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There's Action in Silence: An Action Research Study on the Impacts of Diverse Narratives in an Advanced Placement United States Government Class

Ashley Kristen Wright

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THERE'S ACTION IN SILENCE: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY ON THE
IMPACTS OF DIVERSE NARRATIVES IN AN ADVANCED PLACEMENT UNITED
STATES GOVERNMENT CLASS

by

Ashley Kristen Wright

Bachelor of Arts
Florida Atlantic University, 2013

Master of Arts
Florida Atlantic University, 2015

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Accepted by:

Elizabeth Currin, Major Professor

Christian Anderson, Committee Member

Rebecca Morgan, Committee Member

Victoria Oglan, Committee Member

Cheryl Addy, Vice Provost and Interim Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all my teachers and professors, past, present, and future. Thank you all for instilling a passion for life learning and a drive to continue bettering my practice in the pursuit of equity for all students. I also dedicate this work to the Class of 2022, without whom this study would not be possible. Thank you for taking the time to engage in the sometimes difficult and messy process of dialogue and self-reflection. You all inspire me never to stop asking questions.

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ABSTRACT

In this action research study, I facilitated and evaluated student exposure to politically, socially, and economically diverse source material within my Advanced Placement United States Government classroom, seeking to resolve students' apparent disconnect from experiences that differ from their own, which had made connections to topics like civil rights challenging to grasp. Because the supplemental material I had chosen for my government classes failed to provide opposing narratives for my students to make these connections, this study arose as a way to research and ultimately correct this problem from within my government classroom.

Over the course of a semester, I developed a critical intervention, in which I introduced a series of primary and secondary sources to my U.S. Government students to evaluate the impact these sources had on student engagement with course content as well as their understanding of social justice issues. This study helped demonstrate the role that diverse supplemental readings can have on a predominantly White classroom, impacting how they connected with manifestations of societal inequalities, and suggests the types of sources social studies teachers should seek to include in similar interventions in their classrooms.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Advanced Placement
CAP	Civic Action Project
CRT	Critical Race Theory
PLC.....	Professional Learning Community
PoP.....	Problem of Practice
RQ	Research Question

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, I decided to make a career shift from politics to the classroom. Spending my undergraduate and graduate years absorbed in political campaigning and working alongside interest groups had left me disheartened with the apathetic and uninformed state of the U.S. electorate, especially among younger voters. I identified teaching as a way to rectify this current state of political affairs. After my first year in the classroom, I was excited to receive a call from my high school alma mater. The predominantly White, private, Catholic institution was reaching out to see if I would be interested in teaching the Advanced Placement (AP) United States Government classes. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity and sought to develop my lessons around the U.S. Government's foundational understandings.

I aligned my curriculum to the College Board's (2020) course standards, as well as incorporating foundational readings from my own college experiences as a student of U.S. political science and history. I even used materials I had received from my own high school government teacher, whom I had been hired to replace. I wished for my students to leave my classroom prepared for college and to become active citizens with a passion for democracy. By exposing them to the ideas of political scientists and primary historical sources, I wanted my students to take their knowledge of government foundations and create positive

social change. We read, analyzed, and discussed theoretical works from renowned political scientists. We absorbed Federalist papers and Supreme Court opinions, and with each document, I was impressed with my students' ability to synthesize their central arguments.

However, applying the arguments outside my students' own experience proved difficult for them, especially during units on individual civil liberties and civil rights. My students knew little of experiences outside of their community; many had been through private, Catholic schooling their entire lives, progressing from grade school to high school with the same group of students and lacking exposure to diverse students or even faculty. I knew because I was one of those students, a product of the same educational institution. The homogenous community where these students grew up instilled a narrative from years of generational teaching and inherited histories that became the prominent driver of their comprehension of political, social, and economic issues. My students' disconnect was apparent during class activities when students acknowledged reading texts by Martin Luther King for the first time as seniors in high school. My students' education fostered their ability to comprehend the arguments of "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," but an exercise on the discriminatory policies of state literacy tests to limit voting revealed that my students could not relate to the perspective of someone denied access to civic participation. For most of them, the lack of exposure to diverse narratives limited their critical application of historical concepts and events.

Our classroom activities illuminated restrictive policies like state literacy tests, but these types of civil rights denials were not the norm for my students. Their history textbooks presented civil rights movements as a singularity, not an ongoing social phenomenon (Gosse, 2002), which meant some students left my classroom unable to rationalize present-day social and collective activism like Black Lives Matter or calls to remove Confederate monuments, which at their height in the summer of 2020 recorded over 10,600 demonstrations across the United States (Kishi & Jones, 2020).

Upon entering the teaching profession, I did not realize I was silencing knowledge from additional perspectives in choosing specific course content. I embodied Greene's (1977) description of passivity, creating an environment that maintained my students' current worldview of political and social culture instead of expanding it. My curriculum challenged them with academic rigor but failed to challenge them to think critically about less-familiar issues of inequality in U.S. democracy.

Problem of Practice

Upon reflection, I began to question social studies education's foundational readings, noticing how the curriculum centered on a narrow, male-dominated, Eurocentric sociopolitical lens (Russell, 2012). Much of my selected reading list for the course, and even a decent amount of the College Board's (2020) required "Foundational Documents," reflected this traditional focus instead of promoting a more diverse and critical approach. I defaulted to traditional texts when designing my course due to my comfort with the material. My original

syllabus reflected the institutions responsible for my academic development, namely my high school and early college days, but failed to incorporate the critical perspectives that broadened my worldview as I progressed through college and graduate school. Integrating political classics into my curriculum was not inherently wrong, but in application, they seemed to highlight only one pathway of thought or provide a singular perspective on social justice issues.

At the beginning of the 20th century, U.S. education reformer and philosopher John Dewey articulated the purpose of education in a democratic system: to engage and enlarge the student experience, allowing students to freely interact with their environment and construct their knowledge around those interactions (Darder, 2003). For citizens of the United States, being keepers of democracy is excruciatingly hard work and extends beyond memorizing the preamble of the Constitution. It takes actual, out loud, vocalized objection to anything and everything that denies human rights and constitutional rights, which requires thinking critically, thinking carefully, and staying diligent. After due consideration, I wondered how students could be expected to participate in a democracy without exposure to diverse perspectives on political issues of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, language, class, sexuality, or age (Ross, 2014). How could citizens of democracy address issues of immigration, questions of civil liberties, or race relations if they lacked exposure to multiple sides of a story?

Research in multicultural education has documented how social studies standards, teaching, and textbooks reflect a predominantly White, Eurocentric perspective (Russell, 2012), a perspective that, due to cultural bias, fails to

critique injustices and inequalities related to race, gender, class, and the like. This problem could be compounded in environments similar to my high school, where the overwhelming majority of the student and faculty population are from White, upper-middle-class backgrounds. As a teacher, I must reflect on the sources of my course content and ask, “whose knowledge is this? Where did it come from?” (Wolk, 2003, p. 101). If I identify gaps of perspective, I have a responsibility to fill those gaps for my students’ comprehension (Wolk, 2003). Classrooms should not silence the narratives of the impoverished and working class, women, other minoritized groups, and intersections thereof. By diversifying their curricula, “teachers can contribute to a broad project of interpretation, critique, and reconstruction in terms of creating a citizenship education more conducive to the circumstances of social justice, freedom, equality, and multicultural diversity” (Ross, 2014, p. 31).

The problem of practice (PoP) for this action research study was my students’ lack of exposure to diverse political, social, and economic literature or source material within their social studies classes. Traditional curriculum across their social studies left them unable to relate to perspectives outside of the European, male-dominated narrative. If the purpose of social studies education is to promote citizenship responsibilities in a pluralistic, democratic society, social studies teachers must provide materials that empower these students to accept such civic responsibility (Wolk, 2003). Diversifying course curriculum and anchoring literature to include additional theoretical perspectives and different

narratives on race, gender, and class promised to enrich students' experience in both the classroom and society (Russell, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I crafted for my study facilitated critical examination of the material I was using—and excluding—in my AP U.S. Government curriculum. Based on the assumption that the existing social studies curriculum followed traditional power structures, I framed the study through social reconstruction and critical theory, expanding into the specifics of critical race and critical feminist theories in Chapter 2 to demonstrate how I could challenge this dynamic of course design to improve outcomes for my AP U.S. Government students. Through the lens of critical theory and social reconstruction, social studies educators like me can uncover injustices in society alongside their students and provide them with the knowledge to transform unjust realities.

Including varied counter-narratives and rejecting the notion of objectivity allows critical theorists to challenge guiding assumptions. Broadly, critical theory entails a “reflective assessment and critique of society and culture to reveal and challenge power structures” (Geuss, 1981, p. 11). Critical theory argues that societal problems stem from systematic design and cultural assumptions of how society functions (Geuss, 1981). Through such revelations, individuals can reconstruct their communities to address race, gender, and class inequality.

These theories informed and validated my attempt to understand and rework or reframe my practices in line with multicultural education and critical literacy. As the basis for an action research project, this framework grounded the

specific classroom problem while allowing for possible transferability for teachers experiencing a similar phenomenon. After establishing a foundation in inclusive literature, I could analyze the impact on student outcomes, following Luke's (1992) advice by "problematizing race, class, and gender in the classroom and providing the conceptual tools of emancipatory critique" to open up "the possibility of political action to enable those structural transformation[s] required to liberate the 'disenfranchised and dispossessed'" (p. 38). Further, de Saxe (2012) explained, "this agenda, challenging the intersections of race, class, and gender, will help transform the dominant knowledge production, assist in critical dialogue, and provide equal opportunities for expressing personal choice" (p. 196). Understanding these theoretical components allows educators to teach diverse perspectives and generate different knowledge from within their classrooms.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to expose students to diverse literary sources from varying perspectives of race, class, and gender in order to improve their ability to respond to social injustices. The research design enabled me to assess the impact of incorporating politically, socially, and economically diverse literature—from perspectives outside the traditional narrative—that aligned with the broad content objectives of the course and could serve as a foundation for student political discourse and analytical writing assessments. In doing so, I hoped to see an impact on how students perceive issues that might be outside

the scope of their personal experiences and identify which source materials enable students to engage with social justice issues.

The research questions (RQs) for this action research study were:

1. How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to understand foundational concepts from the course?
2. How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to understand past and present issues relating to inequality?
3. How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' motivation to engage on issues of inequality?

From the social constructivist perspective, students gain insight and understanding concerning individuals' lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), yet social studies texts often promote one view of history while silencing others (Murry, 2017). Connecting multiple viewpoints to contemporary democratic issues is a worthwhile goal for students from all backgrounds. This conceptual connection of the "why" and the "how" are fundamental to linking historical literature with human experiences and could prove instrumental in educating students about contemporary societal issues (Murry, 2017). Students need to identify how studying historical, political, and economic events extends beyond the memorization of facts and dates. By crafting my social studies curriculum in a new way, paying particular attention to curricular narratives, I

sought to help students analyze how individuals' experiences shape culture and society.

Overview of Methodology

Action research is applied research seeking to explore “a practical problem with an aim toward developing a solution” (Creswell, 2013, p. 449). As a teacher researcher, I engaged my student participants and peers in the inquiry process surrounding my PoP. Action research was an appropriate approach, as I sought to understand the source of my problem within my community and diversify my own U.S. Government curriculum. As schools continue to become culturally and socially diverse, educational texts must reflect that change for the benefit of both White students and students of color, and action research provides an outlet for teacher researchers to respond to phenomena in their own classrooms. My RQs focused on student impact, highlighting how a refined use of literature in social studies could assist students in critically applying source material through literacy interventions.

Specifically, a qualitative inquiry design aligned with my purpose and RQs because interviews, artifacts, and reflections allowed me to evaluate the impacts this curriculum shift had on my students. Using more than one data source increased the study's validity (Mertler, 2014). As I explain in Chapter 3, I triangulated data from pre- and post-intervention interviews with student artifacts in the form of reflective journaling. Student journals provided a safe space for their thoughts on the literature I introduced. Incorporating interviews and artifacts

assisted the validity of the research and captured different dimensions of the phenomena in the classroom.

Using purposeful convenience sampling (Mertler, 2014), I selected participants from my 12th-grade AP United States Government class, all of whom met the course-level requirements established by our school's social studies department, including baseline requirements in the form of a standardized testing score and grade point average. The student sample was somewhat reflective of the school population, including a mixture of genders and ethnicities. However, as I noted in the introduction to my PoP, in line with the school's overall student population, my students tend to come from similar demographic backgrounds, predominantly from White, middle-class, and religious families.

Positionality

As a researcher and educator, I do not have the luxury of complete objectivity. My life does not exist in a vacuum, and I cannot escape my background, culture, or even this moment in time. Like the students in this study, I brought my own unique experiences, biases, assumptions, and personal history. However, reflecting on my positionality mitigated my subjectivity.

I am a White female educator and an alumnus of the high school where I work. My background and experiences resemble those of the student population at the heart of my PoP, allowing me, as a teacher researcher, to comprehend the phenomena occurring at my institution, especially considering how my education shaped my early worldview upon graduation. I, too, entered college, reading little from the experiences of women, people of color, and the working class because

so much of Western society socializes students to participate against these non-dominant discourses (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002). To counteract this problem, my first step was reflecting on and confronting my privilege. As a White female educator from a middle-class background, I cannot speak on the experiences of people of color or those from different socioeconomic classes. However, I can provide space in my classroom to uplift those voices. My educational experiences in my bachelor and graduate programs aided in expanding my worldview to recognize how important education can be in seeking to interrupt manifestations of inequality. If teachers can educate students “to identify, name, and challenge the norms, patterns, traditions, structures, and institutions” that keep dominant perspectives in place, we can start dismantling those societal barriers (DiAngelo, 2012, p. 4).

Reflecting on my identity also had bearing on my research design. Concerning this PoP, I continuously found myself flipping between the outsider–insider research dichotomy (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Uniquely, I am a product of the educational environment I studied. I graduated from the same high school 8 years before I returned as a faculty member, and those experiences critically shaped my early academic career. I entered and left high school with similarly limited exposure to diverse historical narratives as my current students, but later obtained additional education that provided me with the ability to reflect on the materials to which students are exposed. Additionally, my academic background in historical and political studies provided a foundation to adapt my curriculum in response to my PoP. These dual roles allowed me the extraordinary experience

of being able to provide insight as both a former student and current teacher as I attempted to tackle this problem within my environment.

Even when teachers benefit from their multicultural training, teaching about race, gender, and class presents personal bias problems. As a White, middle-class woman, I also became an outsider in this research because many of the narratives relating to economic class or race were outside of my personal experience. The literature reflected marginalized groups' experience, and my personal experience does not reflect theirs, so my study filled gaps in my own knowledge as well. However, I had experience applying my skill through my educational pursuits in political science, history, and education to fill some of these knowledge gaps. I sought to afford my students with similar opportunities much earlier in their educational careers.

Faculty demographics also play a role in my school community, given the high return rate for alumni who join the faculty. The social studies department, for example, includes six alumni out of eight full-time social studies teachers. Additionally, seven of the eight faculty members in the social studies department are White males. This makeup could have contributed to my PoP, as the majority of the social studies faculty have similar experiences and backgrounds. However, I am the only female teacher in the social studies department, another indicator of my outsider experience in my approach to social studies education. My experience as a woman studying politics and history also gives me a unique perspective apart from my male faculty counterparts.

I also belong to the high school community where I teach and the classroom community I create with my students. I value a learning community where students have a stake in their learning and topics of discussion. To engage within a democracy, students must act in support of the issues they are passionate about, yet my role as a teacher gives me authority over my classroom, such as choosing and controlling the knowledge perspectives, instructional methods, and facilitation of discussions. Even though I wanted the students' interests to drive their application of governmental principles, I recognized my control of the environment could have presented bias as (a) in spite of my aims to diversify the curriculum, I could, through exclusion, silence perspectives if they did not work to advance set curricular objectives; (b) student participation may have reflected answers they assumed to be correct; and (c) I needed to facilitate student discussion to a degree to meet learning goals. Constant introspection throughout this process was also necessary to combat the transference of my views onto my students. The goal was to evaluate how more diverse literary exposure affected personalized critical thought among students, not promoting one particular thinking pattern.

Significance and Overview of the Dissertation

According to the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, the role of education, especially in democracies, is to uncover injustices in society and bring about societal change (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Freire (1974) signified the importance of critical consciousness, asserting that students, rather than passively receiving knowledge, must become critically aware of the world in order

to transform it. Adopting more responsive literature in social studies requires educators' conscious effort but should enrich their understanding of multiple truths and prepare them, and their students, to create better conditions for society (Freire, 1974). Throughout this action research, I committed to transforming my own teaching to better reflect this vision.

Research on the lack of diversity in social studies exists but is limited in the availability of specific classroom examples. Banks (2016) provided essential top-down strategies for implementing multicultural education from an institutional standpoint, but existing scholarship lacks the context that an action research study like this might generate. Beyond suggestions like incorporating more socially conscious literature, my comprehensive journey to diversify the curriculum in my government class could make the process of source adoption in other social studies subjects a manageable undertaking for educators seeking to diversify their traditional syllabi.

Examining this problem through action research allowed me to address the specific questions with solutions and student outcomes in mind. My attempt to tackle the lack of diverse narratives within a small, predominantly White social studies classroom could provide benefits on a micro level within our school and on a macro scale for our community. Chapter 2 situates my PoP within a framework of expansions of critical theory, including critical race, critical feminism, and ultimately critical pedagogy, as well as theories of multicultural education, using multiple perspectives to capture various facets within the study. Chapter 3 expands on the study's methodology and research design, focusing on

critical literacy interventions to combat my PoP. As Chapter 4 illustrates, I exposed senior government students to diverse literature, including both primary and secondary source material, that anchored democratic concepts from their government class within multiple perspectives of thought, allowing them to become active contributors to knowledge and directly addressing their initial inability to make meaningful connections to political situations outside their own experiences. However, as Chapter 5 reveals, additional broader educational and societal implications also emerged, informing specific recommendations for social studies educators wishing to implement culturally responsive change and evaluating the impacts such strategies have on engaging students with contemporary multicultural issues.

Key Terms

Critical literacy: The capacity to review dominant social systems of knowledge and power (Lewison et al., 2015).

Multicultural Education: An idea, educational reform movement, and process for creating equal educational opportunities for all students, including those from different racial, ethnic, and social-class groups (Banks, 1997).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

My review of literature surfaced several themes that extended across this study. Keywords I pulled from the literature to identify additional source material included diversity, multicultural education, critical theory, education for social justice, critical literacy, critical race in education, critical pedagogy, critical consciousness, and social studies education. In addition to elaborating on the theoretical framework I introduced in Chapter 1, this chapter presents current scholarly knowledge about the lack of diverse literature in predominantly White high schools. This chapter also explores a gap in scholarship on critical approaches to education and how their implementation can yield better outcomes for all students and promote social justice.

Literature Review Methodology

A literature review is a “critical analysis of a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles” (Machi & McEvoy, 2016, p. 2). Literature reviews seek to analyze sources with similar methodologies, philosophies, claims, and interpretation of evidence; they can also highlight gaps in research or areas that require further study (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). To prepare for my study, I consulted various academic research and policy data obtained through University of South Carolina databases, including EBSCOhost,

SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis, ERIC, ProQuest, JSTOR, and the Wiley Online Library. Journal and textbook resources from my coursework also contributed to this study.

Theoretical Framework

As explained in Chapter 1, I intended to frame my study using multiple perspectives, including social reconstruction and critical theory, as well as the specific offshoots of critical race and critical feminist theories.

Social Reconstruction

Social reconstruction promotes change within society and viewing the world through a social lens (Schiro, 2013). This ideology addresses racial, gender, social, and economic problems as injustices committed against members of society. Social reconstructionists assume (a) society is “unhealthy” and these injustices threaten its very survival, (b) people can take steps to “keep society from destroying itself,” and (c) action has to happen in the form of reconstructing society (Schiro, 2013, pp. 6, 133). Outraged at class-based inequity in educational opportunities, Counts (1932/2013) argued that educators are responsible for pushing students to commit to doing what is best for society, firmly in line with the social reconstruction approach. Giroux and Giroux (2006) saw a similar role for teachers, explaining, “educators need to assume the role of leaders in the struggle for social and economic justice” (p. 9). Education can help people analyze problems and empower them to envision and ultimately create a world where these problems do not exist. Moreover, democracy and public life stem from connections students make in the classroom: reading, writing, and

discussing equips them to translate those ideas into real-world applications (Giroux & Giroux, 2006).

Critical Theory

Drawing on Marxism, which situates institutions like schools within dominant sociopolitical and economic systems, a critical theory of education proposes a radical reexamination of existing educational ideologies and practices to develop pedagogical and social transformation for a more democratic culture and society (Kellner, 2004). From an educational perspective, critical theory involves conceiving education's role in changing society. When education seeks to transform and empower students (Giroux & Giroux, 2006), the sign of an educated population is the ability to challenge the politics of injustice and reform the current state of affairs.

Critical theory also emphasizes the relationship between language and power, marking the "linguistic turn" as the moment when humans recognized they construct reality interactively through language. Conceptual, definitional, and institutional systems depend on language, so whoever controls the language controls the narrative of phenomena under study. The stability of this language system produces the strength of a shared reality (Deetz, 1996), yet Ladson-Billings (1994) exposed the socially constructed nature of knowledge by pushing back on "objective truths," given that "scientists create knowledge and use implicit cultural assumptions, perspectives, and frames of references in doing so" (p. 78). Beyond facts, knowledge encompasses the community and discourse of individuals and society. Based on Ladson-Billings's (1994) interpretation of

knowledge, each community's experience has social, cultural, and political consequences. These socially constructed ideas, in turn, manifest in social reality, which educators cement into public policy and social, political, and economic systems.

Under an "assimilationist model" of education, knowledge is "static, one-directional, and achieved through group conformity" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 81). If constructed through a single discourse, knowledge maintains the current form of social reality and the status quo. Harding (1998) also viewed power and knowledge as "intimately linked," such that "whoever already owns 'nature' and has access to it, whoever has the capital and knowledge" stands to gain "the benefits of contemporary scientific and technological change" (p. 21). If students are disfranchised based on their access to power, capital, and knowledge, how can educators disrupt institutional bias? Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested the answer lies in teachers' instructional approach. Culturally relevant pedagogy positions knowledge as "continuously recreated, shared between educator and students, and [...] developed through critical thought" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 81). Education's goal is to recreate students' understanding of social reality. Unfortunately, these distinctions can lead to hostile relationships between communities that do not share the same social reality (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

As I noted in Chapter 1, including counter-narratives and rejecting objectivity allows critical theorists to challenge guiding assumptions. A counter-narrative approach "is based in a social constructivist paradigm, which argues that individuals construct reality" (Bergerson, 2003, p. 54). Within this paradigm,

individual perspectives and experiences are essential to understanding a given individual's reality. The more opportunities students have to deconstruct their own realities, the better they will be at empathizing with others.

Critical Race and Critical Feminist Theories

As extensions of critical theory, critical race and critical feminist theories also encourage reconsideration of knowledge, power, and empowerment spaces. Critical race scholarship uses critical theory to examine society and culture related to categorizations of race, law, and power (Delgado et al., 2012), while critical feminism focuses on a similar application through gender (Martin, 2003). Both approaches expose and critique the dominant (i.e., male, White, and heterosexual) ideology for perpetuating canonical understandings of dominant and marginalized groups (de Saxe, 2012; Hiraldo, 2010). Both theories draw upon the foundations of critical theory by addressing social and economic inequalities to promote systemic change, yet their unique evolution necessitates discussing them as separate fields of inquiry (Martin, 2003).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) offers individuals a race-conscious model to interpret society. Critical race theorists agree that race is a central structure in society that permeates institutions like legal or educational systems (Delgado et al., 2012; Gillborn, 2005; Yosso, 2005; Zamudio et al., 2011). For critical race theorists, race also manifests within belief and ideological systems. Zamudio et al. (2011) pointed out how subtle beliefs about racial superiority and inferiority “elevate the traditions, art, languages, literature, and ways of being and knowing

of some group while disparaging the contributions of others” (p. 3). This imbalance is most apparent in the historic creation of social divisions based on race, which intertwines with contemporary racial inequality: CRT sees European colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia as the standard for modern expressions of racial inequality (Delgado et al., 2012; Gillborn, 2005; Yosso, 2005; Zamudio et al., 2011). The establishment of colonies constructed racial differences as natural practices in society by dividing the world into dichotomies of “conquered and colonizer, master and slave, and white and non-white” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 4). Such attempts at racialization usually meet generational opposition or resistance in the form of revolution, wars of independence, and civil rights movements (Omi & Winant, 1993). With these foundational tenets, CRT continues to evolve as increasingly complex and diverse perspectives advance the field.

CRT emphasizes narrative and oppositional voice as tools for deconstructing the structures and practices responsible for racial inequality. For example, retelling history from a minoritized experience contradicts dominant historical narratives. Critical race theorists challenge the objectivity of such master narratives, asserting that objectivity silences voices that provide an alternative truth. Critical race theorists identify education as one of the institutions that reproduce unequal relations between dominant and marginalized groups. Even though schools disseminate knowledge presented by dominant groups, educators can draw on CRT to incorporate marginalized voices to broaden students’ understanding of the history and experiences of people of color.

Critical Feminism

Power structures exist not only within race but also the expression of gender roles. As a feminist scholar, hooks (1994) stressed the need to listen to oppressed groups and individuals who have been marginalized in educational practice and social life. Giving voice within education to individuals in oppressed groups marked by race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, or class aligns with social reconstruction and critical theory. Building upon these perspectives allows teachers to connect education directly to democratization and provide students with the knowledge necessary to transform societal relations in the direction of equality and social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Weedon (1987) defined feminism as the “politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society” (p. 1). No one feminist perspective or position exists; rather, scholars speak of *feminisms*. For example, Martin (2003) cited multitudes and varieties of feminist theory, each developing specific nuances but most sharing two objectives: “The first is descriptive: to reveal obvious and subtle gender inequalities. The second is change-oriented: to reduce or eradicate those inequalities” (p. 66). Like critical theorists, feminist scholars seek to highlight society’s dichotomies and work to rectify their impacts on individual groups, demonstrating an existing power structure in which women tend to have less access to power and fewer privileges due to that lack of access. For scholars like Weedon (1987) and Martin (2003), the starting point for any feminist analysis is the patriarchal structure of political,

social, and economic society. My research applied feminist theory with these objectives and understandings.

Understandings of gender and race permeate all aspects of life, including work, popular culture, and education. Schooling and curriculum have become avenues for feminists and critical race theorists to deconstruct sexist and racist practices. Critical educational theories and applications of critical pedagogy provide the discourse students need to analyze dominant social problems regarding gender and race. Such discourse directly contradicts “traditional theories of education,” which promote transmitting knowledge and “jargon from the natural sciences,” whereas critical pedagogy “illuminate[s] how class, race, and gender function as part of the discourse of schooling” (Giroux, 1989, p. 6).

Historical Perspectives

Reconstructionists and critical theorists “embrace notions of equality, the eradication of social injustices, multiculturalism, increasing levels of social consciousness and the discussion of controversial issues through the employment of critical forms of pedagogy” (McKernan, 2013, p. 417). From this perspective, education is a tool to advance the principles of social justice. As an educational movement, the critical approach helps “students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Giroux, 2010, para. 1). Once students encounter and identify society’s structural inequities, they can act to manifest change. This type of resistance to dominant powers is rooted in Marxism, as the critical approach aims to transform society to alleviate

suffering. Even though critical thought has origins in the Frankfurt school of critical theory, its application to education extends beyond Marxist ideology, which does not recognize 21st-century forms of power outside of capital (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical perspectives within education thus identify how knowledge and language, alongside traditional capital—property—can create oppressed groups.

Critical theorists have widely credited Freire for the first applications of critical theory to education (Comber, 2015; Giroux, 2010; Gottesman, 2016; Kincheloe, 2008). The Brazilian educator identified how Marxist principles manifested outside of the traditional economic organization and could apply to other social systems. Freire developed the concept of critical consciousness while working with laborers and examining their social behaviors, realizing that individuals who faced the most inequalities were unable to decode their own social conditions; they lacked knowledge about the systems and structures that created and sustained inequity (Comber, 2015). Freire thus recognized literacy's role in achieving social justice. Critical literacy could enable "workers and farmers to ask questions about their conditions and argue for their rights" (Comber, 2015, p. 363). If oppressed individuals could develop a sense of power through knowledge acquisition, Freire reasoned they would ultimately act against oppressive conditions. This principle implied that reforming educational systems could cultivate such socially transformative knowledge (Gottesman, 2016).

Significant advocates of the critical approach to education include Freire (1970), Kincheloe (2008), and Giroux (2010). Building from Freire's work,

Kincheloe and Giroux suggested that restructuring schools to develop students' critical consciousness—the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and the commitment to act against these systems—could ensure all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to function in an ethnically and racially diverse world (Watts et al., 1999). Reform could render schools better suited to provide the multicultural exposure students in a democratic, multiethnic society need. Such reform sought to provide educational equity for members of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups and facilitate group participation in an inclusive national civic culture. This exposure is significant because, according to Kincheloe (2008), “questions of democracy and justice cannot be separated from the most fundamental features of teaching and learning” (p. 5). From the critical perspective, the purpose of education is to build an informed citizenry able to transform society and challenge injustices.

In more contemporary research, researchers have found that developing students' critical consciousness not only expands students' commitment to challenging injustices but also improves academic achievement and engagement (Cabrera, 2014; Carter, 2008; Dee & Penner, 2017; Ginwright, 2010; O'Connor, 1997; Watts et al., 2011). A key component of critical consciousness in education is the ability to recognize inequality and injustice. Offering students clarity and understanding of the language surrounding oppressive systems provides visibility and creates openings for educators to discuss these forces' political, social, and economic roles (Watts et al., 1999). When people understand the forces threatening their communities, they are more likely to engage in activities that

challenge those forces (Ginwright, 2010). Students can apply their learning to the larger dilemmas facing U.S. democracy.

Critiques of critical pedagogy have suggested that critical theorists have failed to incorporate elements of social reconstruction ideology with historical connections to critical theory, especially in the United States. As Giroux (1983) argued,

Early American progressive social reconstructionist thinkers George Counts and Harold Rugg [...] viewed education as part of an ongoing struggle to develop forms of knowledge and social practices that not only make students critical themselves but made them address social problems in order to transform existing political and economic inequalities. (as cited in McKernan, 2013, p. 428)

Consequently, critical theory has evolved both separately and intertwined with social reconstruction. In the United States, Dewey, Counts, and Bramfield championed the role of education in equipping students with the critical thinking necessary for questioning authority, deconditioning “mental bad habits,” and dispelling society’s false beliefs and deceptive ideas (McKernan, 2013).

Collectively, they advocated for schools and teachers to be instrumental agents in promoting change and believed schools should lead to the renewal of culture and the resolution of social problems. McKernan (2013) suggested Bramfield’s scholarship within this framework set the foundation for a more widely accepted philosophy focused on commitments to multicultural education, wherein “a major purpose of education is to create a world community” (p. 429).

Similar to, yet distinct from, critical consciousness, culturally relevant pedagogy and critical multicultural education developed during the civil rights movements in the United States. Scholars such as Au (1993), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Delpit (1988) sought to provide educators with the tools to improve students' academic achievement by repairing discontinuities between students' diverse backgrounds and school culture. Culturally relevant pedagogy developed into a theoretical model that focuses on multiple aspects of student achievement and supporting students' cultural identities, enabling them to develop critical perspectives and challenge societal inequalities (Gay, 2018). Multicultural education grew out of ethnic groups' demands for inclusion in schools, colleges, and universities during the 1960s and 1970s, but it has deep historical roots in the African-American ethnic studies movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Educational resources are still predominantly "white-washed," but over the past 2 decades, more ethnic content has appeared in elementary and secondary textbooks in the United States, and an increasing number of teachers are using more diverse resources within educational programs thanks to scholarship on multicultural education (Banks, 2016).

One major distinction of culturally relevant pedagogy is that it does not fully accept education as the sole driver for societal change, departing from existing sentiments of critical education. According to Gay (2018), "culturally responsive teaching recognizes the power of teaching while fully realizing that without accompanying changes in all other aspects of schooling and society, the very best of teaching will not be able to accomplish systemic reforms" (p. xxvii).

Culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes reforms are necessary outside the educational system as well as within it to combat societal injustices. Policy transformation must occur within multiple spheres of influence; otherwise, complete change cannot happen. However, culturally relevant teaching can foster incremental change, which is far better than no change at all (Gay, 2018).

Related Research

In addition to theoretical and historical scholarship, I also reviewed prior studies on the problems arising in social studies education; how critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and multicultural education can respond to such problems; and implementations of such efforts in predominantly White schools.

The Status of Social Studies Education

Social studies education can cultivate skills beyond the classroom environment and foster students' awareness of their responsibilities to their communities. Without a base in humanities, both the students and their democratic societies are denied a full view of the heritage and critical habits that make civilization worth the effort (Shaver, 1979). Education in the humanities helps students become more aware of their social nature; gives them basic knowledge regarding their social, economic, and political backgrounds and their interrelationships; and can help them commit to transforming their communities and society as a whole. The role of social studies educators is to teach a curriculum intended to guide students in making social, economic, political, and historic decisions in the world (Myers, 2006).

A problem arises with the current environment of social studies education in the United States, one that fails to provide students with the necessary exposure to perspectives outside of the dominant discourse and issues reforms that focus on academic success rather than the tools for democratic citizenship. Noddings (1999) criticized educational reforms that

aim almost exclusively at increasing the academic achievement of students...[because] they often fall short in promoting the discourse that lies at the heart of education in a liberal democracy: What experience do students need in order to become engaged participants in democratic life? How can education develop the capacity for making well-informed choices? (p. 579)

Education has prioritized reform based on objective understandings of the curriculum rather than promoting choice, inquiry, critical thinking, and application to democratic problems. Further, students lack exposure to diverse, critical thought, as the typical K–12 social studies textbook “continues to produce historical narratives about racism that veil its institutionalized nature” (Brown, 2011, p. 252).

Social studies classrooms are conducive to teaching critical literacy, as the discipline involves evaluation of various sources and provides opportunities for social justice teaching practices (Harouni, 2009; Soares & Wood, 2010; Wineburg & Martin, 2004; Wolk, 2003). Nevertheless, scholarship regarding how social studies teachers can use specific multicultural methodologies to produce positive and more equitable student outcomes is thin. Practical suggestions for

the classroom come in the form of adopting broad critical literacy initiatives or giving students opportunities to explore different perspectives throughout the curriculum, meaning educators need to do a tremendous amount of additional research to apply this advice to their subject area. Throughout my literature review, I struggled to find sources that guide teachers in how to navigate critical education in specific fields. One exception, Meloche et al.'s (2020) qualitative case study examined how critical literacy could emerge from AP World History classes that consider historical texts and current events critically. The study identified clear benefits for educators seeking to apply a similar approach, such as my own action research occurring within a similar AP social studies context, but locating similar qualitative studies in each subject area proved more difficult.

Additionally, a lack of appropriate training or unfamiliarity with issues of race and gender cause some educators to avoid discussing these issues within their classrooms (Brown, 2011; Chikkatur, 2013; Epstein, 2000; Sleeter, 1993). The social studies classroom is one of the most appropriate settings to include discussion of and exposure to topics of race, class, and gender, yet my school's social studies faculty lacks the training in how to approach these topics with students. Chikkatur (2013), while observing a teacher in a social studies classroom, recounted how the instructor "did not feel comfortable bringing up issues of race and gender in her classes because she was not comfortable talking about those issues" (p. 517).

Another problem arises with students' unfamiliarity when addressing issues of race and gender, echoing educators' own discomfort. Chikkatur (2013)

observed that White students felt uncomfortable with discussing the history of institutional racism in the United States, given their ancestry. Therefore, educators and students need familiarity with the prejudice that exists in society and their own discourse. Feeling uncomfortable and unfamiliar with the injustices outside of one's experience inhibits discussion of difficult topics. Through action research, I sought to begin addressing this problem within my own classroom, breaking down feelings of unfamiliarity for myself and my student population through exposure to diverse authors, narratives, and topics.

Critical Theory Within Education: Critical Pedagogy

Critical theory also evolved to meet the education field's specific needs in the form of critical pedagogy, which treats social justice and democracy as integral to teaching and learning (Giroux, 2007). A critical theory of education could draw on the reconstruction of Marxist, Deweyan, and Freirean critical pedagogies and attempt to promote the ideals of democracy, social justice, and a positive society because

critical pedagogy is fundamentally committed to developing and evolving a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students. By doing so, this pedagogical perspective seeks to help transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life. (Darder, 2003, pp. 10–11)

Critical pedagogy strives for “students [to] gain a critical self-consciousness and social awareness and take appropriate action against oppressive forces” by

promoting self-reflection that embodies “Freire’s notion of ‘conscientization’ or the coming to personal critical consciousness” (McKernan, 2013, p. 425).

Under the critical paradigm in education, a teacher researcher is not merely seeking to understand the power structures and dynamics unearthed by critical theories but actively attempting to change them in positive ways. Primarily, the “culture of power” manifests in the classroom as a reflection of societal norms, and Delpit (1988) identified how “those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often more aware of its existence” (p. 282). Therefore, all community members must recognize and reflect on their positionality and culture to initiate transformative policies.

Critical Theory Within Education: Critical Literacy

The essence of critical literacy is examining the relationship between language and power in a text; the term connotes the “use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (Luke, 2004 as cited in Luke, 2012, p. 5). According to Wolk (2003), critical literacy entails “how [people] see and interact with the world; it is about having, as a regular part of one’s life, the skills and desire to evaluate society and the world,” and ideally centers “issues of power: Who has it and who is denied it; how it is used and how it is abused” (p. 102). The primary aim of these literacy efforts is social justice across disenfranchised communities. Critical social theorists oppose traditional, transmissive forms of instruction in which students are

passive recipients of teachers' knowledge (Coffey, n.d.). In contrast, critical literacy instruction enables students to deconstruct their perceptions of reality, especially when reinforced by traditional understandings. In a critical model, students become more aware of forms of injustice and capable of exploring knowledge. Educators who see the value of critical approaches strive to create experiences that offer students the opportunity to deconstruct and construct forms of knowledge (Freire, 1970).

Critical literacy can be a valuable instructional tool when teachers employ it effectively. Encouraging students to question hidden biases and social disparities can help them become reflective readers (Coffey, n.d.). To that end, Lewison et al. (2015) explored four key dimensions of critical literacy, suggesting texts should: (a) strive to disrupt the commonplace culture, (b) consider multiple viewpoints, (c) focus on the sociopolitical aspects of society, and (d) drive the audience into taking transformative action. These dimensions ensure the central focus of critical literacy by prioritizing education as a vehicle to limit marginalization, prompt inclusion, and lead to the construction of new discourses. To achieve these aims, students need a curriculum that emphasizes diverse life experiences and contributions of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups.

Critical Literacy From the Perspective of Educators

Teachers can foster critical literacy by assigning supplementary texts, using multiple texts within a lesson or unit, coaching students to engage in resistant reading, and acknowledging students' passions in ways that inspire

them to act (Coffey, n.d.). Integrating diverse texts on similar themes surfaces multiple perspectives, and presenting multiple texts from the same period or introducing an author's background also stimulates comparative reading; for example, students can identify how concepts like race, gender, and socioeconomic status impact individual perspectives (Coffey, n.d.). Resistant reading goes even further by guiding learners in "the interpretation of a text from the viewpoint of the world and not just the common Euro-centric ideology often found in standard texts," giving students insights into marginalized groups (Coffey, n.d., para. 20). Presenting texts in this way fosters the deconstruction of hidden biases and creates opportunities for students to consider why particular perspectives may be privileged and others typically unheard.

Critical Literacy From the Perspective of Students

Student choice also plays a significant role in critical classroom environments. Constructivists like Dewey endorsed choice as a strategy to empower students in constructing knowledge (Darder, 2003), and legitimatizing students' interests prompts them to evaluate societal problems and seek solutions to address those problems (Coffey, n.d.). As Coffey suggested, choice within the practice of critical literacy could include the choice of participation in various activities or even choice in the direction a student takes when analyzing text, reflecting on the themes or concepts of their choosing.

Beyond literary exposure, critical literacy also "has an explicit aim of the critique and transformation of dominant ideologies, cultures and economies, and institutions and political systems" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). Once students have a better

understanding through the pedagogy of critical literacy, they can begin taking their knowledge from the classroom to solve problems within their communities. Educators adopting critical literacy initiatives should ensure that their instructional practice reflects its central tenets, providing students with the chance to reshape their critical consciousness and develop agency as readers.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. Ladson-Billings (1995) traced the evolution of multicultural education, suggesting it began "as a challenge to the inequities that students of color experienced in school and society [and] soon became an umbrella movement for a variety of forms of difference" (p. 55). More modern applications of multicultural education have reduced it to a celebration of diversity, isolating the term from a constructivist approach (Darling-Hammond, 2015). For Ladson-Billings (1995), "multiculturalism without a transformative political agenda can be just another form of accommodation to the larger social order" (p. 53). Therefore, efforts to promote multicultural education should intertwine with the empowering components of critical pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching.

To adopt equity-driven methods, educators should consider "for whom multicultural education is intended" (Milner, 2005, p. 393). The answer should evolve as classrooms diversify. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), less than half of children under the age of 18 are non-Hispanic White. By 2060, that number is projected to be less than one-third. As the student population

becomes more diverse, educators must build on students' individual and cultural perspectives and prior knowledge (Banks & Banks, 2004), but what about schools where the student population is predominantly White? Beyond the need for students of color to experience a curriculum that speaks to their experience, multicultural education can help all students “develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will need to survive and function effectively” in a more diverse society (Banks, 1998, p. 23).

Successful implementation of multicultural education for all student populations requires institutional changes, including changes in the curriculum and teaching materials, such as those I attempted to incorporate through this action research study (Banks & Banks, 2004, 2013). Schools should strive to incorporate multiple multicultural education dimensions to yield better outcomes for their student populations, ideally promoting institutional transformation. By applying critical multicultural education from a social justice perspective, I sought to expose students to varying perspectives and encourage them to think about how to solve social problems outside of the traditional status quo.

Critical Education Within Predominantly White Schools

As I explained earlier, CRT reinforces the centrality of race in personal lives and work. For White individuals like me, enacting CRT means examining and rejecting racial privilege by committing to challenging the “manifestations of racism that [we] observe” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, p. 615). My discourse only allows me to speak of my own experience, not the experience of other groups, whereas counterstories come from the perspective of the oppressed person or

group (Grillo & Wildman, 1991). Transformation depends on these silenced voices. To explore my research through the lens of critical theory, I had to ensure that voices outside the dominant narrative guided my students' exposure to societal problems.

Additionally, I encountered another problem with framing my research under the critical paradigm: a lack of literature adopting a critical approach within a predominantly White school. A central tenet of critical theory is empowering oppressed groups, so most research focuses on that application, yet taking—or failing to take—a critical approach to education in the suburbs impacts how effective social reconstruction can be. If groups of students are isolated from systemic problems of race, gender, and class, is there hope for change? Milner (2005) emphasized the need to fill these gaps pertaining to overlooked contexts. Because all students should interact with multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic individuals in the United States, education needs to make gains in critical pedagogy for all student populations (Milner, 2005), hence my larger aim to empower students of color in my AP Government class while exposing their White peers to diverse perspectives, through an intervention process. My action research primarily sought to resolve an individual PoP, yet my study may also contribute to literature on social justice in social studies classrooms, as action research has the potential to “contribute to personal and social transformations” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 25). Chapman (2013) suggested schools

need to commit to a focus on critical multicultural education for social justice to assist educators in predominantly white suburban schools to

challenge racist practices, which are supported through a colorblind ideology, and create more equitable schooling experiences for students of color. (p. 2)

Scholarly consensus thus reinforces the need for a critical pedagogical approach to teaching and learning in all schools.

Methodological Implications and Chapter Summary

This chapter illustrated that *critical research* is not a uniform category but broadly describes efforts to understand, uncover, and transform social divisions and power structures. Critical researchers assume that reality is historically created and socially produced or reproduced through the domination of language, knowledge, and understanding. Within the critical paradigm, research begins—but does not end—with “uncovering the interpretation of people’s understandings of their world” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 11).

Consequently, critical approaches tend to rely on qualitative dialogic methods, whereby researchers and participants can engage in conversation and reflection that seeks to challenge traditional structures of dominance. Critical research should be explanatory, practical, and normative (Elliott & Ray, 2003). In other words, critical scholars must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify actors who can change it, and outline achievable goals for social transformation (Creswell, 2013). Consistent with this definition, qualitative designs go “beyond the aggregated statistical data” to a “nuanced understanding” (Hayes, 2011, p. 328). Action research also contributes to the goal of societal transformation by serving as “practical inquiry which focuses on

the improvement of practice” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 52). Therefore, the next chapter presents my intentional qualitative action research design for creating change within my sphere of influence.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this action research study, I sought to expose students to politically, socially, and economically diverse literature within my social studies classroom. As I explained in Chapter 1, my PoP was my predominantly White students' apparent disconnect from experiences that differ from their own when attempting to understand concepts relating to inequalities. I attributed this problem in part to the supplemental curriculum material I chose for my government classes, which failed to provide opposing narratives. This action research study enabled me to correct this problem from within my classroom.

Research Design

Qualitative research attempts to use “words as data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). Rather than determining cause and effect, as might be the case when examining quantitative data, a qualitative design seeks to uncover the observed phenomenon's meaning. In my case, the main objective was to identify how exposing students to supplemental literature from authors of different ethnicities, genders, or economic backgrounds could impact how students reflect on issues relating to discrimination, representation, or social movements. Engagement with various perspectives on topics of U.S. government should aid students' understanding of complex political and social issues, like those of police brutality or even the gender pay gap. Martell (2013) highlighted the

“importance of white teachers listening to the voices of color when planning instruction” (p. 408). Participating in action research allowed me to further evaluate the impact these strategies could have for both White students and students of color in my social studies classroom.

Qualitative researchers’ interests lie beyond statistical data, focusing on how individuals “interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 7), which requires room to develop the meaning of “socially constructed realities”; it is not so much what participants “know” about a phenomenon but more about their interaction with or interpretations of that experience (pp. 24–25). As I explained in Chapter 2, this type of design also aligns with a critical paradigm (Hayes, 2011) and thus with my theoretical framework. Employing qualitative methods meant that data collection and analysis happened simultaneously, in an emergent and exploratory process distinct from the linear patterns of more traditional quantitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

From an action research angle, I sought to elicit and contextualize my students’ narratives and perspectives on U.S. Government as I changed the curriculum, in line with my specific aim: to explore how the application of diverse voices in supplemental literature can stimulate critical examination outside students’ own experience regarding the concepts of U.S. Government. I expected students to gain an increased ability to analyze the social, political, and economic forces that contribute to past and present inequity and inequality.

To plan the intervention, I adjusted the supplemental reading for my AP U.S. Government class to address disparities in the current social studies curriculum. I intentionally identified sources that would expose students to multiple perspectives, guided by the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2. Content integration and knowledge construction are essential first steps in multicultural instruction, yet Banks (2016) cautioned that narratives and processes should be “logical and not contrived” to create a classroom environment reflective of reality (p. 9). Adding content for the sake of content does little to achieve the goals of an inclusive and multi-perspective curriculum. Additionally, I sought to embed my methodology with the significant dimensions of critical literacy to promote multiple voices in the class and then empower students to pursue forms of action against inequalities they identify in the world today.

Initial Plan for the Intervention

In preparation for my study, I began to review the U.S. Government standards and identify what additional literary sources would meet the expected objectives while promoting critical literacy, critical analysis, and discussion. Grounding the literature within the course objectives ensured the choices’ multicultural and curricular relevance, as opposed to being merely contrived for the sake of inclusion. Content integration should not simply diversify a curriculum, but rather should add perspective on social divisions and power structures within society. The mere inclusion of sources alone could be one explanation for the problematic state of my existing U.S. Government curriculum.

For example, from the College Board (2020) course description, the first section of the AP Government curriculum focuses on

how the framers of the Constitution set up a structure of government intended to stand the test of time. The [...] compromises [...] made during the Constitutional Convention and ratification debates [...] focused on the proper balance between individual freedom, social order, and equality of opportunity. (n.p.)

This unit on the political philosophies and ideals at the founding of the United States typically includes readings from Enlightenment thinkers, such as Locke or Hobbes; foundational documents like the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution; and selections from the Federalist and Anti-federalist papers. These texts are vital to understanding the foundations of U.S. democracy, yet their authors are demographically homogeneous.

Integrating the “Remember the Ladies” letters Abigail Adams sent her husband John when he and other leaders were framing the U.S. government can “provide a distinctive lens through which to look at issues of power, quite different from the more commonly considered perspective of the Founders” (National Humanities Center, 2015). Far from advocating for suffrage, the letters nevertheless highlight women’s role as something more than property and critique the arbitrary and unrestrained power of men.

To expand my understanding of political inequalities and improve my ability to adapt primary and secondary sources to the AP U.S. Government curriculum, I also participated in a 3-week summer institute entitled *Freedom’s*

Lawmakers: Black Leadership During Reconstruction. Funded through an NEH grant, the 3-week professional development opportunity enabled 25 K–12 teachers to explore the impact and legacy of Black elected officials during Reconstruction and sought (a) to provide teachers with the ability to learn about “a seminal moment in American political history when large numbers of Black Americans who, though but one generation removed from slavery, were selected by their peers and party affiliates to take on the responsibilities of governance,” and (b) “to bring these individuals into focus and examine their lives, who they were, what they wanted, what they did, and their role in the Reconstruction experiment” (Center for Innovation & Inclusion in Higher Education, 2021). The speakers, activities, discussions, and resources related to citizenship, the experience and legacies of Black lawmakers, and methods for teaching about Reconstruction through memory and personal stories provided a framework for centering my project and readapting my curriculum.

To incorporate critical literacy, I focused on three units within the AP U.S. Government curriculum that easily accommodated supplemental readings related to social justice: (a) the foundations of American democracy, (b) federalism, and (c) civil liberties and civil rights. Over the Spring 2022 semester, I implemented a three-phase intervention by including a mix of primary and secondary source material corresponding to topics embedded within each unit. Designing the study in this way permitted me to center the dimensions of critical literacy, including student choice and multiple viewpoints, within the methodology.

Each intervention phase included two pieces of literature for the students to read and analyze. This combination enabled me to (a) evaluate whether primary and secondary sources had different impacts on students across my intervention, (b) provide student choice for the readings or concepts they decided to discuss in their reflections, and (c) encourage reflection on the major themes of the study more broadly. Moreover, each part of the intervention included two separate readings on the same topic, providing additional perspective or context. The students had a week to review the readings and craft a written reflection, which allowed them to consider the texts in a neutral space. Figure 3.1 illustrates my overall approach to this critical literacy intervention moving through each phase as we progressed through the units of the AP U.S. Government curriculum.

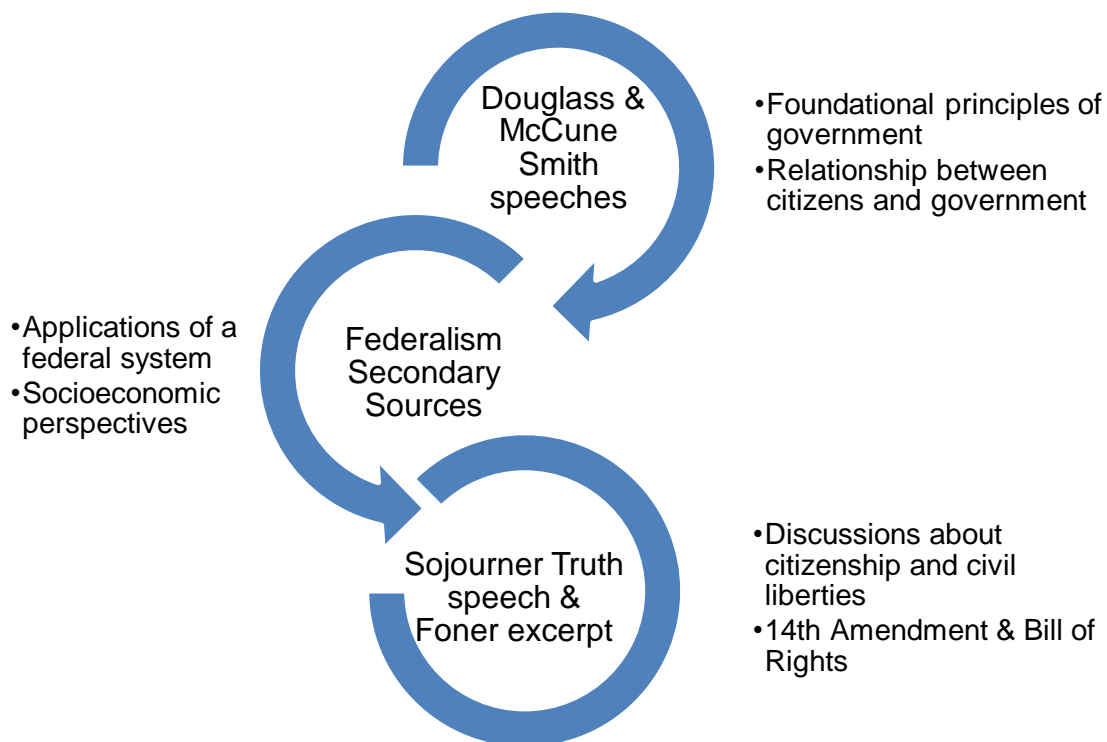


Figure 3.1 *Critical Literacy Intervention*

Within the AP U.S. Government curriculum, Topic 1.1, Ideals of Democracy, seeks for students to understand that a “balance between governmental power and individual rights has been a hallmark of American political development,” reflected in the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution (College Board, 2020). To build on these foundational documents, necessary for teaching the U.S. political system’s philosophical underpinnings and political values, I sought readings that would illuminate the limitations of government, especially in terms of inequality. Therefore, I included an excerpt from Frederick Douglass’s 1852 address to the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society in New York, which has become known as the “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” speech, and a speech Dr. James McCune Smith delivered on the third day of the 1855 Colored National Convention. Both speeches address the hypocrisies surrounding the documents central to the creation of the U.S. Government. These two sources, I reasoned, would assist students in making connections to the limitations and inequalities in documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, allowing them to consider the perspective of individuals who were not guaranteed participation or protection under the U.S. Government.

Topic 1.7, The Relationship Between the States and Federal Government, seeks for students to understand federalism, “the dynamic distribution of power between national and state governments” (College Board, 2020). The concept of federalism is at the heart of most political, social, and economic issues facing the United States and can sometimes be difficult for students to grasp. Thus, I

intentionally included it in this critical intervention and chose readings that would prompt students to consider how federalism provides positive local autonomy for some governmental issues but could also contribute to problems of inequality and uneven citizenship. Unlike in the first unit, where both sources were primary, I decided to provide two secondary sources relating to federalism, which I pulled from two supplemental reading resources for U.S. government and politics.

First, I selected Schram et al.'s (2009) "Deciding to Discipline: Race, Choice, and Punishment at the Frontline of Welfare Reform," which was reprinted in an anthology specifically designed to follow the structure of a typical U.S. government class, while highlighting the diversity at the heart of political issues. As the title indicates, Schram et al. examined the effects of state welfare policy-making, including the possible racial implications, which provided an additional benefit beyond showcasing an economic perspective on welfare that might be unfamiliar to my students from a more privileged socioeconomic background.

The second source, an excerpt from Ryan's (2011) *Federalism and the Tug of War Within*, focused on the federalism conflict surrounding climate change reforms. The overarching theme of the book is "how constitutional interpreters struggle to reconcile the competing values that undergird American federalism, with real consequences for governance that requires local and national collaboration" (p. xi). The selection I chose focused on the issue of climate change and how the lack of national policies in favor of state decision-making has impacted citizens across state lines. These readings intentionally exposed

my students to different economic perspectives when considering poverty and how federalism can create unequal policies across other states.

I aligned the final readings to the College Board's (2020) unit standards on civil liberties and civil rights, specifically Topic 3.1 and Topic 3.10, which expect students to understand how the Bill of Rights is "continually being interpreted to balance the power of government and the civil liberties of individuals" and how the "Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause, as well as other constitutional provisions, have often been used to support the advancement of equality." I decided the readings for this section should relate to the concept of citizenship and how that definition could impact an individual's access to society. Therefore, I selected supplemental texts centered on citizenship. A secondary source, an excerpt from Foner's (2019) *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*, contextualized the book's main argument—that the Declaration of Independence announced equality as an ideal, yet the Civil War and the subsequent adoption of three constitutional amendments were seemingly necessary to establish that ideal as law. To echo this notion, I paired Foner's explanation with Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech from the 1851 Women's Convention. Truth's speech demonstrates the intersectionality of being both Black and a woman during the women's suffrage and abolition movements of the 19th century. Pairing these documents exposed students to the importance of that definition of citizenship when considering the concept of individual civil liberties and how one's intersectionality can create unique dynamics of discrimination or inequality.

In preparation for the study, I also reviewed literature and strategies related to critical literacy and reading interventions for social studies. Learning for Justice (2022a), in collaboration with the Southern Poverty Law Center, provides educational resources for catalyzing racial justice. I incorporated the program's close reading strategies to enhance my students' skills with analysis, interpretation, and critique. To scaffold and build critical reading skills in my classroom and help students connect texts, to broader contexts, I focused on incorporating a few specific practices from Learning for Justice.

One such practice, *annolighting*, involves guiding students to annotate text and highlight important facts to help them focus during the process of reading and, therefore, build comprehension skills (Learning for Justice, 2022b). As a class, we also discussed how to challenge the text with questions, a strategy known as *reading against the grain* that can surface gaps, silences, and contradictions (Learning for Justice, 2022b). Both strategies encourage students to engage directly with the text while considering their interests related to the reading. To supplement and reinforce these practices, I also emphasized the importance of taking general thinking notes and questions, thereby building reading comprehension and critical thinking skills into the literacy interventions.

Setting and Participants

The setting for my action research study was a small Catholic high school in the South Florida area. Our school is anchored to a legacy of tradition while at the same time attempting to modernize to meet the changing educational needs of our student population. As a result, our school is in a state of flux, reevaluating

curriculum and instructional design, integrating technology, and building new student resources while maintaining our mission to embody Catholic values. Most significantly, we have a 1:1 technology initiative allowing students individual access to an iPad for their schoolwork and an alternating block schedule in which students take eight 90-minute classes that meet every other day.

As I explained in Chapter 1, my participants were students from my 12th-grade AP U.S. Government class, a purposeful convenience sample (Mertler, 2014). Convenience sampling allowed me to recruit easily accessible participants (i.e., my students), and the sample was purposeful because of participants' relevance to my PoP and overall action research design. The sample from my AP Government classes was reflective of the school population, including a mixture of genders and ethnicities. However, as I noted when describing my PoP and will illustrate in Chapter 4, my students tend to come from similar demographic backgrounds, predominantly from White, middle-class, and Christian or Catholic families.

My senior students are on the cusp of entering democratic society, about to leave the protection of our school community for a more diverse world. Our school's racial and ethnic demographics differ significantly from those of the surrounding South Florida county. In contrast to the county's roughly 36.3% White, non-Hispanic residents; 29.8% Hispanic or Latino residents; 27.6% Black, non-Hispanic residents; and 6.3% of residents making up a variety of other groups (Broward County Government, 2022), our high school of 1,100 students hovers around 70% White, depending on the year. These students need

exposure to diverse perspectives to navigate life in the United States. I designed this action research project because I was curious about how an educator can begin diversifying the perspectives within their classroom and the impact of such curricular changes on students' abilities to connect those perspectives to historical and present-day social injustice.

Student enrollment in the AP U.S. Government course depends on a combination of standardized test scores, grades, and a former teacher's recommendation. Our school evaluates student placement into social studies classes through their performance on the Evidence-Based Reading section of the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. The student sample would normally consist of students who achieved above a 29, based on the Reading section's 8–38-point scale; however, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on student test scores prompted the department to lower the benchmark to 27. AP students are also expected to maintain a B+ grade point average across their enrolled honors and AP courses.

During the Spring 2022 semester, I invited all students ($N = 51$) from my two sections of AP U.S. Government to participate in the study (Appendix A). Involvement in the more personalized sections of the research design (i.e., interviews and student journals) required students' explicit permission, whereas I originally considered all students in the class as part of the observational components of the study, wherein I recorded and analyzed my observations of class discussions in response to the readings. However, after completing one

unit, I found the class discussions were repetitive and lacked necessary levels of student engagement. As a result, I dropped them as a measure from the study.

All students were aware of the study, goals, and methodology before participating in whatever capacity. I notified each student and their guardians at the start of the Spring 2022 semester and asked them to acknowledge their understanding and indicate their preferred level of participation. Recruitment for the interview portions of the study occurred through email and was optional for any AP U.S. Government students who wished to participate (Appendix B). I also provided students and guardians with evidence of the administrative permission I secured to conduct the study at our institution, alongside the student permission forms (Appendix C).

Data Collection

Because of the study's narrative nature, qualitative methods aligned with my purpose and RQs:

1. How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to understand foundational concepts from the course?
2. How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to understand past and present issues relating to inequality?
3. How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' motivation to engage on issues of inequality?

Interviews and student artifacts in the form of reflective journals served as sources for each question, allowing me, as the teacher researcher, to evaluate the impacts this curriculum shift had on my students. Both qualitative methods supported a more exploratory and open-ended approach to the action research study, and using more than one source facilitated triangulation (Mertler, 2014).

Interviews

Pre-intervention and follow-up interview data helped me gauge student benchmarks for exposure to diverse sources and analyze the impact of engaging with them. My AP U.S. Government classes are semester-long courses, allowing me to obtain Institutional Review Board approval during the Fall 2021 semester before interviewing students at the beginning of the Spring 2022 course and again at the conclusion of the semester to determine any change over time. Students' participation in the interview process was optional and open to the student population from my AP U.S. Government classes. I constructed my interview protocol (Appendix D) to identify changes in students' opinions and knowledge throughout the study and voice-recorded the interviews for later transcription. After transcribing and coding the interviews, I deleted the voice-recording copies to maintain participant confidentiality.

As semi-structured sessions, the interviews were designed to encourage open dialogue between the students and me. As opposed to a formalized and unchangeable list of predetermined questions, my protocol included open-ended questions to facilitate discussion rather than a more straightforward question-and-response format. Semi-structured interview techniques "are well suited for

the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). This type of exploration permitted the students to provide more perspective on the issue of the social studies curriculum at our high school. The semi-structured interview format also provided opportunities to ensure my data’s reliability through clarification of ideas or inconsistencies.

Through interviews, I wanted to gauge student attitudes and exposure over time because “unlike the spontaneous exchanges of views in everyday conversations, a research interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). As such, interviewing becomes a systematic activity heavily rooted in design and framework goals. Because each student came into the classroom with their own set of experiences, establishing baseline measures was essential. I also expected students’ individualities to play a role in how they responded to the interview format, which I devised in accordance with the study’s critical paradigm and my research aims. Having these interviews as a data source thus provided me with student-driven perspectives and insights on the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interview procedure began once students had volunteered for time slots following the recruitment email and completion of their permission slips. The interviews occurred in my classroom, a familiar space to students, and typically lasted 10–15 minutes. The pre-intervention interviews took place during the second week of the course to give students a chance to adapt to the class and

complete the permission slips but before the students began their reading reflections. The follow-up interviews occurred during the last week of the course to accommodate AP and final exams for the graduating seniors. Similar to the pre-intervention interviews, these interviews typically lasted 10–15 minutes but focused more on the student experience during the intervention stage.

Artifacts

As I explained in Chapter 1, my study also included student reflection journals, which provided students a judgment-free space to elaborate on their thoughts and gave me a systematic way to reflect on students' progress throughout the research timeline. The first reflection coincided with student-led group discussions of the supplemental literature, but I evaluated the remaining literacy interventions primarily using the student artifacts.

These qualitative measures documented the students' connection to the diverse literature I incorporated throughout the intervention, providing insight into their attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews. I spent a week reviewing foundational course materials for each set of readings to help scaffold the significant concepts I expected students to consider. For example, before the first set, I guided my students through primary document analyses of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution to lay a foundation for the concepts they would encounter in the readings and scaffold the skill set needed to analyze primary sources. Additionally, alongside the artifact directions, each reflection artifact provided a collection of critical literacy-inspired questions (Appendix E) for students to consider while reading and writing. Designed to aid students in their

reflection and focus some of their thoughts, these questions prompted them to engage more critically with the sources they were reading.

Through these personal inquiries, I examined the diverse literary sources' impact on my students from their perspectives. I wanted this approach to be as learner-centered as possible, using student voices as the catalyst for the reform I wanted to create in my classroom. I also saw these artifacts as an additional source for the action phase of my study: using these inquiries in a cyclical nature could yield a more comprehensive blueprint for continuing to adopt a more critical approach in the classroom.

Table 3.1 *Study Timeline*

Stage	Major tasks
Pre-intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit volunteers and conduct pre-intervention interviews • Finalize intervention design • Familiarize students with procedures for supplemental texts/reflections
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Phase 1 and Phase 2 during Unit 1 and analyze artifacts • Implement Phase 3 during Unit 3 and analyze artifacts
Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct follow-up interviews with volunteering students

Procedure

As Table 3.1 illustrates, the study began with participant recruitment, using the sampling plan I described earlier in the chapter. I reviewed the goals and purpose of the research project with my students and answered any questions they had. I then advised my students to consider what we had discussed before expressing their preference to opt in or out of the study. Students volunteered by completing a permission form and indicating their level of preferred engagement (Appendix C). Students could consent to varying levels of participation, including

participating in the interviews or offering their written artifacts as data points. Students who opted out of supplying artifact data were still expected to complete the critical reading and writing reflection as a class assignment.

Figure 3.2 provides a breakdown of the research procedures following the initial recruitment and planning for the intervention. With participants in place, I spent the first 3 weeks of the semester conducting the pre-intervention interviews to assess students' prior experiences with diverse sources in social studies classes and invite them to consider their engagement specifically within my government class. After the pre-intervention interviews, I initiated the reading intervention that occurred over the course of the semester.

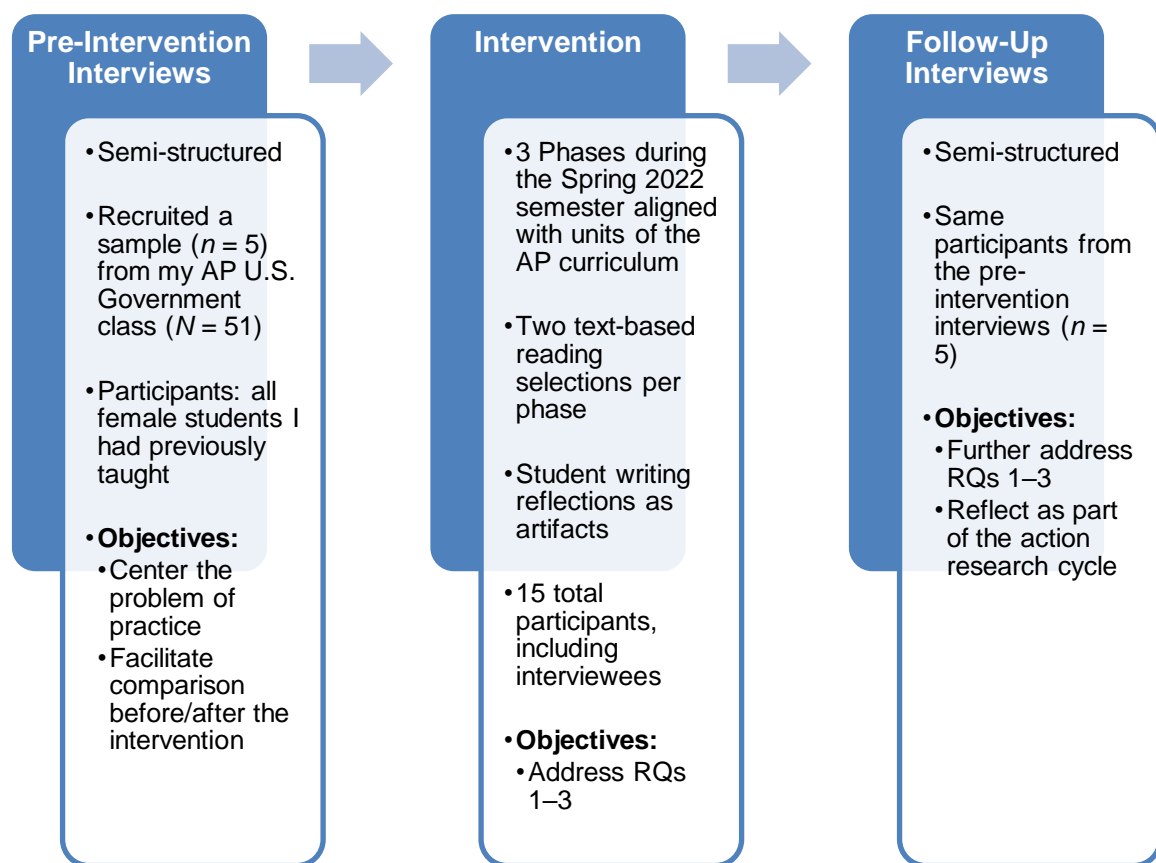


Figure 3.2 Action Research Plan and Objectives

First, I ran through the general expectations and directions (Appendix E) for the critical literacy interventions prior to the first phase of the intervention with the students as a class. I also reviewed and scaffolded best practices for reading comprehension and strategies for critical reading with them to guide the process. Once I briefed the students on the procedures, I began with phases of the critical literacy interventions, which required all students to read and reflect on the three sets of diverse supplemental readings, thereby producing the artifacts I used to evaluate the intervention's impact on student perspectives. This pattern occurred three times over the course of the semester. Each part of the intervention followed the course sequence, with two occurring early in the semester as the class completed Unit 1 and the third toward the end of the semester, aligned with Unit 3. One final round of follow-up interviews completed my data collection.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a sense-making process, and for qualitative designs, that process is non-linear (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), requiring me to organize my data and construct possible findings early in the study. Developing hypotheses directed my attention to particular data points or toward specific refinements throughout data collection, so setting up organizational and framework categories during the proposal phase benefited my research in the analysis phase.

Ongoing coding of interview and artifact data simplified analysis when data collection ended. Coding itself is the process of labeling and organizing qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My approach was inductive, focused on developing a

coding scheme to evaluate student views toward culturally responsive literature and how it affected their understandings of U.S. Government from the interviews and artifacts.

In alignment with RQ 1, *How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to better understand foundational concepts from the course?*, coding focused on the pedagogical actions within my classes. Throughout the interview and artifact data, I identified any cues from student responses related to incorporating foundational course material (i.e., the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, the U.S. Constitution, Federalist Papers, Anti-Federalist Papers, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," or any of the 15 required Supreme Court cases). Through this approach, I located connections for how effective source material may be for promoting critical thought among my students while maintaining AP standard course alignments. I sought to identify whether students were able to draw connections from the supplemental readings and required course content.

Similarly, RQ 2, *How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to understand past and present issues relating to inequality?*, prompted coding based on a productive, mixed, or unproductive categorization, yet framed to address the impact the curricular changes had on student attitudes toward issues in U.S. Government. Coding the interview transcripts and student reflective journals in this way allowed me to evaluate the influence these multicultural

curriculum changes had on my students' understanding of complex political, social, or economic inequalities.

For RQ 3, *How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' motivation to engage on issues of inequality?*, coding focused on students' acknowledgement of the critical literacy dimension of taking action. I wanted to see evidence of a "course of action to bring about change in an inappropriate, unequal power relationship between people" within their written reflections or in the interview conversations (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2020, p. 587). I expected to see or hear references to forms of civic participation, like voting or social activism, or students' vocalizing a desire for more information related to social issues.

Predetermined Codes for Artifact Data

Before the initial intervention, I developed qualitative codes based on the overall themes I thought would occur in the student reflection artifacts with my research aims in mind: to identify how the students engaged with course material and current events relating to inequality, and to discern their motivation to act on social issues as a result of these literacy interventions. This approach resulted in the following codes: (a) foundational understanding, (b) past–present comparison, (c) different perspective, (d) citizenship or rights, and (e) call to action. The following sections provide more insight into the development of these codes, and the table in Appendix F provides a small sample of illustrative quotations to demonstrate how I interpreted the student artifacts that I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Foundational Understanding

The code of foundational understanding applied to references to major curricular objectives and core content for the course and thus aligned with RQ 1. AP U.S. Government students are expected to comprehend concepts relating to six foundational documents and 15 required Supreme Court cases and outcomes (College Board, 2020), which made identifying relevant data easy. Table 3.2 illustrates what information in the AP U.S. Government course is considered essential understanding for students, highlighting the required knowledge and breakdown of the course units. Appendix F also further demonstrates how this code appeared across artifacts, with different students addressing the essential status of these required documents and court cases as well major concepts from the content areas of the course.

Table 3.2 *What is Foundational Understanding?*

Required knowledge	Examples
Foundational Documents	Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, U.S. Constitution, Constitutional Amendments, Federalist Paper #10, Federalist Paper # 51, Federalist Paper #70, Federalist Paper #78, Anti-federalist Paper Brutus #1, Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"
Supreme Court Cases	McCulloch v. Maryland (1819) , United States v. Lopez (1995), Marbury v. Madison (1803), Baker v. Carr (1962), Shaw v. Reno (1993), Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972), Engel v. Vitale (1962), Schenck v. United States (1919), Gideon v. Wainwright (1963), Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (1969), New York Times Co. v. United States (1971), Roe v. Wade (1973), Brown v. Board of Education (1954), McDonald v. Chicago (2010), and Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010)
Units	Unit 1: Foundations of American Democracy, Unit 2: Interactions Among Branches of Government, Unit 3: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights, Unit 4: American Political Ideologies and Beliefs, Unit 5: Political Participation

Past–Present Comparison

This code applied to students' connections to historic or current issues of injustice and thus corresponded with RQ 2. Examples could include instances, both historic and current, related to voting rights, income inequality, or social movements. I hoped for evidence that students could draw connections between events or apply concepts from the reading to similar social, political, economic issues. Because the interventions contained both primary and secondary sources, I predicted that students would make connections aligned to the periods embedded within the readings. For example, the primary documents could spark reflection on the political and social issues of the 19th century, while the more recent secondary sources could enable students to expand on issues in their own lifetime. Once again, Appendix F details a few examples of students' references to past or present events.

Different Perspective

This action research project centered on exposing students to new and diverse perspectives, so I expected to see ample evidence of this code in the student artifacts. As Chapter 4 will reveal, many of the responses reflecting this code remarked how eye-opening these narratives were or how students had not considered a specific perspective before because it was beyond their experience. Identifying an alternative perspective or describing the varying viewpoints on related issues, especially those embedded in social justice themes, demonstrated alignment with RQ 2.

Citizenship or Rights

Because a few of the selected readings related to discussions on the definition of citizenship and rights granted through citizenship, I anticipated seeing these concepts throughout the student artifacts, creating the need for this code. Students' artifacts reflected on the notion of citizenship or rights that are protected by American citizenship. These topics connect to the U.S. Constitution, influential court cases, and instances of injustice, so responses under this code were beneficial in understanding the intervention's impact in terms of the relationship between RQ 1 and RQ 2. Even though this code relates to components of the Constitution, I foresaw it being unique to the foundational understanding code, by capturing students' ability to apply rule of law to individual persons.

Call to Action

One of the key dimensions of critical literacy initiatives is that the readings not only prompt a deconstruction of oppressive norms but also elicit a desire for action, hence RQ 3. For this reason, I developed this code to address clear connections to an action component across the student artifacts. I envisioned evidence of students' motivations and plans to engage in civic or social activism, speak out on instances of injustice, and/or continue developing transformative knowledge.

Emergent Codes

I had anticipated the possibility of emergent codes as I progressed through the intervention, planning to reflect on any new themes or occurrences that manifested over the course of the semester. Indeed, two additional codes

emerged as the study progressed, which I will discuss more fully in Chapter 4: difficulty understanding and audience. Briefly, I noticed a pattern of students' difficulty comprehending the supplemental sources, especially during the second phase, and also detected attention to audience across the student reflections, which reflected one of the critical literacy strategies I employed to assist students in engaging with the readings. I provided general questions to prompt critical reflection, such as encouraging them to consider the author's intended audience or missing perspectives. Although similar to the code related to identifying a different perspective, and thus also aligned with RQ 2, this concept warranted a separate code because of the connection to an explicit guiding question from the reading strategies I employed (Appendix E).

Validity Considerations and Chapter Summary

With respect to validity in practitioner research, Herr and Anderson (2015) encouraged pursuing outcome, process, democratic, catalytic, and dialogic validity, as opposed to the validity criteria reserved for traditional research. However, Newton and Burgess (2008) cautioned that "each action research mode makes somewhat different knowledge claims and therefore relies on somewhat different configurations of validity" (p. 26). Because of this study's emancipatory nature, I prioritized catalytic validity, in which the research process seeks to transform and motivate participants to further social action, and democratic validity, which is concerned with stakeholder collaboration (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Taking part in this study stood to benefit both my students and me by improving our comprehension of sociopolitical inequality.

As I previously discussed, seminal studies relating to critical literacy efforts also suggest that education in multicultural humanities not only helps students' academic outcomes but also assists them in becoming more aware of their sociopolitical backgrounds and committing to transforming their communities. Exposing senior government students to diverse literature that anchored democratic concepts from their government class within multiple perspectives of thought encouraged them to become active contributors to knowledge, as Chapter 4 will reveal. This chapter showcased my intentional plan to address these students' inability to make meaningful connections to political situations outside their own experiences within my classroom because of a lack of exposure to diverse content.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Returning to the classroom for the 2020–2021 school year following the surge of demonstrations associated with the Black Lives Matter movement was a turning point in how I viewed my purpose as a social studies educator. I had spent the summer engrossed by news coverage of what felt like footage from the Civil Rights era documentaries I watched in my own high school history classes. According to Kishi and Jones (2020), between May 26, the day after George Floyd's death, and August 22, over 7,750 demonstrations linked to the movement occurred across more than 2,440 locations in all 50 states and Washington, DC. From these events, I was determined to come back into the classroom and use my role as an educator to teach and advocate for equality and justice, even just within the scope of my practice. Although students returned to school virtually due to COVID-19, they were eager to untangle the lineage of events underlying a summer of protests, perspectives, and conversations that had been avoided or silenced during their previous social studies experiences.

This action research project was intended to provide supplemental resources as a critical literacy intervention to improve how students comprehend course material and issues relating to social justice. I assigned three sets of readings over a semester of AP U.S. Government and examined the subsequent impact on students' understanding of foundational concepts from the AP

curriculum and reflections on issues of inequality within a democratic society. This chapter shares the outcome of those efforts.

Intervention

During the intervention semester, I had 51 students enrolled across two sections of AP U.S. Government. Within that population of AP students, 57% were female and 43% were male. Moreover, 62% of students were White, non-Hispanic. All 51 students met the department requirements for entry into an AP course and were seniors in class standing. Of that 51, five students consented to participate in the interview phase of the research and 15 students agreed to allow their written reflections to serve as data for this study. The five students who participated in the interview phases were all female; two identified as White, and three identified as White Hispanic. This chapter uses pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. The 15 students who supplied written artifacts, including the five interview participants, were more representative of my student population: a mix of male ($n = 6$) and female ($n = 9$) students, identifying as White ($n = 9$), Black ($n = 2$), and White Hispanic ($n = 4$). I assigned student numbers to their written responses to protect their identities.

Presentation of Findings

The following sections follow the research timeline presented in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1). I start with information from the pre-intervention interviews, highlighting the student participants and allowing them to describe their social studies experiences at our school prior to my intervention. The next major section moves chronologically through the three phases of the intervention and is further

organized by discussing my coded analysis of the student reflection artifacts corresponding to my research questions. The final subsection presents the follow-up interview results and an overarching summary of the data.

Pre-intervention Interviews

As I explained in Chapter 3, the intervention phases of my research corresponded with core sets of literature from the existing curriculum, with the interviews providing student insight on the nature and effectiveness of the interventions. Five female students from my AP U.S. Government course volunteered for the interview phases, with four of the five being students I had taught during the prior school year in AP Psychology. I had hoped that the recruitment phase for the interviews would yield a more diverse sample; however, I believe my typical teaching assignment and offering U.S. Government in 12th grade contributed to this outcome. I mainly teach 11th- and 12th-grade students in AP Psychology, and that population does not feed directly into the AP Government classes. Additionally, AP U.S. Government is only offered as a semester course during senior year, meaning my new students only had a period of 2 weeks to get to know me as a teacher, during which I was recruiting participants for the interviews. Having taught some of the students before probably contributed to their comfort level in opting into the interview portions of the study. In subsequent studies, I would like to evaluate a wider variety of the student population in order to better gauge my overall PoP. Nevertheless, my rapport with former students encouraged a candid discussion on their experience across their social studies classes prior to the intervention. The remainder of this

pre-intervention interview section introduces each student participant and describes our initial interviews before providing analysis across their responses.

Payton

I had my first interview with Payton. This very involved young lady had attended our school for the entirety of her high school career and earned AP distinctions for passing multiple courses and their qualifying examinations. Our conversation centered on her experience in the social studies courses at school and how she interacted with source material from her classes.

From what she recalled from her previous social studies classes, including the core curriculum courses such as World History and United States History and her electives like European History, she noted how much of the primary sources she read felt repetitive. For example, she mentioned how they read documents like the Declaration of Independence across every one of the classes she had taken, and many of the documents selected within the course curriculum had overlapped.

Additionally, she pointed out how she did not believe many of her social studies courses provided the opportunity to read “outside” sources from individuals, aside from specific units of study. She highlighted this trend by mentioning her junior-year experience in AP United States History:

We did get to see some firsthand accounts of people like American and Canadian Natives telling their accounts of what it was like to be in those schools. I forgot their exact name, but they’re boarding schools where they were transitioning them [Native American students] into the White culture

and stuff like that. That was definitely one of my very first things of seeing what it's like for someone that was actually affected by the hands of a White male, and it was impactful.

I asked her to elaborate on the impact, and she explained how this source was an “eye-opener” because it allowed her to see the impact historical events had on individual people, not just “governments.” In her prior history classes, some sources did not seem to convey the full effect of events or policies. Using the Declaration of Independence again as an example, she stated,

I feel like we just get a very base layer of say how the Declaration of Independence separated us from Britain. Just a very vague statement of like what it does. But getting to know more secondary sources [meaning primary sources] diversifying it can actually tell us the impact that it had on the people not just of what basic American history textbooks tell us.

Payton's responses in the interview demonstrated how social studies classes can dehumanize elements of history. Literature and historical documents become purely documents to analyze and students forget that individuals, with different backgrounds or motivations, experienced these events or wrote the documents they spend so much time working with in school. Furthermore, and as expected, the perspective of these sources is limited. When students are reading similar—or even the exact same—documents without varying perspectives, their ability to discover alternative ways to interpret and respond is restricted. The Declaration of Independence is an essential document, but when paired as the basis for

abolition or the civil rights movement, students can see a systemic failure to protect individual rights.

Kristin

My second interview was with Kristin, another distinguished AP student and one I had taught in the previous school year in an AP Psychology course. During her 4 years at our school, she had taken almost every AP social studies course offered: World History Modern, European History, United States History, Psychology, and both Micro and Macro Economics. Our conversation differed slightly from my interview with Payton. Where Payton focused on the impact source material can have on students in social studies, Kristin identified how the end-of-course exam component made her feel like she engaged differently with sources in AP classes.

From her experience, Kristin thought that the exposure to primary and secondary sources had one purpose: to prepare her for the end-of-course AP examination. She felt as though the source material served merely as practice for the AP exam instead of providing more insight into a topic or idea. The selection and introduction of sources were geared more toward improving student skills for the AP exam, like learning how to write for “LEQs or DBQs” [Long Essay Questions and Document-Based Questions], rather than using those sources to help better understand course concepts. Kristin elaborated that she believed diverse sources could benefit social studies classes if teachers better incorporated them as expansions to the class, not just part of the curriculum. Individually, she wants to “understand everyone’s point of view” to “expand or

learn more as opposed to being closed off to other people's points of view." She felt like courses should include the voices of "less influential people of history," different social classes, and racial groups, but in a way that impacts students to expand their viewpoint, not just work through classroom skills.

Kristin's interview illustrated some of the confines within the AP curriculum that inhibit teachers' ability to incorporate supplemental material. Students are expected to comprehend the course content and demonstrate new skills on the end-of-course examination, which can determine educators' priorities. The restrictions of time and content over a single-semester course was one of limitations of my research design. The AP curriculum provides opportunities and flexibility within the course to incorporate supplemental sources, but time might not always allow full integration. When students are expected to comprehend multiple required primary documents and Supreme Court decisions, the addition of supplemental reading can be overwhelming.

Francesca

I conducted the third interview with Francesca, another student I had in AP Psychology the previous year. A top-10 member of her graduating class, Francesca was also selected as a National Merit Finalist based on her academic performance and testing record. Our conversation started with discussing her exposure to documents or sources in her AP social studies classes. She recalled working through primary document analyses in her World and U.S. History courses but mainly remembered her work with foundational documents, such as the Mayflower Compact. However, much like Kristin, she associated much of her

exposure to primary and secondary documents with AP exam preparation, especially relating to practice for document-based essay questions.

When I asked Francesca to reflect on what diversifying literature in social studies could mean for students, she said that sources should include individuals outside of the “big influential names of history, like the founding fathers.” For this student, diversification “would not just include more minorities or more women, but more normal people. Not just the names we’ve heard over and over.” She wanted history and social science classes to provide more voices of the common person to elaborate on the topics they were learning. Francesca also expanded on the difficulty of finding historical documents for students from these sources, highlighting that records of more everyday people are less accessible for teachers and students alike. When educators can incorporate such sources, they provide students with powerful perspectives to which they can connect course concepts and real-world events.

Annalise

My interview with Annalise was slightly different than my previous interviews with Francesca, Payton, and Kristin, as she was primarily an honors-level student who decided to challenge herself with AP social studies her senior year. She felt passionate about the subject and was interested in pursuing a history or political science degree, so her experience within the social studies department differed slightly from that of her peers who primarily enrolled in AP-level classes.

In our conversation, Annalise expressed how social studies was one of her favorite subjects in school, describing how she appreciated these courses, particularly how they prioritized the study of people and the events that led to the current point of human history. In line with her love for history, she took courses in World History, U.S. History, Contemporary U.S. History, Geography, and U.S. Government. When asked about her overall experience in social studies, she expressed how much it varied from teacher to teacher at our school. Her frustrations in social studies classes came when teachers presented information in a generalized fashion, focusing on memorization of battles and dates. When I asked her to elaborate, she said,

I just can't stand it when I go into a social studies class, and the teacher is just standing up there reviewing a military battle or something or like historical timelines. I like the classes where we learn more about the individuals or movements that drive historical events, and it can be boring when teachers don't understand that or provide us with those things in class. I totally understand that we need to understand the context but I want to find out more than just the what happened. I can read the history book for that.

Annalise valued social studies as a way to connect to the human experience despite inconsistent use of that approach across her classes. She also felt as though our school had done students a disservice because the core history curriculum stopped around World War II. Annalise viewed learning about current history—or at least the parallels between historical and modern events—as

essential. She mentioned being “unsure how students could possibly learn from history if [they] hadn’t covered events from the last 60 or so years.” This notion resurfaced later in the interview when I asked her about the purpose of social studies education, and she emphasized the need to provide students with sufficient background to engage in the world. Annalise’s interview thus demonstrated how some students desired their social studies classes to be springboards for their involvement in a democratic society.

Claire

I held the final interview with Claire, who, unlike the previous interviewees, had transferred to our school during her sophomore year. She had taken my AP Psychology class but primarily attended school virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on the role of social studies courses and the impact that multiple perspectives can have, Claire described the value of students’ learning to become “informed citizens.” That aim, she continued, required “know[ing] about our history and the ideas around us, like how they originated.” She applied this notion especially to senior students, explaining,

For people who are 18, they’re now allowed to vote, and it’s very important to know exactly who you’re voting for, exactly what you’re voting for. And I think, we’re younger right now. So right now, everything, all our beliefs and ideas are being formed rapidly, especially due to social media, et cetera. So, I think having a class where we can learn unbiased, just everything in general will allow us to be more inclined to making better decisions when it comes to voting and being members of society.

Regarding the types of sources, Claire valued when instructors pair readings alongside more foundational documents. For example, in AP World History, a unit on revolutions that paired excerpts from Americans and British following the Boston Tea Party offered a range of perspectives, allowing her to view the event in a different light than when she previously studied it in middle school. She was able to consider the event more tangibly because it was framed through people's experiences and felt more real. Additionally, she stated that pairing lesser-known resources with foundational course material could be helpful. She questioned, "How is it we know the names of those who wrote the Federalist papers, like James Madison, versus how we barely know the name of Robert Yates? That's a big difference." Hearing other perspectives can "really change how people perceive the situation," which can inform how—and to what—students pay attention in a social studies class.

Pre-intervention Interview Analysis

Each interview highlighted similar concepts in regard to participants' social studies experience at our school and provided a much clearer narrative relating to my PoP. Across the interviews, my students identified an essential need to study history and social science, citing study of the human experience as vital to engaging in civil, democratic society. However, the preparation they received throughout our social studies program seemed to fall short of their expectations for participation in a diverse democracy. These students' experiences lacked personal historical narratives, application to modern problems, and the motivation for them to engage in civic life, consistent with my PoP.

From the interviews, I gathered that the AP class distinction and the overall purpose of assigned texts played a role in how these students engaged with information in their classes. Their motivations for taking or doing well in an AP class, such as earning a higher grade point average, boosting a college entrance résumé, or earning college credit, change how students participate in advanced courses. The endgame for many of these students is passing the end-of-course exam, which can make additional course objectives fall by the wayside. The young ladies who participated in the interviews acknowledged how this reality affected their personal experience with AP social studies classes but also sketched a larger picture of the role of social studies in an individual's education. For me as a practitioner, this perspective solidified the importance of thoughtful consideration when working to build multicultural content integration and knowledge construction. Supplemental material should be reflective of reality and purposeful in its intent (Banks, 2016).

The conversations with my students also touched on the role of social studies as a provider of the tools for civic participation. Knowledge of civics is important, but active citizenship involves engaging with society in a meaningful way, and my students seemed to understand that. Critical teaching and learning foster educational skills through communication, listening, and problem-solving to transform society. This educational experience can encourage students to think critically and then take their newfound enlightenment into their families and communities through various forms of action.

The pre-intervention interviews also validated my three RQs. Students expressed that their prior social studies classes did not expose them to enough diverse literary perspectives to (a) actively participate civically, (b) make connections to social justice issues, and (c) apply what they studied in class to their realities. These pre-intervention interviews provided a baseline for assessing the intervention's impact and reinforced the general themes that I used to organize the data.

Intervention Phase 1: Unfulfilled Promises

The selected readings for the first phase of the intervention included Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" speech and James McCune Smith's speech at the 1855 Colored National Convention. Both readings identified the hypocrisy surrounding the founding of the United States Government on the concepts of liberty and citizenship, given the institution of slavery, and thus were conducive to critical analysis of various foundational primary documents, including the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Developing arguments from these primary documents, both authors addressed the incompatibility of valuing freedom when only a tiny minority of the country can access the civil liberties guaranteed by the government.

My A.P. Government students needed exposure to the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution to understand these authors' analyses. During this unit, individual and guided primary document analysis sessions and scaffolded class discussions introduced students to the central concepts of those foundational texts. My instruction aimed to instill an understanding of the natural

and legal rights presented in the Declaration and Constitution, as well as help students identify how the documents establish a moral standard to which the U.S. Government should strive. Following the week of introductory lessons, students had a week to read through the two supplemental documents and provide at least a one-page reflection, submitted electronically. I provided a set of open-ended questions inspired by critical literacy instructional strategies to help students who needed guidance during the reflection process, but I wanted the reflections to be as organic as possible.

The remainder of this section is divided into subtopics based on the codes I introduced in Chapter 3: (a) foundational understanding, (b) past–present comparison, (c) different perspective, (d) citizenship or rights, and (e) call to action. Figure 4.1 depicts their frequency across the student samples.

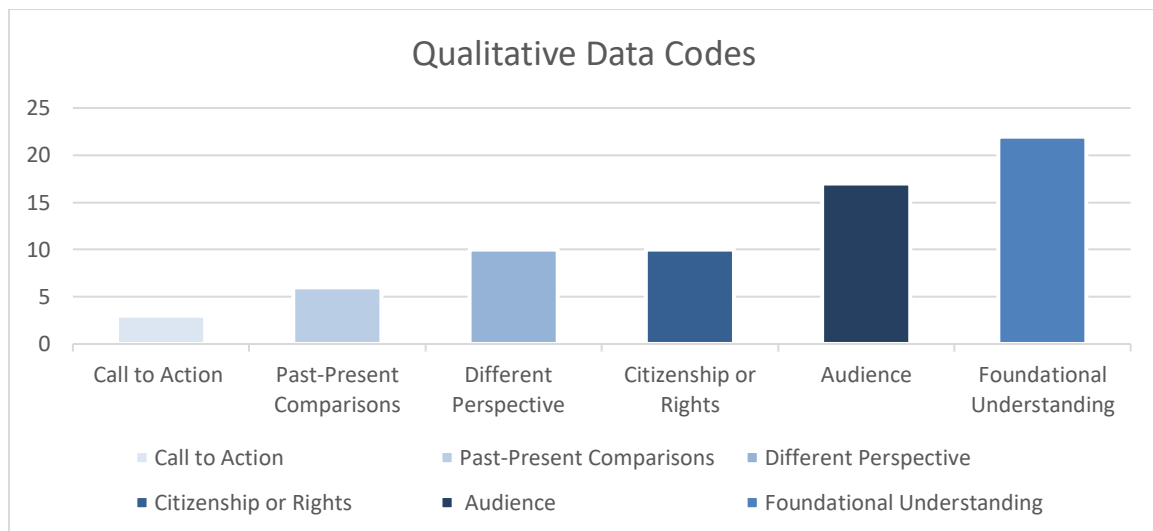


Figure 4.1 *Frequency of Codes for Intervention Phase 1*

Foundational Understanding

Student connections to foundational documents were the most prevalent in the first intervention phase, generating 22 codes across 15 artifacts. Given the

readings' explicit mention of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, I was not surprised by how much these connections showed across the artifacts. However, students' responses tended to expand on the links we discussed in class and points Douglass and McCune Smith made in the documents. Some of these written responses discussed connections to natural law, human rights, purposes of government, legal guarantees under the Bill of Rights, and comparisons to colonial rule under Great Britain, all while addressing the authors' main point regarding the American system's inequities and discriminatory practices. Such reflections were encouraging pieces of evidence of critical thinking relating to the corresponding primary documents.

Interestingly, my students preferred to engage with the Declaration of Independence over the U.S. Constitution when comparing the two documents' connections. Most of the foundational course understanding came from students' analyzing the arguments from Douglass and the Declaration of Independence, while only a handful mentioned the comparisons between McCune Smith's speech and the Constitution. This trend might have to do with the timing of the course and this first phase of the intervention. At this stage, my students had analyzed both the Declaration and Constitution; however, the course later expands on the Constitution and its ideals. Students who used the Constitution seemed more comfortable writing about the apparent connections to the Bill of Rights specifically, even though McCune Smith's main points explicitly cite the supremacy clause and elements of the preamble Douglass used. The student

reflections within the artifacts resonated with the unfulfilled promises of civil liberties, tying the purposes of government to individual liberties.

These responses demonstrated that introducing new readings did contribute to an increase in student understanding of at least two AP foundational documents: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. One student even remarked how the documents helped them

understand the situation and context of what was happening in this time during history, and why these speeches were written the way they were. I liked how Douglass, in particular, used the word hypocrisy to explain the situation, as I think this is the perfect word to use.

Adding these speeches enabled students to make tangible connections to very abstract philosophical concepts of political theory presented in this unit of the course.

Because this was the first reflection assignment, some students struggled with making more analytical connections in their artifact responses, relying more heavily on summary. Consequently, some responses containing references to foundational documents were more expository, describing the readings' main points. For example, one reflection cited how

in his speech Douglass talks about the reasons why the founding fathers created the Declaration of Independence on the ideas of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness with all men created equal but at the time people celebrate like that goal was achieved which is a lie to themselves because slavery is still being practiced which violates all of these ideas.

This student accurately described the ideas these documents connected but failed to expand much further. In these cases, I struggled to discern how much of an impact the documents had on aiding students' understanding of foundational concepts, so in the next phase of the intervention, I provided additional directions, suggestions, and guiding questions to help the students move beyond summarizing the texts and incorporate more analytical reflections.

Past–Present Comparisons

Regarding how this first set of new readings impacted students' connections to past and present events, the students seemed to struggle to relate these speeches to current events, opting to draw connections from historical examples. Even then, when examining the student artifacts, comparisons to past events only occurred at a frequency of six. The only modern comparison students made to the Douglass and McCune Smith readings were in discussions of the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and '60s. The two students who made the civil rights connection mused over how long the hypocritical structure of the United States Government lasted. One of them regarded how “egregiously late” the United States was in addressing racial equality and how ahead of his time Douglass's ideals were in calling to rectify the injustices perpetrated against minoritized groups in the United States.

Students were much more likely to engage in some of the conceptual discussion both Douglass and McCune Smith presented in regard to the institution of slavery and the creation of government or provide summary information from the readings. These conceptual discussions connected to

foundational documents, mainly the Declaration of Independence, and are demonstrated with the frequency of coding under the foundational understandings category.

Because this reflection was the first, I expected students to struggle. The assignment was unfamiliar, and I needed to improve my approach to ensure students wrote in their voice rather than providing a summary of the author's main ideas. If I wanted to examine how future texts impacted students' ability to connect to issues of inequality, I needed to be sure they comprehended how to express their thoughts on the readings.

Different Perspectives

I was encouraged to see several students address how these readings were “eye opening” and allowed them, as White students, to experience how disenfranchised groups regarded the United States government and its founding. Interestingly, my student population mirrored the audience for whom Douglass wrote, which might have contributed to their reactions. One student expressed that they never considered how other groups viewed U.S. holidays, such as the Fourth of July. For them, the holiday was a cause for celebration until they considered it might have been “a day that many Americans never were able to celebrate in this way because they never had freedoms in the first place.”

Another described a similar revelation:

This document was especially eye-opening for me because when I think of the Fourth of July, I think of a day of the celebration of freedom from Britain by ALL citizens of the United States. I never truly realized the ill

feelings the African American slaves felt towards this day of independence. I assumed everyone rejoiced in our victory of the American Revolution and our eventual creation of a separate entity. This speech especially makes me question the different perspectives surrounding other documents and speeches in American history and how not everyone was on the same page regarding the foundation of our great nation.

Consistent with the aims of critical literacy interventions, these documents, particularly the Douglass speech, assisted students in deconstructing their worldview to expose them to the inequities built into the government's design. Students demonstrated that these sources evoked a consideration for an alternative perspective of the Fourth of July, especially if they were White. When students realized that the celebrations of freedom they enjoyed were not the experience of all Americans, they could apply that consideration to events, institutions, and other aspects of U.S. society.

Citizenship or Rights

Student reflections on citizenship and the corresponding rights associated with citizenship frequently appeared: 10 times throughout the 15 artifact samples. The students primarily approached this discussion from a philosophical view rather than a practical one, meaning they questioned the types of rights individuals have in society rather than addressing the current realities of citizenship. Three did so by reflecting on Enlightenment philosopher John Locke's view on "inalienable" natural rights—life, liberty, and property. They questioned if these ideals were reinforced when Douglass and McCune Smith

were writing, while another six critiqued the concept of equality for all when the privileges of citizenship were so inconsistent across the United States. I was curious to see if this trend would continue as we progressed into the subsequent phases. Approaching the texts this way may have come more naturally for students because of the unit's focus on political philosophy.

Calls to Action

Because students were less likely to connect these speeches to current events, I was not surprised that student responses included only three mentions of the texts' prompting them to act on issues of inequality. The student samples address a need "fix societal problems" or express how Douglas and McCune Smith promote "the hope that change is possible" but fail to motivate beyond those comments. I was hoping to see more specific "problems" that students aligned to the reading or a discussion on how the readings made them consider the work that still needs to be done. As in the prior section, I needed to re-center how the students engaged with the written reflections to examine any impact on students' interest in acting against social injustices.

Audience

Discussion of audience was the second most frequent code in the student writings from the first phase of the intervention, occurring 17 times. One possible explanation for this frequency could be the critical literacy guiding questions I provided to help students in the reflection process. I encouraged students to consider who the author was writing for to help them analyze how an audience can impact the author's perspective.

Even though this code was generated from the critical reading strategies I employed for the intervention, students' discussions of audience in the artifacts also showcase their ability to analyze a text from a different perspective. For the first phase, my students were able to identify that Douglass's Fourth of July speech was written from the perspective of an enslaved person for a White audience. One student captured the dynamic of Douglass's dual audience in their reflection, stating,

African Americans would most likely see this text as the unspoken truth, the things that all of them wanted to say but may have been too afraid to say, it especially speaks out to the enslaved African Americans because it can truly speak to them as this is what they all go through each and every day. This text also speaks out to the White Americans. It is designed to be a wakeup call to them because this is most likely an unrivaled way of thinking during the time period.

By considering the author's intended audience, these students noticed there are multiple perspectives to every experience, and what may hold true for one group might not be the same for the other. Exercises like this can help students begin to deconstruct their realities and consider the experience of others.

Intervention Phase 2: Inequality Under Federalism

The second phase of the intervention included a set of secondary articles on climate change and welfare reform under a federal system of government. Federalism is one of the more difficult concepts for government students to tackle, yet it permeates most of the issues throughout the course and is at the

heart of many social justice concerns: voting rights, income gaps, gun violence, climate, and racial justice, to name a few. I thought that providing secondary accounts of these concepts would contribute to student understanding of how a federal government division can yield inequitable state-level policies.

Incorporating secondary sources also allowed me to gauge how students interacted with them in comparison to the primary sources from the first and third phases of the intervention. I had hoped to see whether personal narratives or secondary source material contributed differently to the measures of this study.

To succeed in this unit, my AP Government students need a solid foundation in the concept of federalism as well as an understanding of the divisions of power between the national and state governments. My instruction prior to this second intervention phase included a student-directed case study on a political, social, or economic issue of their choice. The main objective was to demonstrate how a federal government system provides benefits in the form of a more individualized state policy and introduces the opportunities for inequitable outcomes for citizens dependent on their state. These case studies could also be where students made connections to the supplemental literature. Once again, students had a week to read and electronically submit their reflection artifacts. I also addressed writing tips to guide students in the reflection process and move them away from pure summary. The students also had another set of guiding questions alongside the directions to prompt their reflections.

As with the previous section, the following subsections correspond with the themes I gleaned from student artifacts (Figure 4.2).

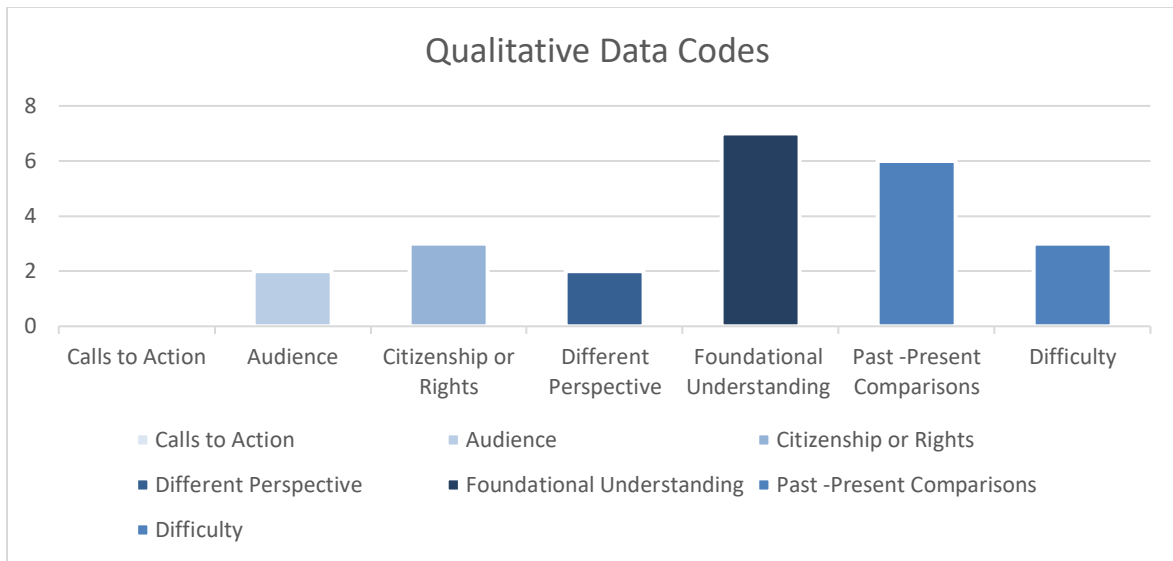


Figure 4.2 *Frequency of Codes for Intervention Phase 2*

Foundational Understanding

The foundational understandings for this second phase revolved around student comprehension of federalism and divisions of government, which could manifest in comparisons to the Constitution or highlighting specific policies impacted by federalism. Five different students demonstrated a strong understanding of how the Constitution divides power between the national and state governments. Throughout their reflections, these students addressed the differences between reserved powers, the responsibilities given to the state government explicitly, and concurrent powers shared by the two levels of government, determining where and when the states or national government should take charge of specific policies. One student even went a step further, highlighting how the two articles addressed the messy notion of “marble-cake federalism,” a bakery metaphor often used to describe the model of cooperative federalism. The command with which these students analyzed these foundational

course concepts in their writings indicates that they benefitted from the readings in this phase of the intervention.

While the frequency of codes explicitly stating a foundational understanding decreased in this phase of the intervention compared to the first, my students could also demonstrate an understanding of federalism through their descriptions of event comparisons, which I discuss in the following section. I also believe that the placement of this phase within the topic of federalism contributed to this decrease in coding. This section of the course had far fewer foundational documents, meaning fewer opportunities for such connections.

Past–Present Comparisons

Reading more recent texts, students seemed to have an easier time addressing more current issues than in the previous phase. In coding for this section, I looked for present comparisons outside of the topics related to the articles (i.e., excluding climate change and welfare, which were present in some student samples). I appreciated the range of policies that appeared across my students' artifacts: the government's role in policies relating to COVID-19 regulations, expressions of religion, gun rights, commerce control, recreational drug use, segregation, and discrimination. For example, I had one student discuss the role of federalism at the heart of the cannabis legalization debate, highlighting the limits of federal power demonstrated by the movement. They explained that under a federal system, a state could become a "laboratory of democracy," where public sentiment can drive governmental changes.

Reflections such as this demonstrate how the readings prompted my students to consider how federalism plays out in regard to different policies.

Throughout their reflection artifacts, my students demonstrated their ability to project a discussion of topics in a text onto current issues they cared about. They even weighed in on how this balance of power can be beneficial or adverse at times regarding their specific policies. When a state law permits or restricts its citizens from acting inconsistently with federal law, it can set a dangerous precedent if applied to different approaches. I had students address this concerning precedent when discussing state economic benefits, including topics like welfare or Medicaid expansions. One student stated, that research projects like the from the Schram reading “really opened my eyes to the systematic injustices that plague our country,” especially in the form of “how many states administer benefits in a racially biased manner, withholding aid from people of color and using program files to punish those who violate race-specific policies.”

This code also surfaced the most prominent differences in student artifacts between the first and second intervention phases. The prior artifacts were much less likely to connect the literature to concrete issues, whereas connections were much more common across the artifacts in this second phase. Past–present comparisons might have been easier with these secondary sources that used current events to highlight their main argument.

Citizenship or Rights

The considerations of citizenship and individual rights were intriguing from this phase even though they appeared with less frequency than the previous

phase. Three students wrote about how uniform U.S. citizens' rights were depending on the region where they lived. One student mentioned that having policies unique to different states could be "either a good or bad thing because there's a lot of leeway on whose voices will be heard when people are living in the same type of conditions." For her, individuals' living under the same government yet experiencing benefits so differently seemed confounding. Another went a step further in his response, pointing out "restrictive policies working against those low-income families and how it kept them oppressed within the system. Because of policy devolution, it created new openings for racial distortions in the U.S. welfare policy." These and other student reflections demonstrated some disadvantages of a federal system of government. The students who chose to write on this topic were able to identify how state sovereignty on certain policies led to the protection of slavery and segregation, how the United States has seen a rise in states' blocking national policies in respect to equality, and how some states through deregulation are "racing to the bottom" in terms of how they treat their citizens. Student reflections thus suggest that the selected reading did prompt a few of them to consider the impact a system of government could have on the rights of its citizens.

Calls to Action and Audience

Evidence relating to a call to action and audience discussion codes significantly declined compared to the first phase of the intervention, with calls to action not appearing in the data at all and discussions of audience occurring only twice. I suspect that the secondary source nature of these readings contributed

to these codes' frequency of appearance, or lack thereof. While the secondary sources provided students with critical perspectives on climate change and welfare, the excerpts proved unreliable in engaging students in considerations for taking action and identifying the intended audience.

Difficulty

This set of readings prompted an additional code, unique to this phase, relating to the difficulty of the readings, which subsequently caused students to struggle with the reflection. One of my students was especially candid:

to be completely honest, after fully reading these documents, I still did not really understand them, and I learned that I am not a strong reader and I hate reading. I also think that I learn best from in-class lessons and it being dumbed down almost, given that this text was difficult for me to comprehend.

Although their difficulty saddened me, the students' candid revelations helped me gauge how the material might be slightly too advanced for high school seniors. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on student reading comprehension across all grade levels could be a contributing factor in this case. Regardless, if students cannot comprehend the material, they will struggle to connect it to the course objectives or social justice issues. While some students expressed how they experienced some difficulties with the reading level of these sources, others recognized they were written at a "very high level" and considered them to be more "intellectual documents," but seemed to grasp the authors' arguments. For example, another student shared,

After reading this article, it made the topic of federalism much easier for me to understand. I appreciated how Ryan compared it [federalism] to a game of tug of war throughout the article. At first, I was thinking of it [federalism] from a more complex mindset, but Erin Ryan definitely made it easier for me to understand and take in

Though I had varying reflections on the difficulty level for these readings, the student comments prompted me to reflect on my choices for the final phase of the intervention. I wanted all my students to feel confident in comprehending the source material so they could spend time properly reflecting on the main concepts.

Intervention Phase 3: Why Define Citizenship?

The literature I incorporated for the final phase centered on the concept of citizenship. Using the Foner (2019) excerpts and Truth's speech, students considered the unequal distribution of citizenship benefits in the United States for various populations, specifically women and African Americans. For this final phase of the intervention, the literature contained both a primary and secondary source containing similar themes of citizenship and discrimination. To fully understand the documents' contexts, my students needed to pull from course concepts related to civil liberties, ideally building their understanding of the Bill of Rights; the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 19th Amendments; and 11 related Supreme Court Cases. This unit used primary document analysis, course discussions, and group work to accomplish those goals. As with the previous sections in this chapter, the following subsections correspond with my codes (Figure 4.3).

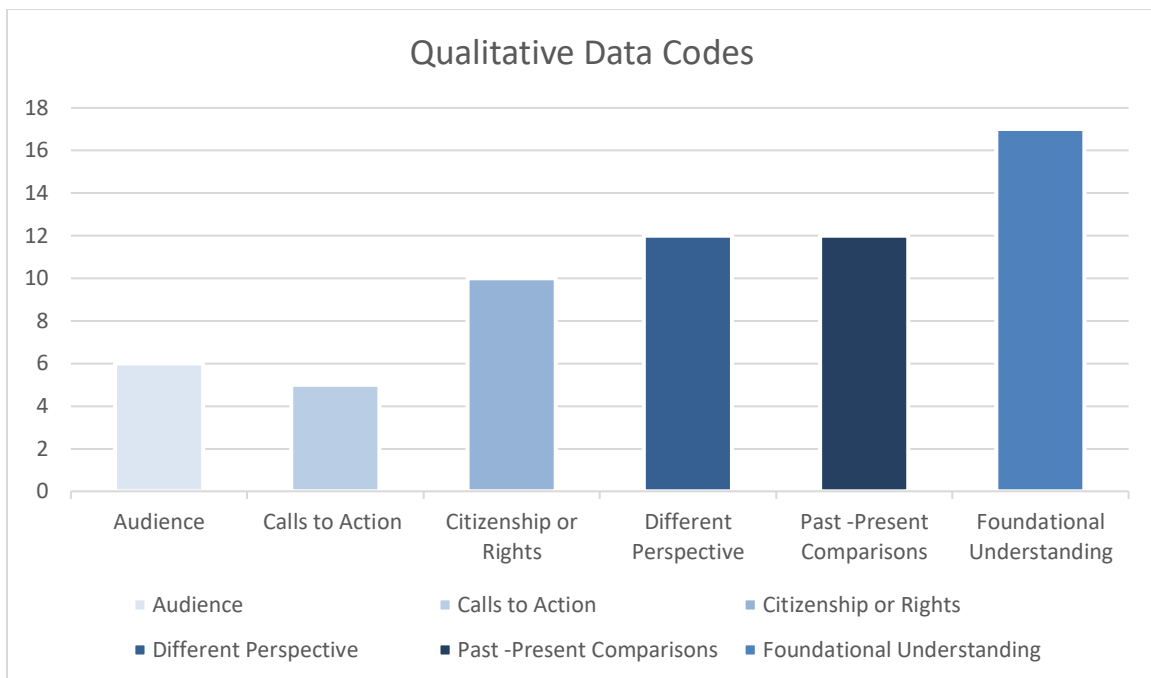


Figure 4.3 *Frequency of Codes for Intervention Phase 3*

Foundational Understanding

During this intervention phase, the foundational understanding code highlighted student connections from the Bill of Rights; additional Constitutional Amendments—the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 19th; and our final required AP document, King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” As the final intervention phase, this unit revealed that students had a better grasp of civil liberties and civil rights when compared to the first phase, which took place during the second week of the course. My students’ arguments and evaluations in their reflections were much more developed and nuanced than at the beginning of the year. For example, in the first phase, students tended merely to expand on the arguments from Douglass and McCune Smith, whereas in this phase, they extrapolated the concepts to other scenarios. One student demonstrated this capacity in addressing concepts from the Constitution when relating the Foner excerpts and

Truth's speech to the course. They also compared the readings to Constitutional holdings from various court cases relating to the 14th amendment, like *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Loving v. Virginia*, and *Roe v. Wade*, all highlighting what they had learned about the Constitutional clauses of equal protection and due process.

Past–Present Comparisons

Even though the supplemental literature for this phase was from or related to the 19th century, students could make quite a few modern comparisons. The increase in frequency of codes relating to comparisons was surprising as compared to the first intervention phase, given that the primary documents were of the same period. I had expected this phase to yield similar outcomes with more historical connections to civil rights movements and the Civil War, both of which Foner named, and while my prediction was accurate, my students surprised me by discussing current social movements for LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, and women's rights. The students who made these comparisons connected their arguments to discussions of the 14th Amendment and the need to continue expanding the provisions under the Equal Protections Clause. Protections from discrimination have expanded from race to gender, prompting students to wonder if classifications like sexual orientation could be next.

Different Perspective

The two readings from this intervention produced the most student revelations on racial and gender inequality. Sojourner Truth's speech seemed to

resonate especially. Claire's written response encapsulates the range of student emotions toward these two readings:

Both of the articles showed me how much being a difference [*sic*] race or gender could change your life experience back in the day, but not only from the past as many of these issues are still happening right now. These readings demonstrated to me how much our community needs to be more inclusive and just love our neighbors.

Limited access to society is not a normal experience for my students, which made these firsthand accounts engaging. In their reflections, students attempted to put themselves in the place of women or people of color, empathizing with their struggle and the discrimination they faced.

For most of the students, Truth's speech was their first exposure to the concept of intersectionality, that multiple layers of oppression exist based on an individual's gender, race, class, and other markers. Truth's speech encapsulates being denied rights based on intersections of being Black and female, and I was thrilled to see students explore that manifestation in modern movements as well. One student explained how Truth's point made them "consider a response to the overwhelming whiteness of the Women's March," pointing out society's persistent failure to address discrimination based on intersections of race and gender.

Citizenship or Rights

Citizenship and civil rights were the main topics from the readings for this phase, so I was not surprised to see this code yield the highest frequency. The students addressed the concepts 10 unique times across the 15 artifacts, with

many reflecting on what being a citizen of a country means. Most of them had never considered what the concept of citizenship meant; it was a privilege afforded to them. A few wrestled with the definition of citizenship, discussing how it “meant freedom from legal discrimination and full enjoyment of the rights in the constitution” or how it meant inclusion for “freed blacks to enjoy access to public education and receive equal treatment in transportation.” I enjoyed this take on the reflection because it was so similar to the conversation of the Reconstruction period—determinations of American identity and what rights being American provides. Some stressed economic equality, discussing the lack of economic support for citizens with scant resources, whereas others emphasized equality of opportunity. Others took a different approach and focused on discrimination’s role in undermining citizenship, arguing how “absurd it is to bring up topics of race, gender, or even intelligence when discussing basic human rights.”

Call to Action and Audience

I was thrilled to see an increase in the coding frequency for calls to action and discussions of audience throughout the student artifacts from this third phase. Both themes were almost non-existent in the transition from the first phase to the second but reemerged with purpose in the final phase, which evoked not only the code’s highest frequency but also the most potent language relating to student action. The student reflections containing calls to action discussed how the readings, particularly Sojourner Truth’s speech, became a source of motivation or empowerment for them. For example,

The readings were honestly very empowering to read. I think the women who showed up and spoke at these conferences to fight for equal rights are some of the strongest people in American History and should be recognized as such. Both of these articles make great points and helped me realize as a spectator the breadth of the progress both African Americans and women fought for at the time and how much work there still is to do.

Such student responses demonstrate how critical literacy interventions can provide students with both a voice and platform to take up issues they care about (Soares & Watson, 2006). Even though student inclination toward action increased during this final phase, I must acknowledge that the intervention design did not prompt clear plans for action from the students. Students discussed feelings of empowerment and desires to call out inequalities without a clear plan for how they would engage beyond the reflection. In terms of a plan of action, I had hoped to see students discuss the importance of voting, activism, and general civic participation as means for them to act on the topics they spoke of in their reflections. If I continue with critical literacy interventions, I will provide students with the space and capacity to develop an action plan.

Full Intervention Analysis

In terms of RQ 1, *How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to understand foundational concepts from the course?*, the artifact data suggest that the readings were beneficial in helping students understand foundational

concepts from the course. Across the three phases, coding related to foundational government principles was present at some of the highest frequencies. Students felt comfortable connecting the literature to the concepts we discussed throughout the semester. Students discussed a wide range of essential information: foundational documents like the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, and of course, the Constitution; course concepts like activism and federalism; and even the required influential Supreme Court cases. The reading intervention demonstrated the value of supplemental literature for social studies students, as it provided students with the space to apply their understandings from the classroom to real-world events or scenarios.

Relating to RQ 2, *How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' ability to understand past and present issues relating to inequality?*, the relevant codes appeared in a consistent frequency across the phases, but the student voices show that they approached this question differently from phase to phase. For example, the second phase had a high frequency of past–present connections; however, the use of secondary sources likely accounts for this higher occurrence. However, coding relating to issues of inequality, including past–present connections, different perspectives, and concepts of citizenship, was more prevalent during the first and third phases, which incorporated primary sources, suggesting they proved to be more impactful. Students demonstrated a more comprehensive range of understanding issues of inequality when exposed to the voices of individuals who have experienced it firsthand. The written

reflections from the first and third phases containing primary source narratives not only made connections to past or present policies of inequality but also expressed how meaningful hearing those alternative perspectives was.

Finally, when applied to RQ 3, *How does incorporating literature from multiple perspectives within my AP U.S. Government curriculum impact students' motivation to engage on issues of inequality?*, the written artifact data demonstrated that this area of the study was the weakest in terms of the reading intervention's impact on students' motivation. Codes relating to motivations or calls to the action occurred at one of the lowest frequencies across all phases. Student samples were full of examples of class connections and revelations about how these readings were “eye-opening” to the perspectives of women or oppressed groups. However, they lacked a written expression of wanting to take action against these inequalities and social injustices as they still exist today. This outcome suggests a need for more explicit discussion, including modeling how students can participate civically in response to the injustices they learn about in class.

During the final phase, with the Truth and Foner readings, I saw the most discussions similar to a proper call to action. Students alluded to needed social change on issues of inequality, especially regarding LGBTQ+ and gender discrimination. However, nowhere did I see students demonstrate individualized plans of action. I had hoped for their writing samples to discuss more explicit actions, including their motivations to vote, participate in activism, or speak out for social justice issues. As a result, I made sure to provide the space in my class

to discuss avenues students could take in form of civic participation. This led to activities related to voter registration, modeling how to request mail-in-ballots while away at college, where to do research prior to voting, and class discussions on the impact of protests and social movements. Such literacy interventions prompt students to consider and identify inequalities in our society; however, educators must also guide students in the process of taking action for these issues in a democracy.

Primary and secondary sources had merit throughout the intervention but yielded varying outcomes depending on my purpose for including them. Students seemed to prefer the primary sources in terms of RQs 2 and 3; these counter-narratives prompted them to consider and deconstruct dominant narratives from their social studies classes. The personal connection from the primary documents also seemed to resonate with them in calling for social justice when they saw it. This preference demonstrated how valuable primary source material can be when exposing students to social inequality. Hearing firsthand accounts personalized historical or current events in a way that mattered to students and provided a deeper human connection to events they had only read about in their history books.

Additionally, the specific format of the primary sources seemed significant. Multiple student reflections mentioned how impactful the speeches were. Students expressed a preference for this style of primary document as opposed to some of the written documents from the course, like the Federalist papers. The speeches made students feel more present in the text; they could imagine

themselves in the speaker's audience. Recognizing that this format provided a more human connection to the speaker and their overall message, I realized all primary documents are not equal, which educators should consider when adopting source material into their curriculum.

Nevertheless, both types of source material, primary and secondary, seemed to contribute to students' understanding of the course and its essential content. Students were able to connect foundational concepts or required knowledge almost equally between the primary and secondary readings. The follow-up interviews enhanced my understanding of these outcomes.

Follow-up Interviews

Whereas the intervention artifacts allowed me to analyze the impact each set of readings had on individual students, the follow-up interviews gave me an overarching idea of the intervention's impact. I conducted these interviews upon completion of the course and after administering AP exams in May 2022 to accommodate student schedules, which enabled the students and me to reflect on the process and growth that occurred throughout the semester. The interviews focused more on a conversation about the intervention and student thoughts for future action research cycles. The remainder of this section will detail and highlight the main concepts from the student participants' personal experiences with the intervention.

Overall, my students seemed to recall and connect more with the primary source materials, discussing the Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass speeches most frequently. Payton remarked how

the Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass speeches were what I took with me the most with all those documents. What I truly remember was because of the different outlook that it gave on just democracy and the way of how the United States ran because when we're growing up, we don't get these perspectives at all. And I think placing that perspective in a different light, like to the minority and to the person that was oppressed, I think that really brought to light, like just the kind of reality of the situation, the reality of our country during that time.

Francesca addressed how the speeches, in particular, made connecting concepts much easier for them than reading something written for publication.

When discussing Sojourner Truth's speech, she remarked,

one thing that really stood out to me was like just the way she was talking and how much it was just normal. I felt like that was kind of important because, like, so often we hear from speeches and writings and stuff of people who a lot of the times when I read these old sources I don't understand them, but hers was like she was talking to a friend or something and you could tell she was just saying what she was thinking and what she believed in.

Francesca also continued connecting the Truth and Douglass speeches, observing how Truth was

just speaking normally, like a colloquial dialect and I remember the Frederick Douglass might have like this too. Like, kind of addressing the

audience more than anything, so they could understand what they were saying mainly because that's kind of important.

For these students, comprehending and connecting to the literature was vastly important. If students encounter material that is too complex or does not relate to them personally, they may not retain or apply the sources beyond the scope of the course. Especially when the goal of incorporating literature is not only to impact students' connection to the course but to have it impact their worldview, the source material must engage them in significant ways.

When I asked the students to tell me about the source material they engaged with this semester, they had difficulty remembering the two secondary sources from the federalism unit across the board. The readings on federalism related to climate change and welfare policies were the least discussed, which is not entirely surprising given the expression of difficulty in the student reflections on those pieces. Secondary source readings, like the Ryan (2011) excerpt on climate change, Schram et al.'s (2009) discussion on welfare, and Foner's (2019) excerpt on citizenship, provided students with more contextualization of events or concepts without prompting much thought beyond the ideas. Payton felt that the benefit from these readings came in the form of writing skills and AP exam practice:

Thinking about the federalism readings, I was reflecting on that and having to write in that way; the [Government] exam was so much that way. The argumentative essays and stuff, having your thesis, your topic statements,

and giving evidence and explaining refutation, I think that was a great way to practice, and I felt very confident going into the writing.

Aside from this comment, the interviews prompted little discussion on the secondary sources. The students wanted to discuss and engage with their thoughts on the primary source material, which impacted their class experience more.

As for my questions about how the literature helped them connect to concepts beyond the course, the participants had a lot to say about issues relating to social movements during the Civil Rights era and even made connections to current events. For many students, the reading provided them with insights into historical study's more personal aspects. As Francesca expressed,

I think it [the readings] just helped me kind of understand like we always learn about the civil rights movements and stuff and the events of the 60s and what not. I know these readings were more 19th century, so these were not like that time period, but they still gave me insight to the various civil rights movements as a whole over history. Because we always learn about 'oh, these events happened, and minorities felt this way,' but before, I couldn't really like empathize with them.

Beyond that reflection, Francesca discussed another present-day connection that was not so obvious to her before participating in the readings:

[The readings] also helped me understand events like when we had the Black Lives Matter movement. Like, at first, I'm not gonna lie [the

movement and protests] just seemed to come out of nowhere to me. I wasn't caught up in the events coming before, and it was so confusing. Though having the opportunity to just understand their perspectives and understand those sources, you kind of understand where they're coming from. How they are oppressed, and even today, there are ways in which they're oppressed and that everything is not all perfect. Like everyone tries to make it all seem right, but it makes the civil rights movement or even Black life feel like a singularity, right?

My conversation with Kristin also mirrored discussions about how the primary sources provided a more personal understanding of discrimination:

Well, I would say it helped me; I mean, I obviously have empathy or sympathy; sorry, I get confused between the two of them! Like, I could understand why the civil rights movement and all that stuff was such an impact or why it was like so hurtful because I can understand why being discriminated against is awful, but then to literally reading someone's words on why am I any less than, it's like wow. I don't know. It's just more powerful when you actually read someone's words that experienced it.

The personal narratives from the primary sources seemed to be more impactful over the course of the action research study for these students. All the readings from the interventions were beneficial, yet the ones including marginalized voices will likely be the ones that these students carry with them beyond graduation.

Themes from the post-interview analysis reinforced my observations across the intervention because the students explained the value of the study

concerning RQ 1 and RQ 2. The post-intervention interviews demonstrated how my participants engaged with this action research project. They highlighted how the intervention benefited their comprehension of course objectives and the value it had by exposing them to multiple perspectives in a social studies class. These students were grateful for the experience and believed it would help expand their worldview as they graduated into a democratic society. As evident in the artifact data, my interview participants favored the primary source documents, even occasionally forgetting the secondary sources were part of the study. Their responses also lacked individually defined action plans when evaluating RQ 3, discussing action as a societal responsibility instead of an individual one.

Reflecting on the interview portion of the study also revealed how student demographics, specifically the gender of my interview participants, may have contributed to the student reading preferences. In the follow-up interviews, participants overwhelmingly discussed and remembered the Sojourner Truth speech, which addressed the intersectionality of gender and race. The reading's placement toward the end of the study could explain the number and intensity of their references to it, yet the students clearly indicated that the reading resonated with them more than the other texts. Therefore, the all-female interview sample may explain their ability to personally relate to Truth's discussion on intersectionality and feminism.

Chapter Summary

Overall, this action research study demonstrated that the critical literacy intervention exposing students to narratives from minoritized groups positively

impacted their ability to apply their understanding of course concepts to social justice. The interviews and artifacts illustrated how such interventions can expand a student's worldview beyond the familiarity of their perspective. Reading sources from the perspective of different genders, social classes, ethnicities, and races aids in deconstructing "the old so-called basics and compliance with the status-quo" (Comber, 2015, p. 366). The intervention was less successful, however, in prompting students to consider how they would engage in dismantling or addressing social, political, or economic inequalities.

This study thus encapsulated three of the four main dimensions of critical literacy in that the literature (a) disrupted the commonplace culture in the classroom, (b) considered multiple viewpoints, and (c) provided a focus on the sociopolitical aspects of society (Lewison et al., 2015). Incorporating these dimensions helped students to understand manifestations of social inequality and connect them to contemporary issues. Throughout the artifacts and interviews, students thoughtfully discussed problems like the institution of slavery, discriminatory practice, and unequal access under the law, but the readings themselves were less effective in prompting the final dimension of critical literacy, driving the students to make transformative action, which means that educators must provide space within their course objectives to guide students in the taking action step. Chapter 5 reflects on the implications of this outcome.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

As the U.S. population diversifies, social studies curricula should evolve to prepare students to participate in a more diverse society. Exposure to various narratives in social studies can provide opportunities to build community, increase students' empathy, and push back against existing biases and prejudice. Learners, especially in predominantly White schools, must engage with narratives outside their own experience to deconstruct stereotypes and develop a more balanced view of the world than they might otherwise have when growing up in homogeneous environments.

Prior to this action research study, students at my high school did not typically encounter primary and secondary source material from various political, social, and economic backgrounds in their social studies classes. Instead, these classes' supplemental reading defaulted to more traditional and majority White narratives. Instruction without diversity creates an environment where White students see only reflections of themselves, and students of color lack representation, which continues the cycle of White normativity in social studies education. Educators who consider more diverse literature, including personal narratives, when selecting source material for their classes can break this oppressive cycle. When exposed to such sources, students should engage with them reflectively to understand the texts within a more personal context rather

than just historically. Incorporating supplemental narratives and written student reflections in social studies class can help students better engage with diverse source material outside their experiences. Operating from this premise, I conducted this study to evaluate how diverse narratives impact (a) student comprehension of course concepts, (b) students' ability to connect to societal injustices, and (c) students' motivation to consider taking action on social justice issues.

Aligned with the existing AP United States Government curriculum, supplemental readings and written reflections allowed students to connect to primary and secondary source material relating to issues of equality from a social, economic, and political perspective in a more engaging way. Through this literacy and reflection intervention, I sought not only to influence how they engaged with the course curriculum but also how they viewed and interacted with social justice issues.

Reflection of Methodology

Collecting data from a 12th-grade AP United States Government class during the Spring semester of the 2021–2022 academic year, I assessed student engagement in reading and written reflections pertaining to issues of social, economic, and political equality, using qualitative methods conducive to more narrative-driven analysis and incorporating pre- and post-intervention interview data to give the students' voices more power within the study. I investigated the three RQs throughout the 16-week semester, including 2 weeks to conduct interviews and 3 weeks dedicated to the critical literacy strategies. During each

phase of the intervention, students read two different pieces of source material and had to draft a written reflection based on the reading topics. Each phase focused on a specific theme related to inequality: the unfulfilled promises of the founding period, inequalities under federalism, and rights related to citizenship in the final intervention. The literature I selected for each phase also rotated between primary and secondary source material as an additional measure to evaluate how students engaged with different types of source material.

The research cycle included planning, action, developing, and reflecting stages. The ultimate goal was to increase students' comprehension of course concepts and connection to issues of social, political, and economic inequality. In the planning stage, I, as the teacher researcher, set about developing the themes and selected literature for each section of the intervention.

The planning stage proved to be one of the more challenging components of this study due to the seemingly endless supply of source material for students to read. Narrowing down the choices felt like a staggering task and was ultimately one of the reasons I initially chose to work on this research project. Educators wanting to incorporate supplemental literature into their classes may face obstacles related to an overwhelming number of resources, leaving them unsure of where to start, or they could experience the inverse by not having access or being unsure of how to navigate resources. One way I confronted this obstacle was to attend professional development events that centered the theme of the study and provided a starting point to guide the selection of sources. Thus,

this planning period incorporated readings and concepts from the NEH summer institute and my educational background in history and political science.

Implications of the Results and Findings

The findings from this study reiterate the significance of the types of stories educators include in social studies curriculum. Incorporating diverse perspectives in education, especially regarding social justice issues, is critical so that students can better engage in identifying, connecting to, and acting when they experience injustices. My participants demonstrated, through their written reflections and follow-up interview responses, that primary source material from people of color contributed to their overall understanding of course concepts and also provided insight into the struggles for equality my student population typically does not experience. While the study benefited students and their perspectives on social justice, the students' reflections indicated a noticeable lack of drive to take action. Students were less likely to mention forms of action they could take compared to the impact the reading interventions had on their comprehension of occurrences of injustice or inequality. Additionally, the primary source material seemed to have more of an impact when compared to the secondary source options. The qualitative coding demonstrated that the primary sources elicited student responses at a higher frequency and with more detailed responses than the responses the secondary sources generated.

Across the student reflections and interview responses, several key concepts consistently appeared, leading to the creation of emergent codes that ultimately informed the major themes for the overall study: (a) impact on a

foundational course understanding, (b) addressing past or present issues of inequality, (c) discussion pertaining to citizenship or civil rights, (d) identification of a new perspective, and (e) whether the reading prompted a call to action from the student. The loosely structured interviews also provided time for the students to elaborate on the intervention as a whole or discuss the themes more thoroughly.

Reflection on Existing Literature

This action research study contributes to existing literature by (a) examining critical literacy in a classroom setting, (b) evaluating the types of sources educators should consider if they want to adopt a similar intervention, (c) providing course-specific literature and topic suggestions for AP Government educators, and (d) analyzing the impact a literacy intervention can have on students' engagement with concepts of social justice.

Critical interventions in the classroom are, by definition, a work in progress. There is no one correct or universal model for educators to follow, making their implementation a unique and sometimes messy process (Luke, 2012). Every classroom environment is different, therefore,

How educators shape and deploy the tools, attitudes, and philosophies of critical literacy is utterly contingent: It depends upon students' and teachers' everyday relations of power, their lived problems and struggles, and [...] on educators' professional ingenuity in navigating the enabling and disabling local contexts of policy. (Luke, 2012, p. 9)

Action research studies like this one contribute to this ongoing and cyclical process by providing educators with instances of practical application. For example, whereas I focused solely on texts, critical literacy interventions can incorporate multiple modalities—including images, audio, or video—to add dimension and accessibility. Political and editorial cartoons are especially suited for social studies and give students access to perspectives of those living during specific events (Veccia, 2004). The same critical reading skills applied to printed text can also enable students to analyze images. Alongside appropriately selected texts and scaffolds throughout the curriculum, visuals can provide educators with the space to discuss controversial issues, potentially inspiring action toward social justice (Wells, 2022). Deconstruction of the primarily White, male perspective dominant in education, especially social studies, will not happen entirely overnight. As educators like me reflect on ways to center diverse voices in their lessons, we need to realize and accept that we will make mistakes because we are “imperfect works in progress” and thus have “the opportunity to model for students, especially the White students, the unpacking of our own assumptions and behaviors as we examine them for underpinnings of racism and White privilege” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 8).

This action research study reinforces the idea that exposure to primary sources and personalization narratives are some of the best practices to help students access diverse and historically marginalized perspectives. Moreover, the primary sources were more beneficial to students by providing a wider variety of voices and cultures through firsthand accounts. The inclusion of these voices

was critical in preventing the reduction of this social studies class to a narrow lens. Although the contemporary secondary sources were the most beneficial for facilitating current sociopolitical connections, exploring the use of more recent primary sources would be interesting, given how well received the primary sources were in my study.

When presenting students with materials for reading interventions, educators should focus on texts or narratives that demonstrate issues and ideas outside the norm; this approach not only encourages independent and critical thinking but enables students to look at the world through a critical lens. Once students have reevaluated how they see the world, they can begin to challenge traditional power structures or develop transformative action through citizenship. Additionally, broader implications for the benefits of this study could include helping educators understand the impacts of multicultural sources on social studies education as well as their effect on student engagement. This study attempted to tackle the lack of diverse narratives within a small, predominantly White social studies classroom, which could provide benefits on a micro level within the school institution but also on a macro scale for the community.

Action Research as a Curriculum Leader

As a teacher researcher, I need to improve my teaching to continue growing as a leader within my school, department, and classroom. One way I can focus on my instructional practice is to be mindful of the sources I assign to my classes. Through deliberate thought and consideration, I can ensure the literature and narratives students encounter within their social studies curriculum include

various voices. This study allowed me to reflect on my instructional practice and improve upon the lack of representation prevalent in my AP U.S. Government curriculum. Social studies education not only should strive to meet the curricular objectives but also seek to provide opportunities to expand student horizons, especially in a multicultural society. The ultimate goal of diversifying literature and providing space for critical reading reflections for White students is not just to expose them to life outside their personal bubble but also to make them question racist actions and systems.

Critical literacy interventions provide students with the opportunities to reflect on their experiences and deconstruct social, political, and economic perceptions of society through personal narratives. Through the intervention in this study, students benefited from having opportunities not only to engage with reading from individuals outside the traditional White male perspective but also to connect to the reading in a more personal way through a reflective process. This approach benefited students in relation to concepts within the AP curriculum and from a broader, more human perspective.

By addressing my PoP as a teacher researcher, I also identified a potential area of need for other educators at my organization. The insights, strategies, applied research, and reflective practices shared from this study have benefited the professional learning communities (PLCs) with whom I collaborate, allowing members from multiple departments, such as English or Theology, to develop ideas of how to build their instructional practice around social justice. As we progress into the next school year, my goal is to continue being a resource for

on-site professional development for any other teachers interested in critical literacy interventions or incorporating social justice initiatives into their classroom.

As a team leader and social studies department chair, I can influence other teachers in my department and the administrative team to reflect on my PoP in both individual classrooms and across the department. Discussions of my research project at department meetings led to the creation of an informal PLC, in which some of the members of the social studies department come together to discuss the perspectives of the supplemental source material for their classroom instruction. Members teaching various levels of United States History, United States Government, and other department electives have begun the work of reflecting on their instructional practice. Additionally, since I started this research project in 2020, the social studies department has added two history electives, African American History during the 2021–2022 school year and Holocaust Education for the 2022–2023 school year. The objective of adding these two electives was to provide history electives with opportunities for our students to experience new perspectives and develop classes with a personal narrative approach.

Action Plan

Because action research seeks transformative change through simultaneous action and research, developing an action plan is a critical part of the process (Mertler, 2014). In addition to outlining how to conduct the study, an action plan should articulate what steps should occur after its completion. Reflecting on my analysis provided me with action steps I need to take and

suggested how I can set up another, more refined action research cycle. Figure 5.1 highlights my next steps to continue confronting my PoP, focusing on curricular developments, expanding across the social studies department and core subject areas, and engaging in future action research studies.

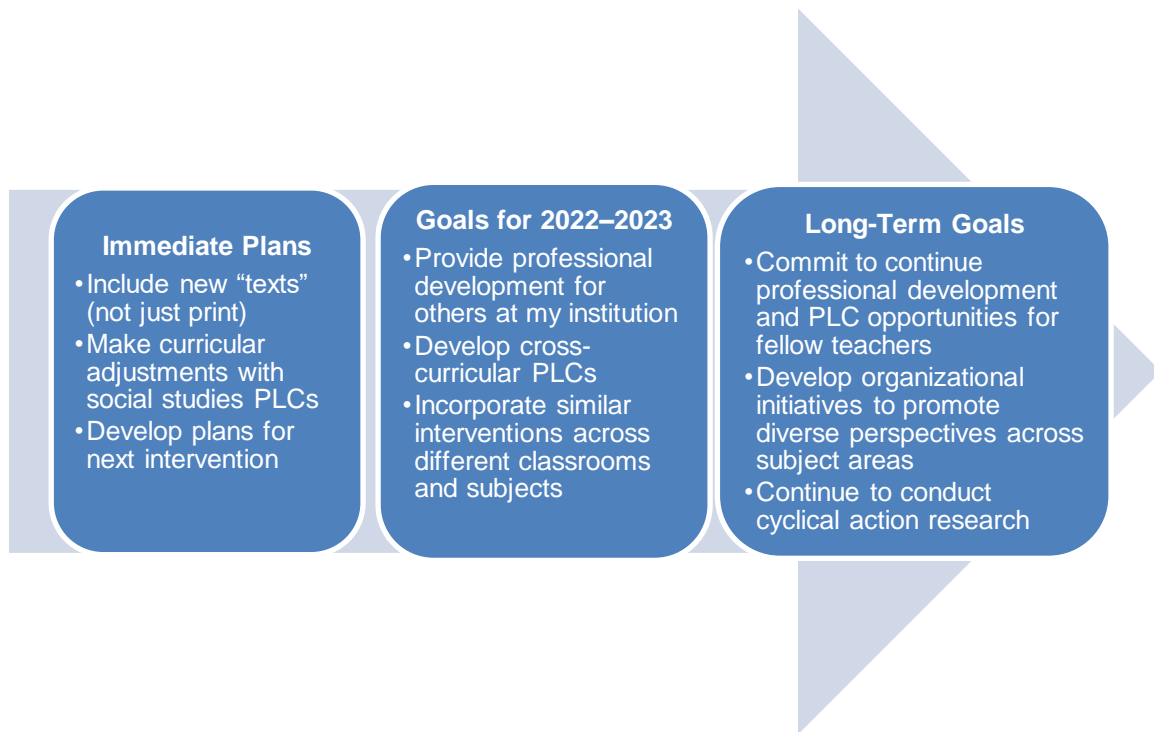


Figure 5.1 *Action Plan*

In further action research cycles, I can give more consideration to incorporating even more diverse source material for government students and developing improved literacy strategies to increase engagement. Although the primary literature I selected for this action research study was ultimately beneficial for my students to reflect on instances of inequality and social justice, the readings did skew toward the Black American experience. The list of potential readings was ever-changing in the months and weeks leading up to the intervention. I kept coming across exciting material as I was in the planning

stage, and not until I started the Spring 2022 semester did I finalize the sources. My potential list included examples of Hispanic barriers to citizenship, Native American activism, and forms of gender inequality during the founding period, among many others. However, I struggled with how I would provide enough context to these complex perspectives to give students the ability to reflect on them meaningfully. I felt even more unsure with some of these sources as I was dealing with a group of high school seniors who had barely been exposed to the formative works of recognizable people of color, like Dr. Martin Luther King. As I entered the intervention phase of the study, I decided to focus a few primary sources around slightly more historical notable figures like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth and on the Black American experience because my students would have sufficient historical background from their previous U.S. history classes. I needed to meet my students where they were and provide a more learner-centered experience with my goals in mind.

The selection of literature was another conscious choice on my part as an educator, a choice that impacted my students and their exposure to multicultural perspectives. As I reflect on the choices from this action research cycle and move to the next, I aim to continue building the types of literature and multimodal source material I incorporate into my classes. Moving forward and building off of this study, I hope to rotate through a wider variety of multicultural perspectives, incorporate a wider variety of non-text based sources, and give students more access to the perspectives of everyday individuals. This goal requires commitment to continue evolving my practice, reflecting on the insights I gained

from this action research study, and working through my action plan to ensure students have multicultural exposure in their classes throughout their 4 years in the social studies department.

In subsequent action research cycles, I must do considerable work to address this PoP throughout the social studies department. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the department has undergone slight adjustments since the beginning stages of this study. In addition to the new electives, African American and Holocaust history, both designed with a personal narrative approach in mind to allow students to experience history through diverse lenses, a few educators in the department have begun an informal process of reflecting on their instructional practice concerning the perspectives to which they expose their students through PLCs. We meet monthly to discuss opportunities to expand and diversify our social studies curriculum, as well as evaluate the practices in use across our classes. After establishing the PLC in the social studies department, we began including the English department for cross-curricular efforts to address this PoP at our organization.

After the completion of this study, I hope to provide additional opportunities for professional development and collaboration in the form of PLCs to more of the teachers in my department and eventually other departments outside of Social Studies and English. As a department chair, I want all my colleagues to have opportunities to improve their instructional practice and to build a desire for them to teach from a social justice perspective. Being in a social studies leadership role means utilizing organizational stakeholders, namely

my fellow social studies teachers, to commit to making transformative changes (Northouse, 2021).

Implications for Future Research

Many implications for future research came from this initial action research study. First, I hope to recreate the study over an extended period using more phases with updated strategies and more students. This study showed that AP Government students responded well to critical literacy reflections, but it did not show how this intervention would work with other students. Focusing on one specific classroom, the study missed out on how this instructional method might impact students in other social studies subjects, like World or U.S. History, or how honors or regular-level students would engage. If this study were conducted in multiple social studies classrooms with different types of students, it could show statistically significant results.

Overall, the study sample reflected the demographics of my AP Government classroom, with the student reflection artifacts having more diverse participation than the interviews. However, because my AP U.S. Government classes are usually composed of a slightly higher density of female than male students and a higher rate of White students, I expected such results. I would have liked to have had more students volunteer for the interview portion, especially to have a male perspective apart from the five female students. Including more male voices in the interview cycle would be an area of improvement to address in a subsequent round of action research. Additionally,

in more diverse classrooms outside of the AP level, I could examine how critical literacy interventions impact White students while empowering students of color.

From the outset of this study, I was also interested in evaluating and developing the types of resources social studies educators can access when they want to begin incorporating social justice initiatives into their curriculum. I tabled this idea as the action research developed a more learner-centered focus, but I would be interested in revisiting my original plan in future research, perhaps by comparing how social studies teachers receive different instructional resources or developing source material for educators who might be overwhelmed with the sheer amount of historical material they use in their classes. This vision includes expanding the list of text sources I would like to incorporate into the U.S. Government classes, but also primary source material in the form of images, audio, and video to evaluate how different modalities could impact student engagement with social justice issues.

Finally, I want to continue to develop critical literacy strategies that provide students with the space and opportunity to take transformative action on social justice issues. The application of my third RQ relating to student action on issues of social justice correlated weakly with my original research design, I would like to redevelop the intervention for future action research cycles to better address this outcome. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had incorporated the Civic Action Project (CAP) learning model for civics and government courses as a way for students to become practically involved in civic activities outside the classroom (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2022). Through the CAP

assignments, students applied their government knowledge to real-world policies, and “by taking civic actions, they go to practice what real citizens do when they go about trying to solve a real policy-related problem” (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2022). Combining elements of the CAP with the critical literacy intervention could address the taking action component that my original research design did not prompt for my students.

Summary

Before this action research study, I was concerned with whether my students would leave my class prepared with foundational understandings from what is considered the most “influential” literature in political science. They read excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville to discuss self-government and Robert Dahl to critique “Who Governs?” American democracy, among many others, but upon reflection on my practice, I realized that I was exposing them to these concepts from a narrow perspective that lacked a human connection to how these concepts operate in society. My curriculum and instruction lacked diverse narratives and a focus on social justice, which impacted my students. Now I am conscious of the types of knowledge and voices I am exposing my classes to and continue reflecting on how that can impact my practice.

Following this study, I will continue to use and develop critical literacy interventions to foster student connection and empower students to take action against issues of inequality. Reading interventions provide space for students to disrupt previous biases, consider multiple viewpoints, focus on the sociopolitical, and take action (Lewison et al., 2015). Written reflections allow students to

consider diverse social, economic, and political perspectives. I must also incorporate strategies to engage students in the taking action component behind critical literacy to optimize these critical literacy interventions. In conjunction with strategies to foster student discussion and action initiatives, these interventions can realize all four dimensions of critical literacy.

Confronting my PoP allowed me to reflect on the state of instruction and develop new strategies to engage students regarding social justice. Reading about individuals who experienced inequalities firsthand gives my White students a unique perspective to consider and might empower my students of color to overcome obstacles. I want to continue applying new instructional strategies so that students can use their experience in social studies classrooms to better communicate about social injustices in society. Creating opportunities for students to experience the perspectives of others gives them the tools to begin the practice of transformative justice. I have come to understand how essential this practice is to help students engage with uncomfortable topics relating to biases or racism.

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APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT LETTER

AP Government Students,

As some of you may already know, I am currently in the process of completing my Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of South Carolina. Part of my degree completion requires me to complete an action research study here at our high school, and I would like to request some assistance from you this semester.

This study is based on the incorporation of diverse literature sources in the AP Government curriculum and how their inclusion impacts student outcomes in the classroom and beyond. As students in my class this semester, you'll be playing a vital role in my research study. With this email, I am asking you to consider your level of participation within the study that will take place over the course of this semester throughout the AP Government courses.

First, I am looking for students who are interested in participating in student interviews at the beginning and end of this intervention. These interviews will focus on the role of diverse sources in previous social studies classes and then the role they had during this semester of U.S Government.

Secondly, over the course of this semester as a class, we will be introduced to three different supplemental readings which will be aligned to units within the AP Government curriculum. Students will be asked to read and reflect on these readings as they appear within the course alignment. These reflections will be recorded as part of the study through written student reflection journals assignments and in observed class discussions on the reading topics. Participating in this component research will have no impact on grades in this course and is not required. The reflection materials gathered for this dissertation will be integrated as a graded component of this course, meaning that the students will produce the reflection journals as part of their involvement in the AP Government course, however, students have the ability to opt out of allowing the use of their documents for the research study.

Attached you will find two forms, the first being a permission letter signed by our Principal for me to conduct my research study at this school. The second form is the student consent form, which will provide a detailed description of the study and what is expected from the volunteering participants.

Please review the consent form with a parent, decide on your level of participation, or if you would like to opt out of the study, and sign and return the form to me via email at email.sc.edu.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me and ask. I'd be happy to clarify any questions you may have on my research. I look forward to hearing back from those who are interested in participating and assisting me on my academic journey.

Mrs. Ashley Wright

APPENDIX B

STUDENT PERMISSION FORM

My name is Ashley Wright; I teach AP Government at our school and am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina. I am inviting you to participate in an action research study on the incorporation and effects of introducing diverse literary sources into the AP Government curriculum. This form will tell you about the study I'm conducting and help you decide the level of involvement you may want to have in it.

What is the key information about this research study?

The purpose of this study is to introduce literature from varying political, economic, and social perspectives into the AP Government curriculum and to students taking the course. This study aims to evaluate the impact these sources have on student understanding of political, social, or economic events discussed throughout the AP U.S. Government course. This problem of practice arose when I realized that the supplemental literary sources in my United States Government classes failed to incorporate multiple historical, political, or economic perspectives. As a result, students struggled with the application of political ideas beyond their own experience. Providing students with literature more representative of our multicultural society will ideally improve their understanding of the historical, political, social, and economic issues they will encounter as citizens of a democracy.

You will be asked if you are willing to participate in different research study components, including interviews or course-embedded verbal or written reflections.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this research intervention is to improve upon the types of literary sources being used in the AP U.S. Government curriculum and evaluate how these sources impact student outcomes within the course. The goal is to continue improving upon the supplemental reading materials being used in social studies classes being taught within the social studies department and provide students with sources that expose them to different perspectives of thought.

What do I need to do within the study?

Students will be asked to participate in various levels of the research study depending on what the student is comfortable with. I will ask students to volunteer to participate in pre- and post-intervention interviews; these interviews

will be semi-structured, taking place over a half-hour. These interviews will be used to assess student familiarity with diverse literature perspectives within their previous social studies classes and then about their engagement with the reading material assigned to them as a part of this course. Students will use this form to opt into the interview component of the study. The second piece of involvement in this study will happen within the AP U.S. Government classes. Students will be assigned three supplemental reading assignments over the course of the semester and asked to provide a reflection on the material. As a class, we will also engage with the literature through class discussions. Students will once again opt-in through this permission form to have their written responses from these reflection assignments or verbal responses from class discussions used in the published version of this study.

What are the benefits to me?

Taking part in this study could provide individual benefits relating to better comprehension and understanding of issues you'd be exposed to in a social studies class or as a citizen of a democracy. Educational studies relating to critical literacy efforts also suggest that education in multicultural humanities not only helps students' academic outcomes but also assists them in becoming more aware of their social nature, giving them basic knowledge regarding their social, economic, and political backgrounds and their interrelationships, and can help them commit to transforming their communities or society as a whole.

Are there any risks to me if I decide to be involved with this study?

Minimal risks are possible in the form of performance stress, anxiety, or discomfort related to the interviews, reflections, or observations is a potential for students participating in this study.

How will my information be protected if I opt in to this study?

I will make every effort to maximize confidentiality and avoid unintentional and unauthorized release or other disclosures of identifiable private information. I will record student interviews and class observations to facilitate transcription, storing recordings on a private password-protected device. Once I have transcribed the recorded data, I will delete the recordings. I will collect student reflection journals through our high school's electronic assignment submission software; I will be the only one with access to these private submissions through a password-protected device as well as a password-protected account. I will also assign pseudonyms to protect students' identities during the data analysis and coding process. I will only collect minimal identifiable data to assist in confidentiality efforts.

Am I required to be in this study?

Participation in the interview process and allowing the researcher access to your written materials are voluntary. Participants will be able to voluntarily withdraw from the study without any repercussions. However, since the inclusion of readings assignments and class discussions will be a part of the course

curriculum, your participation and submission of those will count toward your grade in this course.

Do I get anything in return for participating in this study?

Student participants will not be compensated for their involvement in the study; however, their participation could assist them and future students in the AP Government classroom.

What if I have questions about the study or my involvement?

If you have any questions about the study, you can ask me now or at any time during the study. Students can email me via my school or South Carolina student email at email.sc.edu.

Opt-In Form

Signing below indicates that you have read the information pertaining to the study and that you are willing to participate in this study in some capacity.

Students can opt into various levels of participation in the study, including involvement in the pre/follow-up interviews, providing access to written materials, or opting out from participating entirely. Please check off the corresponding participation level you'll consent to.

[] I would like to participate in the interview portion of this research study.

[] I would like to allow my permission for my written and verbal reflection materials to be included as materials for this study. All student materials will be included in the research study under a pseudonym to protect student identity and maintain anonymity.

Print Name of Parent or Legal Guardian:

Signature of parent or legal guardian:

Print name of student participant:

Signature of student participant:

OR Opt-Out Form

Signing below indicates that you have read the information pertaining to the study and that you wish to opt-out participation in the study.

Print Name of Parent or Legal Guardian:

Signature of parent or legal guardian:

Print name of student participant:

Signature of student participant:

APPENDIX C

ADMINISTRATIVE PERMISSION

Dear School Administrator:

As a graduate student of the University of South Carolina's College of Education, I am requesting your approval for a study to be completed at Florida High School. The project is for the completion of the requirements for a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. I would request to do the following as a part of this research project:

1. Interview senior AP U.S. Government students with the school for the study where interviews will be audio recorded.
2. Collect and analyze qualitative data from students' written reflection responses.

If you are willing to have Florida High School participate in this study, please sign the bottom of this letter with the date acknowledging your approval for the above activities to be completed for the purposes of this study. I will provide copies of this letter to the AP U.S. Government students to assure them that you are aware of and approve this study.

Sincerely,

Ashley Wright

The following signature assures that the principal has read and understands the goals of this project and grants permission to Ashley Wright, the researcher, to conduct the necessary research for the completion of this study.

Principal

Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Pre-Intervention Interview

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. As you know, I am conducting these interviews to fulfill the degree requirements for my doctorate with the University of South Carolina's program in Curriculum and Instruction. To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Please acknowledge that you are alright with allowing me to record this interview for transcription purposes. So you're aware, only I will be privy to the recording, which will be deleted after it is transcribed. In regard to these interviews: (1) all information will be held confidential and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one-half hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover but the majority of our conversation will be unstructured. You agreed to participate to discuss the impact of critical literary sources on students in the AP U.S. Government classroom, so this interview will be used to evaluate your exposure to critical literacy sources before this course. An additional follow-up interview will be used to gauge your thoughts following the intervention. At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the research project to evaluate the impacts of multicultural reading sources on students in the AP U.S. Government classes. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other in a secure location. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop and take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

[Note: use phrases such as "Tell me more", "Could you give me an example?", "Could you explain that?" as prompts to solicit more detailed information when needed.]

1. To get started, let's introduce ourselves. In your introduction please tell me who you are, your grade level, and how many years you've attended this school.
2. Can you tell me a little bit about the courses you have taken in the social studies department? Please identify the courses you've taken and any you're currently enrolled in.
3. What would you describe as the importance of taking social studies courses in high school?
4. How would you describe the types of sources, primary or secondary, you were exposed to in your social studies class?
5. As you know, this intervention focuses on diversifying sources in our AP Government curriculum. What does it mean to "diversify the literature" in our social studies classes?
6. Whose voices do you see and hear the most in your social studies classes?
7. Whose voices are missing from the literature you've read in your social studies classes?
8. Do you feel like it's beneficial to read material from people or authors with different perspectives or backgrounds from yourself? Why or why not?

Follow-Up Interview

Welcome back and thank you again for your continued participation today. Once again, I am conducting these interviews to fulfill the degree requirements for my doctorate with the University of South Carolina's program in Curriculum and Instruction. To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Please acknowledge that you are alright with allowing me to record this interview for transcription purposes. So you're aware, only I will be privy to the recording, which will be deleted after it is transcribed. In regard to these interviews: (1) all information will be held confidential and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

I have planned this second interview to last no longer than one-half hour, the same as our previous interview. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover but the majority of our conversation will be unstructured. You agreed to participate to discuss the impact of critical literary sources on students in the AP U.S. Government classroom, so this interview will be used to evaluate your exposure to critical literacy sources post-intervention in this course. This follow-up interview will be focused on your experience in the class after being

exposed to and engaging with new diverse literature in the AP course. At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the research project to evaluate the impacts of multicultural reading sources on students in the AP U.S. Government classes. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other in a secure location. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop and take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

[Note: use phrases such as “Tell me more”, “Could you give me an example?”, “Could you explain that?” as prompts to solicit more detailed information when needed.]

1. Once again, can you introduce yourself? Be sure to tell me who you are, your grade level, and how many years you’ve attended this school.
2. Could you tell me a little bit about the three sources you’ve read as a part of the research intervention for this class?
3. What thoughts do you remember having while reading through these sources?
4. What types of policies, events, or concepts would you connect to the sources we’ve read as part of this intervention?
5. Can you explain how or if these sources helped you better understand a concept within the course?
6. Can you explain how or if these sources helped you better understand another type of political, economic, or social concept/policy that we may or may not have directly discussed in the course?
7. Do you believe that it was beneficial for you to be exposed and engage with those sources in a social studies class, particularly in AP U.S. Government?
8. What other perspectives or authors, if any, should be incorporated into readings for future AP Government students?

APPENDIX E

CRITICAL LITERACY STUDENT REFLECTION GUIDE AND DIRECTIONS

REFLECTION DIRECTIONS:

Read the following documents. “Annolight,” include “Thinking Notes,” or write out questions as you read through the documents to help comprehend and guide your process. Feel free to reach out through the comment feature on Showbie if you feel stuck or have questions regarding the readings.

After reading craft a 1-page reflection on the thoughts you had while reading the documents. Focus your reflections on your perspective, opinions, and thoughts you don’t need to spend time summarizing the documents unless you believe it helps you make your point clearer.

There’s no set of direct questions to answer, so you can reflect on any of your thoughts while reading through the documents, but if you need a place to start consider these to help you or refer back to your reading notes.

Can you make any connections to the class from these readings?

Consider the audience. Who are these texts for? How would different readers respond to these texts?

Are there any perspectives, practices, and or people centered or valued in the texts? Are any perspective missing?

Does the author invite readers to critique the texts, or are the texts positioned as truth?

What did you learn about yourself as a reader, writer, learner, or citizen by reading this?

Consider the author and their perspective, what perspective are they writing from?

If you’ve read the text before, how has your view of it changed?

APPENDIX F

QUALITATIVE CODING SAMPLES

Code	Explanation	Examples
Foundational understanding	Data relating to foundational understanding demonstrated students' connecting a key piece of the curricular concepts to their reflection, including but not limited to required course primary documents, Supreme Court decisions, or conceptual ideas outlined in the AP course description guide.	<p>"After reading this in the article I thought about the Supreme Court cases we recently went over in class. A lot of them argued whether the rights stated in the Fourteenth Amendment were being violated. These would be the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property and the equal protection of the law" (Student 2, Truth and Foner Reflection).</p> <p>"Through the introduction of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendment, the institution of slavery was completely dissolved, which was one of the main hot button issues of the war. However, the ramifications of post-civil war reconstruction were far reaching and many were unseen. The introduction of these three amendments not only declared all slaves free, gave them citizenship and granted voting rights, but it changed what it meant to be a citizen of the United States altogether" (Student 9, Truth and Foner Reflection).</p>
Past–present comparison	Data that address past–present comparisons highlighted students' connections to political, social, or economic events. Past events could include descriptions of the 1960's Civil Rights movements or Reconstruction following the U.S. Civil War. More modern examples could include social movements like the Women's Marches or Black Lives Matter activism.	<p>"It's [Federalism] become a major grey area especially in recent years and we've seen these conflicts become an issue with Covid-19 regulations and mandates becoming completely impossible for the federal government to be able to control" (Student 2, Federalism Reflection).</p> <p>"The 'Ain't I a Woman?' speech made me consider a response to the overwhelming whiteness of the Women's March and I thought of it as way to include more black women in the women's rights movement" (Student 8, Truth Reflection).</p>
Citizenship or rights	This code applied to the concept of citizenship and/or types of rights extended to citizens, such as expansion/redefinition of citizenship throughout U.S. history and constitutional protections from discrimination or lack thereof.	<p>"By becoming a political abolitionist, Douglass challenged the country to reconsider who was a citizen and entitled to protection under the Constitution. The Constitution would become the lens through which he would advocate for the freedom and natural rights of all people, African Americans and women" (Student 4, Douglass Reflection).</p>

Code	Explanation	Examples
Different perspective	Data related to identifying a different perspective illustrates when students had revelations outside their own perspective. In reflecting on the readings, students indicated how they had never considered an alternative viewpoint.	<p>"This document was especially eye opening for me because when I think of the Fourth of July, I think of a day of the celebration of freedom from Britain by ALL citizens of the United States. I never truly realized the ill feelings the African American slaves felt towards this day of independence. I assumed everyone rejoiced in our victory of the American Revolution and our eventual creation of a separate entity. This speech especially makes me question the different perspectives surrounding other documents and speeches in American history and how not everyone was on the same page regarding the foundation of our great nation" (Student 9, Douglass Reflection).</p>
Call to action	Consistent with the aims of critical literacy, data relating to a call to action exhibit students' motivations or plans to act on social justice issues prompted by the readings.	<p>"I learned that I too am very passionate about modern social issues and will fight and make it known that these things must change" (Student 15, Douglass and McCune Smith Reflection).</p> <p>These documents help me realize and reaffirm that there is still so much work to be done in society. It is crazy to think about how long our world has been dealing with issues like these (Student 13, Truth and Foner Reflection).</p>