I did end up putting a tree up and then I hate the Elf on the Shelf. But then I got this little letter from one of the kids who said, "How can I get this to one of the other teachers? Can you give this to so and so?" And it was like "Dear Santa, some classrooms have an elf on the shelf. Can we please have one?" So, I got a stupid elf. You know, because I couldn't kill the magic."

Moving Beyond the Classroom

Teachers were asked to share their vision for how this work could expand beyond individual classrooms. Many discussed sharing the ideas from the course with a trusted colleague at their grade level or within their school. They were also asked to share their ideas for district and building level layers of responsibility. One teacher felt she might be comfortable sharing in her school. She said,

> I'm used to a building where everyone trusts each other and listens to each other. I can't speak for the other buildings but if, maybe those of us from the class or even people who are much better experts were to present tidbits here and there, little things like dominant narrative not being neutral. I think that could have a bigger impact than DEI at the district level. That's important and I don't think that should go away, but I know people in a smaller group they see somebody they know and trust and have known for years and they say this thing and why you should buy into it and why this is important.

Another teacher shared her desire to hear more from building principals on this topic, facilitating discussions. She said,

I think it's so hard because I feel like the choice to take the class versus having to be in the DEI (district workshops) automatically changes the lens which people are absorbing information. But I think just somehow get it in front of them. I don't think that message is necessarily being communicated. And I think if we could get all admin on board and then admin could slowly, which I know top down is not great, but even just, you know we've been told we have to have a holiday party. Well, you know when admin is telling us we have to do this or we had to wear Halloween costumes. That makes it really hard. And that's no value judgment on what our administrators are knowing or doing. They are rock stars.

Some teachers mentioned the district-level Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) workshops that have been occurring for the last two years with all staff. One teacher shared her thoughts,

I think the DEI training is a really good step. I enjoy my group and the topics. I know just hearing people talk about some of those presentations or the conversations we're supposed to have in groups and then outside afterwards. I definitely know that you can hear there are teachers who just need to hear it, and they need to hear it a lot because they don't know.

Another teacher said she loved the district DEI work, but thought there could be more to it. She suggested, "I would say maybe integrate more voices in those groups that need to be heard. Real-time voices. I don't know how that would look or if that's possible. But then my other thought is and this could just be because I'm really passionate about diversity, making not classes maybe per se like the one I had with you but different trainings be required because they are so necessary and important."

Final Course Project

A final piece of evidence from this study came from the culminating project. Participants were asked to create a presentation that showcased their understanding of the essential question from the course, "What does it mean to design inclusive, culturally responsive practices in my social studies classroom?" This question was posed during every session of the course and was the predominant focus of our work. The final class was held virtually due to a scheduling issue. While the first five sessions of the class were held in person, the virtual format of this final reflection session worked well. Participants with school colleagues joined together and two groups co-created their final projects. With permission of the group, the session was recorded. Evidence from this session touches upon the four main themes of the interview but is presented here as a culminating piece. Samples of the projects are found in Appendices G and H. Stories shared here are solely from study participants and not from the additional teachers who participated in the course but did not volunteer to be a part of the study.

One participant broke the concepts up into three categories (Appendix J). She discussed the importance of knowing students' identities, culture, and differentiating experiences to meet the students' needs. She highlighted the importance of knowing your students authentically, including pronouncing names correctly, knowing families, and incorporating them into the lessons. She emphasized the importance of going beyond a surface understanding of culture, including linguistic diversity. Building these components into lesson design is a critical part of our work, she shared with the group.

Another participant put her thoughts into a word cloud (Appendix J). The background of the image is a world map covered with words that stood out from her notes, readings, and

reflections from the course. Larger words have a bigger weight on the image. Some of the heaviest weighted words in the image included diverse, thoughtful, relationships, inclusive, and beliefs. This teacher enjoys using visuals to keep ideas in the front of her mind and reminding her what she values when working with her students. This teacher talked about how hearing the other presentations made her want to change and adapt her word cloud. Other participants found this reflective and powerful.

A third participant shared a visual with four categories: Student Identity, Authentic Content, Awareness of Normalization, and Instructional Elements (Appendix I). She discussed the importance of knowing your students beyond the surface level and bringing that knowledge into your lessons. She talked about connecting content to culturally relevant examples from students' communities and everyday lives. This teacher also emphasized the importance of having awareness of what is normalized in schools and working to design counter narratives to provide balanced experiences. The awareness of normalization was her biggest take away from the course.

Another pair of teachers shared a list of diverse books they had collected and were using in their classrooms (Appendix I). One of the teachers shared a newsletter for communicating with families. The presentation also included a word cloud sharing elements of culture and the take-home calendar assignment. This teacher talked about ways they connected with families to move into non-dominant approaches to the holidays. She shared a picture of lanterns from a study of Diwali that her class had completed. One of the teachers discussed her appreciation of the emphasis on nondominant narratives and how they can be incorporated into her classroom.

The discussion among participants centered around the projects was rich and diverse. Teachers were reflective and appreciative of the different ways that they each approached the assignment. They pulled key ideas from each presentation and furthered the conversation after each person shared. It was reflective of the way this professional learning experience was designed and showcased the collaborative and safe nature of the group. The final portion of the session was focused on the personal and collective responsibility of the group to move this work forward. This thread of conversation was brought up by one of the teachers and the conversation was robust as suggestions were made to bring the work to regular staff meetings in the buildings, extend the district DEI work, or share examples of work with colleagues.

CHAPTER VII: EVALUATING THE INTERVENTION AND DERIVING DESIGN

PRINCIPLES

Evaluating an intervention is an ongoing and complex process. Much must be considered when seeking to understand the impact of the experience on the participants and the systems in which they operate (Bryk, et al, 2015; Mintrop, 2016) The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which teachers' increased awareness of students' identities influenced the ways in which they created learning environments that were representative of diverse students and nondominant narratives. The intervention sought to expose teachers to information, resources, and experiences that modeled this work and built personal capacity and understanding in teachers.

Interpreting the Findings

Following the intervention cycle, themes from the teacher interviews and final projects were analyzed. A phenomenological methodology was utilized in this study, so the work was focused on the shared experiences of teachers as they navigated a new social studies curriculum while taking a district course focused on increasing awareness of culturally responsive practices in their classrooms. This interpretation will consider design principles, the impact of the intervention on the research questions, and connect the interpretations back to the theory of action and the conceptual framework.

Design Principles

The problem of practice for this study was identified early in the research process. It was determined that elementary social studies instruction in the school district was not reflective of the students' identities or cultures. Students were being immersed in social studies learning experiences that were centered around a dominant narrative that did not represent the diverse

range of student identities found in the schools. Additionally, it was noted that teachers had not received any support for this work and that the district had not provided training or resources to help teachers understand how to challenge these narratives. The research team believed that implementing a course specifically focused on self-awareness and identity that was connected to social studies instruction would impact the way that teachers shifted their approaches to teaching.

Research Questions

The study examined three research questions. These questions were designed to inform the planning and implementation of the intervention and are considered here.

1. How can the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (ISBE, 2022) inform teacher practices in elementary social studies?

2. How does the self-awareness of teachers impact the ways in which they challenge dominant narratives in elementary social studies?

3. How do teachers ensure the cultural diversity of their students is authentically represented within classroom learning environments?

The research questions were examined through the analysis of teacher interviews, a teacher survey, and a final course project. All questions were analyzed with a phenomenological lens considering the holistic experiences and reactions of teachers to their experience in the course aligned with the implementation of a new social studies curriculum. All analysis was qualitative in nature and was achieved through coding and theming. A consideration of the first-round interviews conducted pre-course and second-round interviews conducted post-course were combined with an analysis of the final projects presented by teachers in the final course session.

ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTLS)

The first question sought to understand the ways in which the ISBE CRTLS (2022) could inform teacher practices in elementary social studies. The standards were at the heart of the course development and informed the learning objectives, especially in the first two sessions. The course designers chose to focus on Standard A: Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others (Appendix F). The standard states that "culturally responsive teachers and leaders are reflective and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and how they impact others, leading to more cohesive and productive student development as it relates to academic and social-emotional development for all students" (ISBE, 2022, p. 1). Standard A has ten sub-indicators, all of which informed the work and showed up during teacher interviews. During the initial round of interviews, teachers were general unaware that these standards existed and they were mostly unable to define or describe the idea of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). By the second round of interviews, several common indicators arose that supported the idea that the ISBE CRTLS can inform teacher practices. The first indicator that arose across interviews was A1: "Understand and value the notion that multiple lived experiences exist, that there is often not one "correct" way of doing or understanding something, and that what is seen as "correct" is most often based on our lived experiences" (ISBE, 2022, p. 1). Another indicator that was commonly infused into interview responses was A4: "Know about their students and their lives outside of school, using this knowledge to build instruction that leverages prior knowledge and skills" (ISBE, 2022, p. 1). Both of these indicators were present when teachers discussed getting to know their students and using that information in their classrooms. It was evident, however, that this was still occurring at a more superficial level and that further work in this area is required to fully integrate knowledge of students into instruction. Teachers seemed to

be just scratching the surface of these indicators, but they clearly informed the ways in which they spoke of their students and their classroom spaces.

There was additional evidence of the remaining eight indicators from Standard A in the interviews. Teachers frequently discussed the importance of using diverse and representative materials and content in their lessons, although they were just beginning to wonder about ways in which this could authentically occur. They were beginning to engage in self-reflection about their actions and potential biases as well as building an understanding of their own intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 2016) and the power and privilege that these identities bring or do not bring to their interactions in the world. The conclusion drawn here is that the ISBE CRTLS do have the potential to inform teacher practices. However, the standards are extensive and complex. The work with the standards would require meaningful interaction and practice with application in order to make lasting change. An awareness of the standards alone would not be sufficient for them to change practices.

Challenging Dominant Narratives

The second research question sought to understand ways in which increased self-awareness of teachers impacted the ways in which they challenged dominant narratives in elementary social studies. The concept of a dominant narrative (Jay, 2003; Apple, 2015; Agarwal-Rangnath, 2022) in school was new for most participants. The idea was introduced in session two of the course as we read about normalizing holidays and families in school (Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022). By the completion of the course, teachers had gained a beginning-level understanding of the concept of dominant narratives and counter-narratives. However, when asked about ways in which they seek to challenge dominant narratives, teachers were much less comfortable discussing or naming ways in which they might do this. Several

started to scratch the surface, mentioning teaching about holidays from different points of view or talking to colleagues about ways of doing things, but none seemed overly confident in this area.

The focus of conversations in the course and during the second-round interviews remained largely focused on holidays and the ways in which the dominant Christian holiday of Christmas was heavily normed in their elementary schools. It is worth noting that of the six research participants, four of them intentionally chose not to display Christmas items or focus directly on Christmas in their classrooms after taking the course. They all indicated that this was their past practice, but that they no longer felt comfortable with doing this. The two teachers who did decorate for Christmas were reluctant and apologetic in tone when describing their personal struggles with this narrative in their schools. Both of the teachers discussed how they had not planned to decorate for Christmas, but that pressure from their students made them change their minds. In other cases, school traditions such as sing-along events, movie showings, and classroom parties were events that caused all participants to experience dissonance around their responsibility to be more culturally responsive while still following school traditions.

In analysis, the self-awareness of teachers did appear to impact the ways in which they understood dominant narratives in schools. While the challenging of these narratives was not fully developed, the initial understanding of this concept did cause change in most spaces and it did appear to cause a shift in thinking among all teachers. In Chapter IV, I noted that an intervention must work to "intervene in existing knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, or routines in order to prompt new learning that leads to new practices" (Mintrop, 2018, p. 133). The conclusion drawn from this research question is that increased self-awareness did impact ways in which teachers sought to challenge dominant narratives. However, this work is complex and not

easily accomplished in a short amount of time. The shifts that did happen were indicative of the potential for change to occur with more time and exposure.

Incorporating Student Identities in the Classroom

The third research question sought to understand ways in which teachers ensure the cultural diversity of their students is authentically represented within classroom learning environments. This question was more complex, asking ways in which teachers sought to understand and honor the authentic identities of their students and to integrate that knowledge of into the curriculum. This was investigated through several direct interview questions and was addressed directly in multiple course sections. In analysis of the interviews and coursework, it was clear that teachers valued their students and wanted to get to know them more authentically. However, they did not always seem to know how to go beyond the surface level. Incorporating student identities into their teaching was also much more challenging. Teachers talked about their students with empathy and care. All participants spoke positively about their relationships with students and all expressed a desire to know their students well. Several teachers mentioned that they got to know students by attending sporting events when invited. While this seems like a valid method, it does present as a problematic approach as the only venue for learning about students as it excludes students who are not involved in sports or dance or who are not comfortable inviting their teacher to an event. Teachers who lived in the neighborhood of their school were focused on the children playing outside near the school. This excludes the remaining students who live outside of the immediate neighborhood. Few teachers had a more equitable and intentional way of getting to know their students.

When asked to describe ways in which student identity was incorporated into classroom learning experiences, answers became more limited. Several teachers liked the resources shared

in class and many had used the picture book and calendar activity demonstrated in class. Few teachers described other ways in which they sought to know more about their students and incorporate that information into their classrooms. A few teachers mentioned having children bring in pictures from their weekend activities or from their families. This was limiting as many children are not able to provide pictures or artifacts from home. One teacher discussed the way she was changing this approach. She recognized that asking families to email or send in pictures was not allowing all students to be equally represented. Instead, she altered the display to include pictures she took of students doing things at school. She described this as being more inclusive. Despite this example, most teachers were not able to discuss meaningful ways that student identities were represented in their classrooms. This is an area that would benefit from more extensive work that spans a longer time period and allows teachers to explore further ways of connecting work to students.

Theory of Action

When seeking to understand the impact of an intervention, a theory of action was developed in Chapter IV. Change theory was presented as the set of actions within an organization that can lead to change. This was presented through intentional design that draws upon the knowledge and assets that teachers possess and building upon those strengths in ways that center respect and dignity (Mintrop, 2018). Additionally, the design of the research was intended to center equity, inclusion, and social justice (Shields, 2020). Change theory was central to this intervention as the strengths and voices of teachers were centered in the design of the course. The core tenets of critical professional development (Kohli et al., 2015; Picower, 2015; Parkhouse et al., 2023) were also a key component in the design of the intervention. Centering teacher voice was highly valued by participants as expressed in the mid-course survey and the

second-round interviews. The feedback indicates a positive impact on the experiences of the teachers.

Drivers of Change

When designing the course, several drivers of change were proposed in Chapter IV. These drivers were 1) support for ISBE Social Science standards, 2) support for culturally responsive pedagogy, 3) exploration of self-awareness and relationships to others, and 4) understanding of students' communities and cultures (see Figure 3). It was hypothesized that these drivers would lead teachers to design learning experiences that value and honor the identities of their students through social studies instruction.

Upon analysis, these drivers were present in the intervention with the exception of the first one. Because the ISBE Social Science standards (ISBE, 2023) were removed from the state website for revision, they were unavailable at the time of the intervention. We felt that due to the potential for changes, we should wait to introduce the newly revised standards to the course participants. Instead, we focused more directly on the new social studies curriculum, Inquiry Journeys (inquirED, 2020) to guide the social studies portion of the work. The interview analysis showed that the course did shift the ways in which teachers viewed their students. The drivers appear to have had a positive impact in that area. As discussed in the analysis of the research questions, the work is considered to be in the beginning stages and some slow shifts were made. However, more extensive time and work would be required to move toward meaningful shifts in the classrooms.

Conceptual Framework

Educational Hegemony

In the early stages of the research process, a conceptual framework was developed that nested theoretical elements to form the basis of the work. The framework was constructed using several theories that pertain to this study. Underlying the conceptual framework was an acknowledgement that schools exist in a state of educational hegemony (Banks, 1988, Jay, 2003, Apple, 2015). This was a theme throughout the district course and showed up through teacher interviews as we discussed the dominant narratives in education (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2022; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022) and ways to counter this in classrooms. The understandings of this theory nested into the core of our work and framed the understandings that were foundational to the new understandings.

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy

Once the concept of hegemony in education was established, another nested theory that informed this work was culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy (CRSP). During the course sessions, we spent a good deal of time discussing culturally responsive and sustaining practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Gay, 2000; Paris, 2013). Participants initially had little understanding of this theory and were unable to explain what implications it might have on their work. By the end of the course, it was clear that they were beginning to develop a beginning understanding of some of the key components of CRSP.

Cultural pluralism (Paris, 2012), cultural competence (Gay, 2002), and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) were all woven into the work we did during the course. None of these elements were fully defined, but rather woven into the work. Cultural pluralism requires an understanding and value of the multiple, complexity of cultures and identities that students bring

to the classroom and the critical importance of honoring and sustaining those cultural elements. This was present in our rich discussions around dominant narratives and counternarratives as teachers sought to understand ways in which they might challenge dominant narratives in order to honor their students.

Cultural competence requires teachers to understand culture beyond a surface understanding. In course sessions three and four, we spent time learning more about elements of culture that move beyond an additive approach such as studying heroes and holidays (Banks, 1989) and toward a deeper understanding of cultural elements that focus on unspoken rules or collective consciousness (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). These concepts showed up in second-round interviews on multiple occasions as teachers discussed ways they would like to know more about their students.

All of the work was underlaid by critical consciousness (Freire, 1979; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). As teachers described their experiences in the course, an increased sense of consciousness was noted, as teachers grew their desire to know more about their students and how to create environments that honor them. However, the development of this critical consciousness was slight, with some shifts in beliefs and practices, but not enough to indicate a permanent change. Shifting fundamental beliefs, even for the most willing of participants, is not a slight undertaking. Systems of hegemony, internalized bias, and resistance all work against the development of self-awareness and the ability to understand systems that privilege white people in education and in society as a whole. In order for participants to continue to grow, they will need to continue to seek opportunities to do so, either within the structure of the school or on their own.

Community Cultural Wealth

During the course sessions, we did not directly discuss community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which is built upon an understanding that students bring a wide range of assets and strengths to their learning spaces and that these components of cultural wealth may not be directly honored or valued in educational systems. Despite the lack of direct conversation about this theory, it did inform the planning of the course. Understanding the key tenets of community cultural wealth will be crucial moving into the next steps of the work.

Critical Professional Development

A key component of the conceptual framework was the concept of transformative models of professional learning. Specifically, the lens of critical professional development (Kohli et al, 2015) was incorporated into course design. During the mid-course survey and the second-round interviews, teachers expressed their surprise at the amount of dialogue that was involved in the course design. They were not expecting to have significant amount of time to talk and collaborate. They expressed positive feelings about the collaboration and the authentic nature of the discourse, frequently calling it a "safe space" or "a place where I could ask questions I might be afraid to ask" in other spaces. Many teachers chose to attend this course with a colleague, which strengthened their experiences. They appreciated having someone with a similar mindset to talk to and share ideas with. The tenets of critical professional development appeared to have a positive impact on the experiences of teachers and provided them with a space to growth and learn based on their drive to be more equitable in their practices.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study which impact the resulting evaluation and should be considered when seeking to understand the results. First, the participants in this research

volunteered to take the course. They all reported having a personal interest in growing their knowledge and understanding of equitable practices in schools. This is in contrast to existing district-level equity courses which are required of all employees. In several interviews, participants contrasted the two experiences, noting that it was obvious that some staff do not value the district DEI work and are only there out of compliance. They reported that this was a decisive factor in the way they experienced the two contrasting types of professional learning. This was also a small sample size. Ten teachers chose to join the class and six volunteered to participate in the research study. In order to draw stronger conclusions, a larger sample size would need to be studied.

Another limitation of the study is the absence of student voice. This study chose to focus on the experiences of teachers as they grew their understanding of a new social studies curriculum while taking a district course focused on equity and application. This work cannot be considered complete without the voice of students. The main purpose of this work is to create environments that are inclusive and supportive of students from diverse backgrounds and identities. Hearing from students would be a critical companion portion of this research that would inform the impact of the work on students themselves.

Finally, researcher bias must be considered as the largest potential limitation of this study. The risk of advocacy bias is high. Advocacy bias occurs when "the researcher's wish to see an effect influences how he or she interprets data" (Mintrop, 2016, p. 194). Because of my strong personal beliefs about the value and importance of this work, I needed to remain as impartial as possible when interpreting data. However, my desire to see this work have an impact undoubtedly had an impact on my understanding of the research. Reflecting on my work, there are multiple facets of my own identity that certainly informed the ways in which I interacted with this research. First,

my personal beliefs about equitable experiences in school are very strong. I entered this research cycle with a deep hope that change would occur. This most certainly overlaid the ways in which I interpreted the interviews and additional data from the intervention. My beliefs most certainly impacted the way I interviewed participants, phrased questions, designed learning experiences, and interpreted the results. Secondly, my position as a district administrator put me in a position of power in the cycle of learning. Despite my best efforts to make the course a safe and comfortable space, it was impossible to remove my professional position from the situation. Having a high-level administrative role places an inherent barrier between myself and the teachers. This very likely influenced the ways in which the teachers responded, especially in the private interviews. Knowing my high expectations for equity work in the district and given my position of power, it is very likely that their answers would reflect a desire by teachers to show that they had grown and changed. The data that is least likely to have had this type of bias would be the mid-course survey, which was anonymous. However, even that likely yielded results that leaned toward the positive. This is a powerful limitation to this study and must be considered when moving forward with critical leadership work. Finally, my racial identity as a white woman most certainly impacted the way this research was designed and conducted. My lived experiences in education have been in largely white spaces and have been largely led by educational systems and norms that privilege whiteness. My critical leadership continues to evolve as I work through systems rife with barriers that prevent truly inclusive spaces for students, especially those who have been historically marginalized. Recognizing those barriers, while not personally experiencing them is a challenge. The likelihood that I designed questions, experiences, or coursework that fed into systems of hegemony must be considered as a potential limitation in this study.

CHAPTER VIII: IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Implications

The conclusions drawn from this study are rich and ample. They describe a scenario of hope in which teachers who are driven to advance their understanding of culturally responsive and sustaining environments for their students can find a path to that goal. The study indicates factors that may support teachers as they seek to create more inclusive classroom environments. Teachers who are provided time and a safe space for learning show promise of growing their capacity and understanding of ways in which they can integrate authentic knowledge of their students into lesson design and classroom experiences. Teachers also need to have a voice in their learning process. The tenets of critical professional development are important in this process as we create spaces for teachers to experience cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis (Kohli et al., 2015; Picower, 2015). A transmissive model of learning (Freire, 1979; Banks, 1988) will not help obtain this goal. Teachers also need to develop a deeper knowledge of ways in which they can seek to authentically know their students. This takes time and a commitment by individual teachers and the systems in which they operate. When schools and districts commit to deepening ways of doing school that are focused on equitable practices in meaningful ways, this work can be realized.

This study outlined research that shows teachers benefit from having opportunities to grow their knowledge and application of pedagogy to create more inclusive and diverse spaces for learning. The study shows that teachers care about their students and want to create environments for success. However, they are not always aware of impactful ways in which to do this. The study also shows that carefully crafted learning experiences that are rooted in a deeper

understanding of students' cultures and communities can provide a space for teachers to learn and grow their practices.

This study adds to the research base investigating the importance of teachers understanding and applying tenets of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms. By focusing on a deeper understanding of themselves and their own identities, teachers can transfer that information to inform ways in which they seek to know their students. Through understanding that identities can afford power and privilege in some cases and not in others, teachers can craft environments for students that seek to counter dominant narratives through a lens of cultural competence and social justice. By developing meaningful professional learning opportunities, time to collaborate and work with trusted peers, and providing a rich and diverse curriculum platform with which to work, it is possible to shift the culture of dominant narratives in our schools and provide spaces where all students excel.

Recommendations

The implications of these findings should be used to further move district and school-level equity work forward. There are several layers of recommendations to consider, including next steps for course participants, district-level work, and curriculum evaluation. Recommendations for further work focused on improvement through cycles of inquiry is included.

Next Steps for Course Participants

It was clear from the interviews that course participants would like time to continue to process and develop the work that was started in the course. They reported the need to continue to connect with fellow teachers from the course, continue building their knowledge base, and finding ways to apply the understandings to their work in the classroom. It is recommended that

a follow-up set of sessions be offered in the spring semester to allow time for the teachers to reconnect and collaborate further. Equity work is life-long work and to participate in a course that was emotional, personal, and meaningful to those involved requires ongoing nurture and support to continue the work that was started. Participants all expressed a desire to continue to connect and learn together, so building in some structured support for this is highly recommended.

Next Steps for District-Level Work

It is recommended that the results of this research be shared at the district level to encourage an increased focus on the importance and value of spreading the work to a larger audience. Leadership within the school district is encouraged to continue to message a vision for equitable practices across the district that expand upon the existing structures currently in place. It is recommended that structures for supporting the work at the school level be considered. Study participants all expressed a wish for their building administrators to lead this work at the school level, looking for school-wide expectations and guidance on what equitable practices in curriculum mean within each school. It is also recommended that building principals receive support in how to implement this work in a meaningful, structured way at the building level.

Next Steps for Curriculum Evaluations

Based on the information from this study, a closer examination of curriculum resources and the accompanying pedagogy is recommended. During the course, participants had the opportunity to layer equity work with social studies lessons from the new curriculum. This work felt rushed during the short amount of time we had. Teachers expressed a desire to spend more time looking for meaningful resources that were reflective of the diversity of cultures in our buildings. They wanted to spend time exploring children's books, curriculum resources, and

lesson plans to determine ways in which they might reflect student identities. A closer look at pedagogy is also recommended as resources are only as impactful as the ways in which they are used.

Next Steps for Cycles of Inquiry

The results of this research lead us to surmise the next steps for improvement when considering the problem of practice. If we want teachers to design more inclusive, culturally responsive experiences in their social studies classrooms, further study must be done. The recommendations for next steps are to take this work to a larger scale. I would like to work with an elementary school to conduct a similar cycle of inquiry with an entire staff. Several teachers in the study identified the need for this work to take place within a building. They felt isolated in their work when others around them did not have the same level of professional investigation into the topic. The research indicated that the teachers from the study wanted a collaboration with their building principals and felt that adding that layer of support would have a much larger impact. This study would be easily replicated within a school building within existing structures of school improvement days, faculty meetings, and common grade level planning time. With the support of a building administrator, replication of this study could have a powerful impact.

Upon reflection of this 90-day cycle of inquiry, some clear next steps begin to emerge. It is important to return to Mintrop's School Improvement Model (Mintrop, 2016). First, the problem of practice has not changed. Our teachers still need support in understanding and implementing changes that ensure authentic and inclusive learning spaces for all students. However, this work must now move to working with principals. A reexamination of the change process would allow us to understand and develop a new theory of action, one that is informed

by the model presented in this study. Instead of being led by the researcher, change at the building level would shift to being led by a principal.

A consideration of how to support principals in understanding the value of this work and bringing it into their buildings would be my first recommendation. As discussed previously, many systematic barriers exist when thinking about equity-based work. It is not reasonable to imagine that every principal is a dedicated and willing leader of work that is grounded in understanding bias, privilege, and power. Therefore, district-level leadership has the responsibility of sharing expectations and providing a vision for the approaches we must take when educating our students. Continuing to develop our district capacity for diversity, equity, and inclusion is a crucial component. As this course was centered around building our own self-awareness, this is where the next level of work with principals should begin. This could easily be tied to existing diversity work within the district that has an established structure and vision.

Next, I imagine selecting a willing principal who is interested in further pursuing this work at the school level. This would require a level of commitment to use time and resources within a school to focus on culturally responsive and sustaining practices. There will be a notable difference with this model as compared to the research study presented here. In a school, there will be some willing participants and others who do not feel compelled to do this work. This is a barrier that must be considered in the design process. Even when the participants in the initial course were willing to do the work, their shifts in thinking and practices were not extreme. However, we must not let this deter the importance and value of the work. If we wait for everyone to feel comfortable, the work will never get off the ground (Gorski, 2019).

In a reimagining of this work at the school level, a redesign of the course would be needed. The principal would lead the work alongside teachers who participated in the original

course, allowing for teacher leadership and support from within. The course would need to be designed to connect with specific work that was being done in the building, so a potential move away from social studies might occur. It may make more sense to look at literacy or math practices with a culturally sustaining lens. Expectations for the course work should still be focused on the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (ISBE, 2022), especially Standard A: Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others (Appendix F).

The collection of data for this next step would be more focused on observations, classroom artifacts, collective planning of learning experiences, and group discussion. This would be supported by the researcher with the goal of building capacity within a building to lead the work. Within this iteration of the cycle of inquiry, I strongly believe that student voice should also be considered. Students are the heart of this work and without their input the work is not complete. We must include students by listening to their stories, asking their input, and involving them in designing the learning spaces that hold value for them. This work is also not complete without a more thorough understanding of communities and families. What is valued and honored at school does not always align with home and community values and beliefs. A deeper and more meaningful understanding of students outside of the walls of school will add a layer of richness and meaning to the work and is imperative for a successful implementation of culturally responsive practices.

Finally, I make these recommendations with the understanding that I am living in the possibilities of what could take place within the school district. As mentioned previously, there are very real barriers in place that consistently work to deter and deflect equity work. There is always some urgent initiative, test scores that need fixing, or mandates to follow that devalue the

important work of centering student experiences. Some of this work feels feasible and some feels out of reach. However, it is critical that the work move forward.

Conclusion

This research work began with a story about my son. While I do not include him here to intentionally situate myself personally into the work, his story is the driving factor behind my desire to do this research. My son is finishing his senior year of high school and not much has changed in terms of his educational space. He still exists in a space that is centered around the white, Christian dominant narrative. This shows up in the books he reads, the history he studies, the music he plays, and the rules he follows in school. As he prepares to head off to a small liberal arts college, his biggest concern is that he will be entering yet another primarily white space. I have hope for his generation and can envision a place where a shift in practices can occur, but this is a tentative hope, one that is framed both in my wishful thinking and my knowledge of what is possible.

There is an inherent tension in education. One that exists between the possibility of what could be, the knowledge of what should be, and the reality of what actually is. This is especially true for students who do not fit neatly into the dominant, normed culture. Schools are not designed to honor cultural pluralism (Paris, 2021), to acknowledge community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), or to sustain the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices that define the wealth of assets within our communities (Paris, 2021). School systems exist to maintain the status quo, keeping the power and privilege of whiteness in control. Critical work has value in education and we must endeavor to remember that core set of values and beliefs that drive the work of educators who understand the complex and urgent nature of the work.

I pause to reflect, in conclusion, on how our students experience school and, ultimately, the world. In what spaces do they exist? Do those spaces honor and reflect the unique sets of identities that they bring to the world? As I reflect on my own layers of privilege and power both through my dominant identities and in my position as a district leader, I must push myself to continuously strive to make things better. To work toward a more just and equitable system that cultivates the cultural wealth of all our students. They deserve nothing less.

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Agreements help maintain a safe, supportive, and active learning environment.

Our agreements	What they look like in action
Be engaged and maintain confidentiality	Make the personal commitment to remain emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue. Seek to understand, not to agree. Honor privacy by avoiding "who said what."
Speak to and listen for one's own truth	Be open about your feelings and experiences – not just saying what you think others want to hear. Be open to the experiences of others, not comparing them to your own. Consider your own power dynamics and how it shapes what you see/hear and what you do not see/hear.
Experience discomfort	Stay focused on disrupting institutional oppression and building inclusive leadership skills. It is through dialogue — even when uncomfortable — that awareness happens and change begins.
Expect and accept non-closure	This work is ongoing. Be willing to take risks, sit through silence, and accept that this is about changing yourself and not others.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Toward More Culturally Sustaining Social Studies Instruction
Date/Time:

Place:

Interviewer/Position:

Interviewee/Position:

This project is intended to examine the ways in which elementary teachers seek to understand the authentic identities of their students and incorporate that information into social studies learning experiences.

Round 1 Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself, both personally and professionally.
2. Tell me about your students and how you get to know them.
3. How are your students' identities represented in your classroom?
4. What does social studies instruction look like in your classroom?
5. What does culturally responsive teaching mean to you?
6. What does the term multiple perspectives mean to you?

Round 2 Questions:

1. How does your identity impact the way you design learning experiences?
2. What do you know about your students?
3. How are your students' identities represented in your classroom?
4. What does social studies instruction look like in your classroom?
5. How do you consider dominant narratives when planning learning?
6. What does culturally responsive teaching mean to you?
7. Describe your experiences taking this course, including the impact it had on you.
8. What do you think are important next steps for teachers, schools, and the district when it comes to culturally responsive teaching?

APPENDIX C: JOURNAL PROTOCOL

Toward More Culturally Sustaining Social Studies Instruction

Essential Question/All Sessions: What does it mean to design inclusive, culturally responsive practices in my social studies classroom?

Session 1/Identity: Complete after the Identity Wheel experience. How does my understanding of the Identity Wheel challenge or expand the way I see the world? The way I view my students?

Session 4/Culturally Responsive Education: Stories are powerful tools for understanding a concept. Listen to the stories of educators, parents, and teachers as they explain what culturally responsive education means to them. Listen for stories where an educator leverages or embraces culture to give students access to learning experiences. Consider and reflect upon moments you could have made different moves to be more culturally responsive in your instruction. Reflect.

Session 6/Reflection: Create a presentation that answers the Essential Question: What does it mean to design inclusive, culturally responsive practices in my social studies classroom?

Toward More Inclusive Social Studies Instruction (K-5): Understanding and Applying the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards to Elementary Social Studies Practices

Course Description: 15-hour district course - 12 hours in-person (six 2-hour sessions) and three hours of independent work (journaling, collecting artifacts, reading, collaboration, etc...)

Participants: K-5 Teachers who deliver or support social studies instruction, preferably with a grade level team member; Instructional Coaches; Administrators (course limit of 24 participants)

Facilitators: Laura Delgado, Director of Elementary Education and (facilitator's name), 2nd Grade Teacher
Dates: 9/27, 10/11, 10/25, 11/15, 11/29, 12/6 - 4:00-6:00

Join us as we embark on a journey of self-awareness and understanding of the ways in which we can make our social studies instruction more inclusive and reflective of our diverse student population. This course is designed to help participants gain an understanding of the ISBE Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTL) and how to embed these standards into their practice. The course will be specifically designed to examine approaches to teaching elementary social studies that utilize the new elementary social studies curriculum, the ISBE CRTL standards, and the ISBE Social Science standards. This course works as a compliment to the new K-5 social studies curriculum, but will not be a direct training for Inquiry Journeys.

This course will cover such topics as:
- Identity, Race, Privilege, Bias and how these impact our teaching and work with students
- ISBE Social Science Standards
- Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Practices
- How to connect this work with our new social studies curriculum

APPENDIX E: ISBE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEADING

STANDARDS

Illinois Administrative Rule Part 24, Section 24.50
Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards

(a) Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders are reflective and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and how they impact others, leading to more cohesive and productive student development as it relates to academic and social-emotional development for all students.

(b) Systems of Oppression: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders understand that there are systems in our society, especially, but not limited to, our school system, that create and reinforce inequities, thereby creating oppressive conditions. Educators work actively against these systems in their everyday roles in educational institutions.

(c) Students as Individuals: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders view and value their students as individuals within the context of their families and communities.

(d) Students as Co-Creators: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders (who fundamentally believe all students are capable) center learning around students' experiences and position them as co-creators, with emphasis on prioritizing historically marginalized students.

(e) Leveraging Student Advocacy: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders will support and create opportunities for student advocacy and representation in the content and classroom

(f) Family and Community Collaboration: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders will partner with families and communities to build rapport, form collaborative and mutual relationships, and engage in effective cross-cultural communication.

(g) Content Selections in All Curricula: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders intentionally embrace student identities and prioritize representation in the curriculum. In turn, students are not only given a chance to identify with the curriculum, they become exposed to other cultures within their schools and both their local and global communities.

(h) Student Representation in the Learning Environment: Culturally responsive teachers and leaders ensure the diversity of their student population is equally represented within the learning environment.

APPENDIX F: ISBE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEADING

STANDARDS A: SELF-AWARENESS AND RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHERS

SECTION 24.50 | The Illinois Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards

A **Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others** – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders are reflective and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and how they impact others, leading to more cohesive and productive student development as it relates to academic and social-emotional development for all students. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

1. Understand and value the notion that multiple lived experiences exist, that there is often not one "correct" way of doing or understanding something, and that what is seen as "correct" is most often based on our lived experiences.

2. Approach their work and students with an asset-based mindset, affirming the validity of the students' backgrounds and identities.

3. Know about their students and their lives outside of school, using this knowledge to build instruction that leverages prior knowledge and skills.

4. Include representative, familiar content in the curriculum to legitimize students' backgrounds, while also exposing them to new ideas and worldviews different from their own.

5. Engage in self-reflection about their own actions and interactions and what ideas and biases motivated those actions.

6. Explore their own intersecting identities, how they were developed, and how they impact daily experience of the world.

7. Recognize how their identity (race/ethnicity, national origin, language, sex and gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical/developmental/ emotional ability, socioeconomic class, religion, etc.) affects their perspectives and beliefs about pedagogy and students.

8. Educate themselves about students' communities, cultures, and histories.

9. Critically think about the institutions in which they find themselves working to reform these institutions whenever and wherever necessary.

10. Assess how their biases and perceptions affect their teaching practice and how they access tools to mitigate their own behavior (racism, sexism, homophobia, unearned privilege, Eurocentrism, etc.).

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All Identities Come with Different Levels of Power

These identities come with different levels of power and privilege.
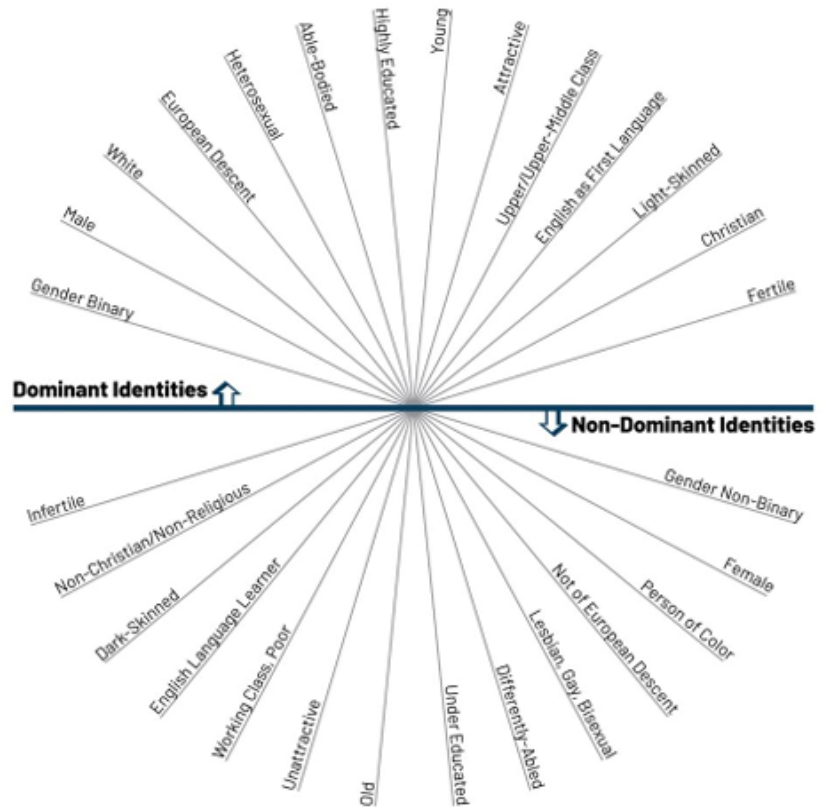
Adapted from Morgan, K.P. Describing the emperor's new clothes: Three myths of educational (in-) equity. In *The Gender Question in Education: Theory, Pedagogy, & Politics*. Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1996, 105–122.

Take a moment to note how many of your identities are seen as above or below the line.

Normalization: Families
What are ways we can create counter-narratives to the dominant stories in schools?

Parent Conferences - provide child care

Evaluate survey terms (ie. "mom's phone" can be "adult #1's" phone

Non-dominant language translations for family communications

Offer opportunities for families to come into the classroom and share their culture

Inclusive language (family conferences, special grown up)

Help families organize transportation (cab vouchers, D87 buses to evening events)

Picture books with diverse family groups

Offer multiple perspectives that are not the dominant narrative

Normalization: Holidays
What are ways we can create counter-narratives to the dominant stories in schools?

Not comparing to dominant holidays (i.e. Christmas)

Ask families what holidays they do and don't celebrate through surveys or conferences

Ask families in your classroom what holidays they celebrate and/or what celebrations are important to them. This may change from year to year!

Possibly alter the study of holidays to fall later in the year. Spring? This could help with making sure Christmas isn't the dominant reason for the unit of study.

Teaching ABOUT holidays, not celebrating them

Change the terminology "holidays" to encompass all of the actual holidays throughout the year, not just around Christmas

Identity

- Take time to get to know students.
- Include them in lessons.
- Celebrate differences

Culture

- Learning about students' culture.
- Make an effort to go beyond the surface culture.

Differentiation

- Lesson structure/routines
- Visuals
- TPR or non-linguistic representation
- Real world problems/opportunities
- Stories